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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 20 March 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Bangladesh

1. **Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): What discussions she had with her counterpart in Bangladesh on her recent visit to that country. [909914]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): During my time in Bangladesh, I met Ministers to discuss the impact of UK aid across the country and reinforced the UK's commitment to assisting Bangladesh's efforts to support both the Rohingya and host communities in Cox's Bazar.

Will Quince: I have visited Bangladesh and saw not only Rohingya refugee camps, but wider UK aid projects. Does the Secretary of State agree that we have a huge role to play, that this is a good use of UK taxpayers' money and that we should continue to support people in Bangladesh?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for visiting Bangladesh. It is incredibly helpful for us to get as many reports as possible about the difference that UK aid is making and about the situation on the ground. He is right that we should be proud of helping 1.6 million children to gain a decent education and providing nearly 900,000 people with sustainable access to clean water and sanitation and 3.7 million children, women and adolescent girls with nutritional interventions.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is clear that the conditions are not in place for the safe voluntary return of Rohingya refugees to Burma. Did the Secretary of State have an opportunity to discuss with the Bangladeshis the possibility of something akin to the Jordan jobs compact that could benefit not only the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar but, importantly, the local Bangladeshi community?

Penny Mordaunt: Although all the people understandably want to return home, it is important to recognise that they can do so only when the conditions are met, which means that we are in a protracted situation. We have to start thinking about better shelter, jobs and livelihoods for both the Rohingya and the host communities.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Did my right hon. Friend discuss with the Bangladeshi Government what was going to happen to the Rohingya refugees who are being moved from their existing camps to some potentially unsafe places in Bangladesh?

Penny Mordaunt: I did discuss those things, as my hon. Friend would expect, and we are sceptical about some of the Bangladeshi Government's ideas. We watched presentations about the island and the investment made there, but that will only take 100,000 people, and there are many more at Cox's Bazar. We therefore need to consider other options for how to support Bangladesh in managing the protracted crisis.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The United Nations convention on the rights of the child states that every child has the right to an education, but that is simply not the case for many thousands of Rohingya children in camps in Bangladesh. What conversations has the Secretary of State had with her counterparts to ensure that adequate educational facilities and opportunities are available to Rohingya children?

Penny Mordaunt: I did raise the specifics. Both Bangladesh and the UK are doing a tremendous amount, but we need other donors to lean in and support such initiatives. However, we are pleased that UK aid is making a profound difference, particularly for children with disabilities.

Global Fund

2. **Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): What (a) preparations she has made for and (b) plans she has to attend the Global Fund's sixth replenishment conference in October 2019. [909915]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): The Global Fund plays a critical role in the fight against AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, having helped to save 27 million lives to date. The UK is considering the Global Fund's investment case ahead of determining our contribution to a successful sixth replenishment, and senior UK attendance will be determined in due course.

Dr Williams: I saw the devastating impact that HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria can have on communities during the four years that I led health services on the Uganda-Democratic Republic of the Congo border. Although the UK's contribution has saved 2.3 million lives, progress is stalling, and the Global Fund is asking countries to increase their contributions by 15%. Will the Minister meet the all-party parliamentary groups on HIV and AIDS, on malaria and neglected tropical diseases and on global tuberculosis to discuss the UK's response?

Alistair Burt: First, the House should pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who is one of a number of Members who have a background in that sort of work. We are in the hon. Gentleman's debt for the experience that he has brought to the House's discussions on the work that needs to be done. We recognise the need to keep the fund at a reasonable level, but we want to do even more, and I will of course meet him and other colleagues to discuss the matter.

Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): If the Minister does go to the replenishment conference in France, will he share with other donors the excellent new UK initiative of an unlimited small charities challenge fund, which is a very real way to tackle some of these preventable and challenging diseases?

Alistair Burt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has done invaluable work in boosting the small charities fund. It will indeed be more accessible for charities around the country that are doing great work in these fields, and we see it as a valuable addition to the work of DFID and the UK's international contribution.

11. [909924] **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): The UK's efforts to tackle HIV/AIDS are to be welcomed, yet progress remains slow in turning the tide of infections and deaths from AIDS-related illnesses. What further action will the Government be taking to strengthen public healthcare in developing countries, to improve prevention and access to treatment?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. It is very important that HIV/AIDS is not seen as an issue of yesterday. I was present at the Amsterdam conference last year to make the case that there are still target groups that need more support. Sustaining and ensuring that countries' local health systems have sustainable methods of dealing with this is a fundamental of DFID's global health work, and it is essential that this work continues.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on malaria and neglected tropical diseases, I have seen the excellent work that the Global Fund has supported over the years, but local contributions from endemic countries are incredibly important. Will the Minister enlighten on whether those contributions have increased over recent years so that they can be put alongside the contributions through the Global Fund?

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is correct that national Governments have a significant responsibility regarding their contributions. Those contributions are increasing, but the question of mainstreaming that support so that it comes into their sustainable health systems naturally has to be considered. We will be working with other donors to boost the fund, and national Governments will have an increasing responsibility as time goes on, but they will not be left to deal with this situation alone.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): There is some concern that the figure set out in the investment case by the Global Fund may not represent what is actually needed to get the world back on track, to meet sustainable development goal 3 and to end the epidemics of AIDS, TB and malaria. What avenues are the UK Government exploring ahead of the next replenishment conference to ensure that the global response meets what is actually needed?

Alistair Burt: We are the second largest donor to the current replenishment, and this is having a significant impact. We are conscious of the need to review the investment case carefully, and we are working with other donors to ensure that it does meet the challenges. Given that a number of different replenishments are going on at the same time, we are bringing our thinking together this year to ensure that United Kingdom support is well spent and covers the replenishments appropriately.

Dan Carden: We can all agree on continued UK support for tackling the world's deadliest diseases, but with so much Brexit uncertainty, the sector is rightly concerned about the future of UK aid and our role as a

world leader in global health. I am sure that those in the sector have taken some reassurance from the Secretary of State's comments on Monday that they should "calm down and chill out".

With almost weekly attacks on the Secretary of State's Department from her own colleagues, and the Department losing 170 staff due to Brexit chaos, it is difficult to know what would be a bigger danger to UK aid—a no-deal Brexit or a Tory leadership challenge. Perhaps the Minister can dissociate himself, once and for all, from attempts to water down the 0.7% of UK aid from public funds.

Alistair Burt: Good try, Dan. It was the Conservative party that brought forward the 0.7% commitment, and it is a Conservative Government who have worked it through. I entirely understand the hon. Gentleman's point; it was a good try. The Government are enormously committed to the delivery of aid, to ensuring that aid is constantly reviewed and does the job, to the 0.7% and to the independence of the Department for International Development, so that it remains a self-standing part of the Government. The hon. Gentleman need have no fears. If we want to avoid the worries of Brexit, perhaps he might vote for the deal.

10. [909923] **Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we are in a position to make ambitious pledges both to the Global Fund and to Gavi, precisely because we kept our promise on the global stage to meet and increase our aid spending, and will he assure the House that the Government have absolutely no intention to water down, dilute or walk away from our promises?

Alistair Burt: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct—no, there is not. He speaks of the Gavi replenishment, which is again important this year. That refers to global vaccination, which we will of course maintain our support for and position on. I hope that the whole House unites in combating the anti-vaccination campaigns that are taking place in too many parts of the world. As someone who had the benefit of my father's own polio vaccinations to me as a child, vaccination is very personal to me. We all need to keep it up—and thanks, Dad.

Global Warming

3. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): If she will make reducing global warming a strategic priority of her Department. [909916]

4. **Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): If she will make reducing global warming a strategic priority of her Department. [909917]

15. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): If she will make reducing global warming a strategic priority of her Department. [909928]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): Climate change is a major threat to achieving the sustainable development goals, and tackling it is a strategic priority for the Government and for my Department. The Government

are delivering £5.8 billion in international climate finance to help developing countries to reduce emissions and to manage the impact of climate change.

Christian Matheson: Last Friday, thousands of children took to the streets, including in my own constituency, because they know that we have only 12 years left to make a difference on climate change. So why is the Department still spending money through its prosperity fund on expanding the oil and gas sectors in several countries where that fund is active?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome the opportunity that the interest young people are showing in climate change gives us to highlight the important work that we are doing. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we do not provide any bilateral assistance for coal-fired power generation, and that CDC, our private sector investment arm, has made no new net investments in coal-fired power since 2012.

Dr Blackman-Woods: Will the Minister update the House on what DFID is doing to follow through on the agreement made at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in 2018 to support urgent action to address climate change and to increase resilience to prevent 100 million more people from being pushed into poverty by 2030?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the importance of commitments that were made last year at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. There is an extensive programme of work to follow through on those commitments, not least the £5.8 billion of international climate finance that we have announced so far, which has already helped 47 million people to increase their resilience to climate change. We will be leading that strand at the United Nations summit in September.

Jeff Smith: The Minister said that there is no net investment from DFID and the CDC. I would be interested to know what she means by that, because we surely need a greater priority on disinvestment in oil and gas extraction. Is she not worried, as I am, about the possibility of stranded assets as a result of investments we have made in the global south?

Harriett Baldwin: We have an important role to play in working with our international bilateral partners to encourage the use of clean growth and clean energy. For example, the week before last, we held an event here in support of sustainable development goal 7 to which we invited African Energy Ministers from developing countries to meet some of the people we have in the UK with expertise on renewable energy.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Solar energy is a relatively clean way to generate electricity. What steps are we taking in Africa to help not only people who are off-grid but those who are on-grid?

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that solar energy, particularly in sunny places, is a very good idea. Indeed, there is some very windy coastline where offshore wind energy would also be very helpful. In addition to the event that we held for African Energy

Ministers the week before last, we have come up with some remarkable inventions using some of our overseas development assistance—for example, a solar-powered fridge.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Will the Minister outline the steps the Department is taking to improve biodiversity and habitat enhancement, particularly through the recent investment in the Darwin initiative?

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend will be glad to know that I work closely with my counterparts at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to join up the work we are doing to tackle biodiversity, specifically the contribution we have made to the global environment fund.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Mangrove forests are one of the most effective habitats at storing carbon dioxide that might otherwise be released. What are the Government doing to help reduce mangrove forest loss?

Harriett Baldwin: We have rebranded them blue forests. We think they are incredibly important, and not only as a way to store carbon; recently it was proven that they also improve resilience to cyclones. They are an important part of the work and have been championed vigorously by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey).

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): Last Friday, on the same day that 1.4 million children went on climate strike across the world, more than 1,000 people were killed in Mozambique and Zimbabwe during Cyclone Idai. Does the Minister agree that young people and those living in the developing world are the least responsible yet will bear the brunt of the climate crisis? If so, does she agree that the UK Government must make climate justice a key part of their climate change strategy?

Harriett Baldwin: That is exactly why the UK is proud to be stepping up our work on international climate finance. We have committed £5.8 billion to work with some of the poorer countries in the world, including those affected by this cyclone in Mozambique. There will be an urgent question later, when I will be able to elaborate on the work that the UK has done to help with the situation there.

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): Our thoughts are with all those affected by the devastation of Cyclone Idai across Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, and I would like to share with the House the thoughts of—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There are a lot of noisy private conversations taking place. It is rather discourteous to the hon. Lady, who is highlighting very grave matters.

Preet Kaur Gill: Our thoughts are with all those affected by the devastation of Cyclone Idai across Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, and I would like to share with the House the thoughts of Anabela Lemos, a woman at the forefront of the climate justice movement in Mozambique. She says:

“The people of Mozambique need emergency response and support right now to survive this crisis. But this is also a harsh reminder that the climate crisis is upon us and developed countries need to urgently reduce their emissions and stop funding fossil fuels.”

I welcome the relief package for the region issued by DFID, but it is a tragic irony of climate change that those least responsible are the ones who pay the highest price. A key component of the—

Mr Speaker: Order. This simply is not on. I do not wish to be unkind to the hon. Lady, but I need one sentence with a question mark at the end of it. My apologies for interrupting, but this is far too long.

Preet Kaur Gill: Will the Minister confirm whether the Government have plans to offer any additional climate finance to support vulnerable communities and countries to cope with the consequences of climate change?

Harriett Baldwin: I can confirm that we are already committed to spending £5.8 billion over this spending period, which will involve us being able to increase our finance over the next spending review period. There will be an urgent question later, when we can talk about the specific situation in Mozambique. The report from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recently said that UK international climate finance is showing a very convincing approach, with some good emerging results in terms of influencing others. We aim to continue with that work.

Topical Questions

T1. [909929] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): I am sure the whole House will wish to join me in expressing our concern at the loss and devastation following the deadly cyclone in southern Africa. In Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, hundreds of people have lost their lives and many more their homes. We pre-deployed aid, and the first UK relief flight arrived in Mozambique yesterday, delivering family tents and shelter kits for those forced to flee their homes. In Malawi, we are working with the World Food Programme to enable 140,000 people to access food, and in Zimbabwe, we are working with our partners to provide hygiene kits and essential medicines.

David T. C. Davies: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the aid that is being sent to Venezuela, whose people are facing horrendous shortages of food, electricity and medical supplies. Does she agree that, as well as sending aid, we need to send a message from both sides of this House that the failed hard-left socialist policies being pursued by that Government will always lead to economic ruin, wherever they are applied?

Penny Mordaunt: This is a tragic situation. It is a man-made crisis, and we are doing everything we can to support the response through the Lima Group. My hon. Friend is right. This is why it is important to remember that keeping economies strong is absolutely

vital for human capital and the basics in life, and we must never ever let systems that do not support that take hold—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, but we have to move on.

T3. [909931] **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): On her recent visit to Bangladesh, did the Secretary of State discuss concerns about relocating refugees to Bhasan Char with the authorities?

Penny Mordaunt: Yes, I did. We looked at what the authorities were doing with the island and we expressed concerns about that and about the fact that many more people—the island will take only 100,000—need to be taken care of in this protracted crisis.

T2. [909930] **Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Ellington Primary School is on a mission to make the world clear of minefields left behind after wars, and I have committed to helping it. I thank Ministers for the written answers they have given me so far. What are the Government doing to persuade the five countries in receipt of UK aid that are not yet signed up to the Ottawa convention to do so?

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt): First, I congratulate Ellington Primary School on its work in joining the Department’s mission to help save the world from landmines, and in joining leading UK non-governmental organisations such as the Mines Advisory Group and the HALO Trust, which do fantastic work in this space. We constantly go to those who are not yet signed up to the Ottawa convention to ask them to do so. I hope my hon. Friend will take even further interest in this, and perhaps do some visiting, as I have done in the past.

T4. [909932] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Save the Children Fund has identified five things that this Government can do to help end the conflict in Yemen. Will the Government do them?

Alistair Burt: Last week, I held a telephone conference call with Lise Grande, the UN co-ordinator on Yemen, and a number of UN agencies. We are looking at everything we can do. This morning, I met humanitarian workers—women workers—from Yemen themselves. We will of course work even more closely with all our partners there and support UNICEF in all its work.

T8. [909936] **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): What is the Department doing to support the people of Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi after the recent cyclone?

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): My hon. Friend will be aware that yesterday we were able to announce a further £6 million of emergency funding, working with our partners, such as UNICEF, the World Food Programme and others on the ground, and we were also able to pre-position aid. I know that you, Mr Speaker, have kindly allowed an urgent question on this subject following Prime Minister’s questions.

T5. [909933] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): At the International Labour Organisation convention in June on ending violence and harassment in the world of work, will the Secretary of State commit, on behalf of the UK, to negotiating for protection for all workers, including those working in domestic and informal settings, and will she undertake to resist any attempts to water down or reduce the scope of the agreement?

Penny Mordaunt: In both the work we do through the ILO and some new work we are doing to support trade unions in developing countries, that absolutely needs to be at the heart of the agenda. Of course, the work that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has led internationally on modern slavery absolutely requires this issue to be at the heart of what we do.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The UK has been one of the biggest donors to the Education Cannot Wait fund since it was set up in 2016. What plans does the Minister have to replenish the ECW, and to maintain UK leadership for children in crises?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank my hon. Friend for his steadfast championing of this cause, to which we have been one of the leading contributors. I can announce today that we will be scaling up our support, but I cannot yet announce by exactly how much.

T6. [909934] **Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I support the idea of a UK hospital ship, but it must not be used as a raid on the aid budget. Will the Secretary of State reassure me that it will not be used as a raid, and that we will keep our 0.7% on aid, not military spending?

Penny Mordaunt: We cannot spend any of the 0.7% on military spending. That is the whole point of being in the DAC—Development Assistance Committee—club and committing to 0.7%. We are looking at Her Majesty's Government maritime capability, which might help other Departments as well as us, but aid money will only be spent on aid.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): The Dalitso project in my constituency has been collecting pads to make sanitary products for young women in Malawi. It has had a fantastic response from the community and is doing fantastic work. Will my right hon. Friend join me in celebrating that work to make environmentally friendly sanitary products for those who need them?

Penny Mordaunt: I congratulate my hon. Friend and that fantastic organisation on their work. In addition to congratulating them, both my Departments will provide support to make period poverty history in the UK and internationally.

T7. [909935] **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Given that the Commission on the Status of Women is taking place at the United Nations this week, what steps are the Government taking to explicitly recognise, promote and support the contribution of older women as part of their women's economic environment agenda?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for that incredibly important question. We have a particular strategy in DFID that is looking at placing the empowerment, especially the economic empowerment, of women at its heart. I pay particular tribute to Lord Bates, who has been considering what more we can do for widows worldwide.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): The UN Human Rights Council will vote this week on a one-sided motion that minimises Hamas's role in the violent Gaza border protest last year. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the UK will continue to oppose one-sided resolutions, particularly given the horrifying scenes this week in Gaza, with brutal beatings of journalists and academics by Hamas?

Alistair Burt: The UK made clear some time ago that we would oppose matters under item 7 of the Human Rights Council's determination, and we expect to do that. On Gaza, the international commission was unable to investigate non-state actors, but there is no doubt that the situation was serious, as Israeli authorities have also determined. The UK will maintain its position in relation to that.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): In the case of a no-deal Brexit, the Secretary of State has given some limited assurances to NGOs accessing funds from the EU's humanitarian fund that the Government will underwrite them in future. Are they prepared to do the same for NGOs that access funds for broader humanitarian work?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point. Yes, we are looking at widening that support. Our NGOs, whether they are humanitarian or work in other areas, are world class and we want them to continue to work in those settings, so we have issued those guarantees. However, I say to the hon. Gentleman that if he ever gets the opportunity, he knows what he can do to avoid a no-deal scenario.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—
Engagements

Q1. [909899] **Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 20 March.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in condemning the appalling and cowardly attack in Christchurch on Friday. There can be absolutely no place in our societies for the vile ideology that drives hatred and spreads fear. I spoke to Prime Minister Ardern on Sunday. I told her that we stood with New Zealand at this time and that we would provide whatever assistance was needed.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the emergency services for their handling of the terrorist incident in Stanwell on Saturday. I am sure that Members from across the House will want to join me in sending our thoughts to the man who was injured.

I would like to send my deepest sympathies to the families of those killed and those injured in Utrecht on Monday. We are in regular contact with the Dutch authorities and are standing by to offer whatever assistance is required.

I am sure that Members will want to join me in expressing deepest shock at the loss and devastation caused by the cyclone in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. As I think the Secretary of State made clear in International Development questions, we have made £6 million of UK aid available to help meet the immediate needs of people who have lost everything, and we have deployed a UK team of DFID experts to co-ordinate our response to the disaster.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Pete Wishart: I totally associate myself with everything the Prime Minister has said. We will never allow hate to succeed and we stand in solidarity with the victims of Cyclone Idai.

The Prime Minister's deal lies in tatters, her Cabinet is in open revolt, she presides over the biggest constitutional crisis this nation has experienced, and where leadership is required, she has once again cravenly caved in to her hard Brexiteers and will now only seek a short extension to article 50, contrary to the expressed will of this House. When will she develop a backbone and stand up to those who would take this nation to disaster? As one of her Ministers said this morning, referencing another feeble Prime Minister: "Weak, weak, weak."

The Prime Minister: Perhaps it would be helpful, in response to that question, if I update the House on the forthcoming European Council and the issue of article 50 extension. On Thursday, the House voted in favour of a short extension if the House had supported a meaningful vote before this week's European Council. The motion also made it clear that a longer extension would oblige the United Kingdom to hold elections to the European Parliament. I do not believe that such elections would be in anyone's interests. The idea that, three years after voting to leave the EU, the people of this country should be asked to elect a new set of MEPs is, I believe, unacceptable. It would be a failure to deliver on the referendum decision that this House said it would honour. I have—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a long way to go and what the Prime Minister is saying must be heard.

The Prime Minister: I have therefore this morning written to President Tusk, the President of the European Council, informing him that the UK seeks an extension to the article 50 period until 30 June. Copies of the letter are being placed in the Library. The Government intend to bring forward proposals for a third meaningful vote. If that vote is passed, the extension will give the House time to consider the withdrawal agreement Bill. If not, the House will have to decide how to proceed. But as Prime Minister—[*Interruption.*] As Prime Minister, I am not prepared to delay Brexit any further than 30 June.

Q4. [909902] **Colin Clark** (Gordon) (Con): Will the Prime Minister welcome Oil & Gas UK's report today predicting £200 billion of new investment in the sector, supported by this Government's fiscal policy in direct contrast to the SNP's failure to stimulate the Scottish economy?

The Prime Minister: I say to my hon. Friend that the Chancellor's spring statement last week showed that this is indeed a Government who are delivering for Scotland. He mentions the issue of fiscal policy and oil and gas. We have also put in £260 million for the borderlands growth deal, £68 million extra in Barnett consequential for the Scottish Government, and £79 million for a new national supercomputer at Edinburgh University. While the SNP is obsessed with independence, it is this Conservative Government who are focused on growing Scotland's economy.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I start by sending my condolences to all the families and friends of victims of the terror attack in New Zealand last week. The terrible events in Christchurch should remind us all that there is no place for hate. I pay tribute to the way in which Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has responded with such dignity and such compassion to this crisis. I absolutely agree with the comments of the Prime Minister concerning the events at Stanwell and Utrecht. I am sure the whole House will join me and her in sending our deepest sympathies to all those who lost their loved ones and homes in the terrible cyclones that have caused devastation in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. I support the Government in sending £6 million of aid. I hope, if more aid is required, we will be able to respond urgently and generously to any demand for help from people who are so desperately suffering at the present time.

We are now in the midst of a full-scale national crisis. Incompetence, failure and intransigence from the Prime Minister and her Government have brought us to this point. Parliament has rejected her deal. It has rejected no deal. The Prime Minister now has no plan. In an effort to break the deadlock, I have held meetings with Members across the House and am having further meetings today to find a compromise that supports jobs and living standards. Tomorrow, I am meeting EU Prime Ministers and officials in Brussels. This is a national crisis. Will the Prime Minister meet me today to discuss our proposals as a way forward to get out of this crisis?

The Prime Minister: It is a bit rich for the right hon. Gentleman to stand up and invite me to meet him, when for days and days he refused to meet me and he then refused to allow the shadow Brexit Secretary to have a further meeting with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Of course I am always happy to meet Members across this House to discuss the issue of Europe, but I note that when Opposition party leaders came out from their meeting with the Leader of the Opposition, they made it clear that what they did not want was Brexit. We should be delivering Brexit for the people of this country.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am not sure that there was an answer to my question there. I wanted no-deal taken off the table; the House has taken no-deal off the table; it is time the Prime Minister took no-deal off the table. The CBI said:

"The extension vote is a welcome dose of common sense...Put in place a new process. Drop red lines...Every MP must show leadership through compromise."

Will the Prime Minister drop the red lines? Is she prepared to compromise to get through this crisis?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about decisions that have been taken by this House. I am sure that it will not have passed you by, Mr Speaker, that of course this House has voted on and rejected a second referendum; it has voted on and rejected no deal; it has voted on and rejected Labour's deal; it has voted on and rejected a customs union; and it has voted on and supported leaving with a deal. It is time that this Parliament faced the consequences.

Jeremy Corbyn: The last time the Prime Minister tried her meaningful vote, she only managed 242 votes—slightly up on the previous attempt, but nevertheless a decisive rejection. Our plan received 296 votes—rather considerably more. Her Government are in chaos and she has ignored the House, ignored trade unions, ignored businesses and ignored the concerns of communities all around the country. She told the House that the EU would allow an extension of article 50 only if there was a clear purpose. She is travelling to the Brussels summit tomorrow morning to meet EU leaders. What is her clear purpose?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman had listened to the answer that I gave to the first question posed in Prime Minister's questions, he would have heard that.

Jeremy Corbyn: It was not clear at all, other than that the Prime Minister is going to try again with what we will now term MV3. Surely, after two big rejections by the House, she must have noticed that there is not much support for the deal that she negotiated.

We learned this morning that the Prime Minister will ask only for a short extension, which directly contradicts what the Minister for the Cabinet Office told the House:

"In the absence of a deal, seeking such a short and, critically, one-off extension would be downright reckless and completely at odds with the position that this House adopted only last night".—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 566.]

Who is "downright reckless" here: the Prime Minister, ploughing on with an unachievable, unsupported deal, or others in this House who want to achieve something serious and sensible to prevent damage to the British economy, jobs and living standards all over this country?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about trying to achieve something sensible. It is he who abstained last week on a vote on a second referendum, despite the fact that it is Labour party policy, and then had the nerve to stand up in this House and say that he reiterated Labour's support for a second referendum. He has no idea what he wants on the future of this issue.

The right hon. Gentleman asks about a long extension. I am opposed to a long extension. I do not want a long extension. Setting aside—[*Interruption.*] Setting aside the issue that it would mean that we would have to hold European parliamentary elections, which I do not think is in anybody's interest, the outcome of a long extension would be endless hours and days of this House carrying on contemplating its navel on Europe and failing to address the issues that matter to our constituents, their schools—

Mr Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister's answer must be heard, and everybody else will be heard.

The Prime Minister: The outcome of a long extension would be the House spending yet more endless hours contemplating its navel on Europe and failing to address the issues that matter to our constituents, such as schools, hospitals, security and jobs. The House has indulged itself on Europe for too long—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a lot of very noisy barracking. [*Interruption.*] Order. [*Interruption.*] Order. The Prime Minister's reply will be heard, and colleagues know that I am happy for the exchanges to take place for as long as is necessary to ensure that they are orderly.

The Prime Minister: It is time for the House to determine that it will deliver on Brexit for the British people. That is what the British people deserve. They deserve better than what the House has given them so far.

Jeremy Corbyn: To describe the parliamentary process as one of indulgence does not show much respect for the democratic process that sent us here in the first place. The House has twice rejected the Prime Minister's deal, and she is trying to come back for another attempt on Monday. Further to your ruling on Monday, Mr Speaker, she has to come up with something a bit different from what she has come up with so far. What significant changes will there be either to the withdrawal agreement or to the political declaration that will even allow her to table it on Monday?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about respect for democracy. Respect for democracy means this House delivering the Brexit the British people voted for. He now wants to disrespect democracy by holding a second referendum. It is not this Government who are being disrespectful to the British people; it is the right hon. Gentleman and his Labour party.

Jeremy Corbyn: The job of Parliament is to hold Government to account, but the Prime Minister does not seem to understand that. When she was first defeated, she promised legally binding changes—I have not seen those legally binding changes; all she is doing is running down the clock after a second heavy defeat. Today marks 1,000 days since the referendum, and the Government have led the country and themselves into crisis, chaos and division. We are still legally due to leave the EU in nine days. Months of running down the clock and a concerted campaign of blackmail, bullying and bribery have failed to convince the House or the country that her deal is anything but a damaging national failure and should be rejected. They have run out of time; they have run out of ideas. People all over the country are anxious and frustrated with the Government's utter inability to find a way through the crisis. If she cannot get changes to her deal, will she give the people a chance to reject it and change the Government?

The Prime Minister: I think the right hon. Gentleman has just made the point I was making in my previous answer: he does not want to respect the referendum result in 2016. We have a deal that keeps millions of livelihoods safe and secure, protects the Union for the future and means that murderers and rapists on the

run can be brought back quickly to face justice in this country. No deal will not do that. The deal is good for this country, it delivers Brexit and it should be supported.

Q6. [909904] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): The announcement this week of the closure of Coes of Lowestoft, following on from those of Beales, Argos and Body Shop, highlights the challenges facing the high street in Lowestoft. To address these, Waveney District Council is submitting an expression of interest to the future high streets fund, which I anticipate will be heavily over-subscribed. I acknowledge the various initiatives the Government have put forward, but can the Prime Minister assure me that a co-ordinated, sustained and properly resourced approach, working with councils, will be pursued to revitalise our town centres, which are vital to local communities and economies?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has made an important point about the significance of town centres to our local communities. I thank him for highlighting the work that we are doing and the help that we are providing through the future high streets fund. Of course high streets are changing, but we want to help them in that process, and help them to adapt. That is why the future high streets fund is there, as my hon. Friend said, and £675 million is available for it to support local areas. I can also reassure my hon. Friend that we will be promoting partnership across the public and private sectors, including local businesses, in developing those plans for the future of their high streets.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I associate myself with the Prime Minister's remarks about the outrage that we all feel at what happened in Christchurch, New Zealand? We must work collectively to drive hate out of our societies across the globe. Our thoughts are also very much with the people of Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. We must do all that we can to support those communities.

All our constituents will be looking on at the crisis and chaos that we are in. We need to reflect on the fact that we are a week away from the intended day for leaving the European Union, and on the responsibilities that we all have. Six days ago, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said:

"In the absence of a deal, seeking such a short and, critically, one-off extension would be downright reckless".—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 566.]

Does the Prime Minister agree with her de facto deputy? Does she agree that her actions this morning are "downright reckless"?

The Prime Minister: As I have set out clearly for the House in a number of answers that I have now given on this question, I believe that the House has a responsibility to deliver on Brexit. People voted for Brexit, and we have a responsibility to deliver it. I recognise that the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in the Scottish National party have always taken the position that they want to revoke article 50 and not to have Brexit.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Correct!

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman shouts "Correct!" At least that is a firm position, whereas the Leader of the Opposition has continually moved his position on this issue. I also believe that nearly three years on from the vote for us to deliver Brexit for the British people, it is time for the House to face that fact, face the consequences of its decisions, and deliver Brexit for the British people. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. We cannot have people shouting in the middle of the exchanges. [*Interruption.*] Order. I do not need any help from any Member in dealing with these matters, with which I am very well familiar.

Ian Blackford: We need to reflect on the fact that the Prime Minister's deal had the biggest defeat in parliamentary history. She brought it back, and it had the fourth biggest defeat in parliamentary history. Her deal has failed, and the House has voted against no deal. Once again, the Prime Minister is acting in her own interest, not the interest of the whole United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister has failed, this place has failed, and Scotland is watching. The only way forward now is to take the decision back to the people. Will the Prime Minister give the people a say in such a referendum? The people of Scotland deserve a choice on the future, and if Westminster fails, Scotland will act.

The Prime Minister: There is an enormous responsibility. It is a huge honour and privilege to sit in this Chamber, to be elected as a Member of Parliament and to represent our constituents, and we all have a responsibility. Parliament gave the decision to the British people in a referendum in 2016, and the result of that referendum was that we should leave the European Union. I believe that if people are to be able to have trust in their politicians and faith in this Parliament, it is imperative that this Parliament delivers the Brexit that people voted for.

Q7. [909905] **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): In June 2016 the country voted to leave the European Union. In February 2017 this House voted by a majority of 384 to trigger article 50. The Prime Minister in this House has said 108 times that we will be leaving the European Union on 29 March. Last week two thirds of her MPs voted against any extension to article 50. Prime Minister, if you continue to apply for an extension to article 50 you will be betraying the British people. [*Interruption.*] If you don't, you will be honouring their instruction. Prime Minister, it is entirely down to you; history will judge you at this moment. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not having the hon. Gentleman denied the chance and the right to be heard; the hon. Gentleman must and will be heard.

Mr Bone: Prime Minister, which is it to be?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has been consistent in challenging me on the 29 March date in Prime Minister's questions and in statements, and indeed in debates. I have always wanted us to be able to leave on 29 March, but I believe, as was said during the referendum campaign by those who wanted to leave, that it is better to leave with a negotiated deal with the European Union. That is why I am saying that I think we should look again at being able to leave with a negotiated deal,

but in order to do that we need time for this Parliament to ratify a deal, and in order to do that we need an extension until 30 June. But, as I have said, as Prime Minister I could not consider a delay further beyond 30 June. This is the point at which this House has the decision to take as to what it wants the future to be. That is what is facing this House, and that is a decision I believe we should take honouring the result of the referendum.

Q2. [909900] **Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): On Friday I visited a school in my constituency where distressing poverty means that teachers are not only providing food for the children at breakfast and lunch, but are sourcing clothes and buying shoes for them, in addition to raising money for books and equipment. Now that school, the only one in the area, is threatened with closure, so rather than spending money trying to get people to back her Brexit deal, will the Prime Minister please use it to address the acute social need in this country that is bringing families and communities to their knees?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady will be well aware that we are putting more money into our schools, we are ensuring that we have a welfare system that encourages people into the workplace, and we have put more money into various other elements of care for people across our communities. But the best solution for people to ensure they are able to provide for themselves and their families is for us to have a strong economy and for people to be helped into work, and that is why it was so pleasing that this week yet again the employment level is at a record high in this country.

Q8. [909906] **Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): To overcome homelessness we need more homes, and in Chelmsford we are building 1,000 new homes every year, but we also need the infrastructure, so this week Essex County Council is putting in bids for housing infrastructure funding, including for the second train station in Chelmsford. Does my right hon. Friend agree that world-class infrastructure is vital for our future, and will she support our 25-year campaign for Chelmsford's second train station?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the action that Essex County Council has taken in relation to new homes and I welcome its bid to the housing infrastructure fund. We have made that money available in the housing infrastructure fund because we understand the importance of infrastructure for new housing developments. We recognise the need for additional affordable housing in the south-east. Of course the Department for Transport will look very carefully at the bid for the second railway station that my hon. Friend has referred to, but I am pleased to be able to say that we are only able to do this because this is a Government who are putting record levels of money into capital investment in our country.

Q3. [909901] **Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I know that the Prime Minister campaigned to keep section 28, which banned LGBT from being talked about positively in schools and led to millions of young people such as myself growing up in fear of being LGBT. I thought she had seen the error of her ways, but this morning the Leader of the House

said on the radio that parents should decide when their children should be exposed to LGBT education. This is Conservative party dog whistle politics. Will the Prime Minister condemn the Leader of the House, and will she condemn bigots who do not want LGBT people to be heard in schools? Will she support Ofsted with good LGBT education in our schools?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to write to the hon. Gentleman with the details of the guidance that is given to schools on LGBT education and teaching. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Women and Equalities has been at great pains to ensure, working with the Department for Education, that appropriate guidance is given to schools, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman—[*Interruption.*] I recognise the issue that he has raised, and I will write to him with the details of the guidance, because it is very clear about what is appropriate.

Q11. [909909] **Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): In Cornwall, we want to be as environmentally friendly as possible. In fact, we want to be carbon free by 2030. For me, this means improving the quality of our homes, making use of all forms of renewable energy and ensuring sustainable food production. Will my right hon. Friend welcome the aspirations of communities such as Cornwall, and will her Government ensure that robust policies are in place to meet our net zero emission commitments more quickly?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly delighted to hear of the aspirations that Cornwall has in relation to being carbon free and the action that is being taken. We are happy to support that, and we have a good record on climate change as a Government, but we are doing more. Our annual support for renewables will be over £10 billion by 2021, and our ambitious clean growth strategy sets out our plan for decarbonising the UK economy through to 2032. We will be putting policies in place that will enable areas such as Cornwall to achieve their commitments in relation to climate change.

Q5. [909903] **Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): There were 4,621 words in the Chancellor's spring statement, but not a single mention of WASPI women. The Prime Minister came into office vowing to tackle burning injustices. Those women worked all their lives for their pension but had it taken from them without their knowledge. Does the Prime Minister really not think that that is a burning injustice?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that, in relation to the WASPI women, this Government did put extra money in. We have been very clear that no one will see their pension age change by more than 18 months relative to the Pensions Act 1995 timetable, and those with the most significant changes did receive at least seven years' notice. We do want to see the empowerment of women in the workplace and in our economy, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women and Equalities will be bringing forward a strategy on that very soon.

Q13. [909911] **Bill Grant** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): The United Kingdom's average unemployment rate is a remarkable 4%, which is a very welcome low.

In Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock, however, it stands at 6.5%. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance to my constituents that she will continue to work on building employment nationally, and with a particular focus on areas where unemployment is significantly higher than the UK average?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has raised a particularly important issue, but if I may, I will pull him up on just one point. The unemployment rate across the UK is actually 3.9%. Employment in Scotland has risen by 239,000 since the 2010 election, and we saw in the spring statement that the economy is growing every year, borrowing is lower than expected and debt is falling, but I absolutely recognise my hon. Friend's concerns. That is why we will continue to work as a UK Government to deliver more jobs, healthier finances and an economy that is fit for the future across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Q9. [909907] **Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Hate crime is on the rise, and our democracy is increasingly based on fear, both in Parliament and in the country. Shocking Home Office figures show that hate crimes doubled from 2011 to more than 100,000 last year. The country looks to politicians to set a high standard, but last week the Prime Minister's allies were texting fellow hon. Members saying:

"I'm going to chloroform you and drag you through the lobbies"

to vote for the Prime Minister's deal. Does she find that behaviour acceptable, or will she be removing the Whip from the offending Member?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that politicians at all levels need to think very carefully about the terms in which we address others and in which we put our arguments. There are many Members across this House who have suffered significant verbal abuse and online abuse of various sorts. This is a matter that we should all be taking seriously, and I will be ensuring that, across this House, we work to ensure that people are not subject to the sort of abuse that, sadly, some Members have been subjected to from outside this House.

Q14. [909912] **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Back in the world beyond Brexit, my right hon. Friend will be aware that my private Member's Bill, the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Bill, completed its passage last Friday. I have since received hundreds of letters of thanks, including no fewer than six from prospective civil partners who proposed after my Bill went through and many from anxious mothers wanting to know when they will be able to sign their son or daughter's marriage certificate.

Will my right hon. Friend guarantee that every effort will now be made to ensure that these measures come in well before the end of the year, and that there will not be a prolonged period of implementation?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for working with the Government on this legislation. We are working to bring it in as quickly as possible, to ensure that these measures are available as soon as possible.

Q10. [909908] **Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Since the Prime Minister has been on her feet the national crisis appears to have deepened, in that the European Commission has said the extension will be either until 23 May or until the end of 2019. Will she listen to the hundreds of thousands of young people who will march peacefully to Parliament Square to say that they would like a chance to have their say in this debate by putting it back to the people—subject to the Kyle-Wilson amendment, which is basically a compromise in this House?

The Prime Minister: I have answered many questions in recent weeks and months on putting a vote back to the people of this country. I continue to believe it is for this House to recognise that, having asked people their view and having heard that view, we should deliver on that view. That is our responsibility. It is about delivering Brexit.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): As the Prime Minister says, this House has voted clearly to reject leaving with no deal and has voted clearly to seek an extension if her withdrawal agreement cannot get a majority, but this House has not yet had the opportunity to debate and vote on the range of options for long-term arrangements such as a customs union, regulatory alignment and so on. Will she arrange for indicative votes finally to be held next week, so that we can see where the consensus and the majority lie? A short extension of article 50 will be completely useless if the Government go into it with no idea of what they have the authority to negotiate in the long term.

The Prime Minister: As I think my right hon. and learned Friend will have noticed, the House has had many opportunities to put forward motions on those issues. The House has rejected alternatives to the Government's deal. The House has voted against a customs union. The House has voted against having a second referendum. [Interruption.] From a sedentary position, somebody on the Opposition Front Bench says that the Government will not let the House. The House has voted on these issues and has rejected them. We have been clear about our intention to absolutely fulfil the requirement to bring forward an amendable motion under section 13(4) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and we will indeed be doing that.

Q12. [909910] **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): My constituents Tasnim, seven, and Hashim, nine, were stuck in wartorn Sana'a, seeing things that no child should ever see. They managed to get out, and the Government asked them to go to Khartoum in Sudan, where they have been asked to wait until their mum can pass an English language test. They have a safe home with their dad in Cupar in my constituency, and I have briefed the Prime Minister about this. Will she let all the family go home to safety in my constituency?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for writing to me with details of this case and for bringing it to my attention. Obviously, as he will expect, when the Home Office receives applications it looks at them carefully and it looks at exceptional circumstances. I have asked the Home Office to look urgently at this case and asked the relevant Minister to respond to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): The Prime Minister knows that if she brings her deal again to the House I will again support it, but will she confirm today that the full length of the extension that she is seeking from the EU will be available to the House regardless of whether it supports her measure or seeks another way forward?

The Prime Minister: As I think my right hon. Friend will have heard me say in answer to the very first question posed in Prime Minister's questions today, the Government intend to bring forward proposals for a third meaningful vote. If that vote is passed, the extension will give the House time to consider the withdrawal agreement Bill, and if it is not, the House will have to decide how to proceed.

Q15. [909913] **Ged Killen** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): More than 50 years since the closure of the J & J White chemical factory in my constituency, the local area is still blighted by carcinogenic hexavalent chromium contamination. To date, Clyde Gateway has received £6 million of EU funds to decontaminate and regenerate land, but tens of millions more will be required to complete the work. Will the Prime Minister give a commitment that, post Brexit, the UK Government will make similar funding available in the long term to complete that work?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has raised a very specific case in relation to a certain type of funding. I would be very happy to ask the relevant Minister to respond to him on the specifics of that case in relation to his constituency.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend rule out introducing the withdrawal and implementation Bill if her withdrawal agreement is voted down yet again by the House next week, and then let the United Kingdom leave the European Union on 29 March, as per the people's vote in 2016, as Parliament has enacted, and as the law requires?

The Prime Minister: What I have done today in writing to President Tusk is ask for that extension to article 50 until the end of June. I have been clear that, as I have said, I do not believe that Brexit should be delayed beyond that point. That would give us the opportunity to ensure that the House can consider again a deal, and then take forward the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill in the circumstances that a deal was passed. In the circumstances that a deal was not passed, then it would obviously be necessary, as I have just said to my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), for the House to consider how we should proceed. I would also say to my hon. Friend that, as he will have heard the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs saying in the debate on no deal last week, there are particular issues, particularly in relation to the governance of Northern Ireland, in relation to leaving the European Union without a deal on 29 March. I continue to hope and continue to believe that the best way for this country to leave the European Union is to do so on the basis of a negotiated deal, and the extension to 30 June would allow us to do that.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): Further to the question from the Father of the House, does the Prime Minister not realise that in her answer she is the roadblock to this House reaching a majority, not the facilitator of it? It is blindingly obvious—including, I believe, to members of the Cabinet—that what the House now needs to do is to have a series of indicative votes, precisely so that it can express its will about what it is for, not simply what it is against. Why does not the Prime Minister agree to that? She would be doing a service to the country if she did.

The Prime Minister: Obviously, I have made it clear that we will bring forward the motion that is required under the legislation, under section 13(4). May I gently say to the right hon. Gentleman, as I did to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), that it is not the case that it has not been possible for this House to bring forward votes of the sort that the right hon. Gentleman is talking about? It has been open to this House. In some cases, the House has brought forward such votes and those have been rejected.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend and this House gave their solemn word to the British people that we would leave the EU on 29 March—on Friday week. I say to my right hon. Friend, if this extension happens, what guarantee can you give the British people that at the end of June, if we still do not have a deal, we honour that referendum result and we leave?

The Prime Minister: I made it clear in one of the debates last week or the previous week that if it is the case that there is an extension, that does not actually take no deal off the table; it leaves that as a point at the end of that extension. Now, whether or not we have that extension is not a matter purely for the United Kingdom; it is a matter for the European Union Council. Obviously, I will wait to see what the Council say tomorrow, but up until now they have been very clear that any extension could be granted only if there was a clear purpose for that extension, and that we could not go beyond the date I have suggested without holding European parliamentary elections. I do not believe it is in anybody's interest to hold European parliamentary elections. I believe it is time that we actually delivered on the vote of the British people in 2016, and that is why, as I said earlier, in response to the first question, as Prime Minister, as far as I am concerned, there will be no delay in delivering Brexit beyond 30 June.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): As the Prime Minister has told us, she is today seeking a short and one-off extension to article 50. Last Thursday, her deputy Prime Minister told this House at that Dispatch Box that any such application would be

“downright reckless and completely at odds with the position that this House adopted only last night”.—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 566.]

The question is, Prime Minister, what changed?

The Prime Minister: I seem to see a certain similarity between the right hon. Lady's question and a couple of the questions that came from the official Opposition on this issue. As I said to them, I think we should all remember the responsibility we have in this House to ensure that we deliver Brexit, and as I have said, I

believe a short extension, of the type that I have indicated, that I have written to President Tusk about today, is a sensible request to put forward; but I have also been clear, as I have been in response to my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), that I also believe that the British people will not thank this House if we do anything other than deliver Brexit, and in a reasonable timetable, and that is by the end of June.

Nick Boles (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for allowing me to continue to represent the people of Grantham and Stamford from these Conservative Benches.

On 26 February, my right hon. Friend said from the Dispatch Box that

“if the House votes for an extension,”

the Government will

“seek to agree that extension approved by the House with the EU and bring forward the necessary legislation to change the exit date commensurate with that extension.”—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2019; Vol. 655, c. 167.]

When will she give the House the opportunity to approve her extension request? When will she bring forward the necessary legislation to change the exit date?

The Prime Minister: The suggestion of the extension to the end of June was of course considered by the House last week. The request has gone into the European Union Council, and before it is possible for that request to be confirmed, it is of course necessary for the EU Council to agree that extension, because the treaty is clear that an extension can be applied for by the country that is leaving the European Union but it has to be agreed by all 28 members of the European Union. That will not be possible until the European Council at the end of this week.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Prime Minister still has to ask the EU to agree to something. At the moment, all she is asking anybody to agree to is the same plan that she has put to this House twice, and that has been roundly defeated twice. Why will she not just open up, just think again, just allow the indicative votes that others have put forward? What she is doing by sticking to this failed plan is deeply dangerous for our country. In the national interest, I beg this Prime Minister to think again.

The Prime Minister: What is first and foremost in the national interest is for this country to leave the European Union, and to do so in a way that protects people’s livelihoods, protects their security and protects our Union. That is the proposal that we have put forward. The right hon. Lady has raised again the issue of indicative votes. I say to her, as I have said to others, that first of all we stand by the requirement to bring the motion under section 13(4) of the withdrawal Act, which we will do, and we will bring that motion to this House within the timetable set out in the legislation. I also say to her that it is the case that there have been votes in this House on some of the other proposals that have been brought forward, and those have equally been rejected. There is one thing that this House has agreed to, and that is that it would leave with a deal; it was in relation to changes in relation to the backstop. That is the one positive vote that the House has given.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): After much representation from the charity Max Appeal, the national screening committee is, for the first time, considering adding 22q11 syndrome to the newborn blood spot test. This second most common chromosomal disorder after Down’s syndrome can lead to avoidable mental health issues if not diagnosed and managed from a young age. Will my right hon. Friend join me and the all-party parliamentary group, of which I am chair, in calling for this condition to be added to the newborn blood spot test?

The Prime Minister: First, I commend my hon. Friend and the all-party parliamentary group for the work that they are doing in this area. He has obviously raised a very important issue. I will ask the Department of Health and Social Care for an appropriate Minister to respond to him, and possibly meet and talk to him about this issue.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The Prime Minister has a very selective view of the decisions that this country has made. She mentions the referendum, but she never mentions the general election that denied her the authority for a hard Brexit. She has mentioned the things that this House has voted against, but failed to mention that her deal has been defeated by large amounts now twice. She seems determined to plough on as if nothing has happened to her deal and cause a huge crisis. Surely now it is time for the Prime Minister to recognise that she has to stop banging her head against the brick wall of her defeated deal and reach out across this House in the interests of stability and our democracy, and come to a deal that actually has the support of a majority of this House, rather than kowtowing to her own Brextremists.

The Prime Minister: The point is that, so far, apart from saying that it would support leaving with a deal with changes to that deal in relation to the backstop, the House has given no positive vote on what it wants to go forward. The hon. Lady talks about the 2017 general election. I remind her that 80% of the votes cast in that general election—[*Interruption.*] It is no good Labour Members waving their hands. Eighty per cent of the votes cast in that election were cast for parties that stood on a manifesto of honouring the result of the 2016 referendum.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: If it appertains to matters of which the House has just treated, I am willing to take the point of order now. If it does not, I will not, because there is a proper time for such matters.

Stephen Doughty: My point of order relates to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) regarding the comments made by the Leader of the House on the radio this morning about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender education and it relates to forthcoming business later today.

Mr Speaker, you will be aware that an important statutory instrument on sex and relationships education and LGBT inclusive education is due to be debated.

Obviously, we understand that you have granted a number of urgent questions and that there will be an SO24 application. What steps can we take to ensure that that debate is not lost, and that we do have it, so that we can debate the comments made by the Leader of the House and ensure that we have an inclusive education across this country?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The short answer to him is that, if I understand it correctly—and I believe that I do—the time for that matter is protected. That is to say that, notwithstanding the duration of urgent questions and the possibility of a SO24 debate, the House will get to consider that matter. I hope that that brings a smile to the face of the hon. Gentleman.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Does it relate to that of which we have just treated?

Caroline Flint: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing my point of order. It does relate to the discussions around the extension of article 50 and the agenda this

afternoon for the debate. Will you confirm that any extension will require us to take part in the European elections, and that we will have to lay the orders in this House before 11 April, so that local authorities can publish election notices on 12 April for South West England and Gibraltar and 15 April for the rest of the UK? We have a duty to make sure that, if we are extending, we will take part in those European elections and we need to lay the orders.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the right hon. Lady and she was as good as her word: her point of order did relate to matters of which the House had just treated. However, notwithstanding her beguiling invitation to me to pronounce on the matter, I genuinely do not think that it is for me to do so. It may very well depend on the length of any extension sought, and it does seem to me that it is a matter that must be pronounced upon by the Government Front-Bench team in the course of upcoming exchanges. If the right hon. Lady wants to be assured that she will have the opportunity to put that proposition directly to a Minister, I think that I can offer her that guarantee, so she will have her chance, but it is not a matter for the Chair. I am grateful to the right hon. Lady and to the hon. Gentleman for their points of order.

Cyclone Idai

12.56 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on Britain's help for those caught up in the cyclone disaster that is afflicting southern Africa.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): I am sure the whole House will join me in expressing shock at the loss and devastation following the deadly cyclone Idai across southern Africa.

Alongside the Met Office, we have been tracking this cyclone and supplies were pre-positioned in Mozambique. We have so far committed £6 million to respond to immediate needs. I am pleased to inform the House that more tents and thousands of shelter kits have now landed in Mozambique.

We have teams on the ground in each of the three countries affected, including humanitarian and relief experts. We are working with other international partners, including the UN and the Red Cross, to address immediate needs across the three countries.

Mr Mitchell: This massive disaster has swept across southern Africa, affecting in particular three Commonwealth and suspended Commonwealth countries. The United Nations has made it clear that hundreds of thousands of people are affected and that this is heading towards being the worst weather-related disaster to hit the southern hemisphere.

The President of Mozambique says that 1,000 of his citizens have perished, and, as we have seen graphically on our televisions from the reporting by the BBC's Fergal Keane, the important port city of Beira has been flattened, with almost all port structures destroyed and the collapse of bridges and roads.

In Malawi, nearly 900,000 people have been directly affected, with many having lost everything. The dangers confronting those caught up in this disaster include the loss of everything they own; the difficulty of getting food and medicines through to those affected; and the spread of waterborne diseases including cholera owing to the contamination of the water supply. The risk of starvation and famine is very real, with harvests destroyed and livestock drowned.

I am sure the Minister agrees that the UK has an important role to play given our acknowledged international leadership in this area, and she has set out some of what we have already done. The strong support and generosity that we know exist all across the UK for stepping up immediately when these hideous so-called natural disasters take place is worth bearing in mind, and so too is the huge repository of expertise that exists within the Department for International Development and British non-governmental organisations and charities. That expertise, which is respected all around the world, was greatly boosted by the report on Britain's international emergency response so brilliantly undertaken by the late Lord Paddy Ashdown.

Will the Government note that the search and rescue response so far has been much slower than in the crisis in 2000? One of those who is today in Beira who was

also there in 2000 says that the response then was 10 times as great for a much lesser disaster. Thousands of families remain stranded. A huge global response is now required and the UK has a key leadership role to discharge in that.

Harriett Baldwin: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this urgent question, which allows me to echo the sentiments that he expressed so eloquently about our solidarity with the people of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe who have been hit by what the United Nations has described as potentially the worst-ever cyclone in the southern hemisphere. My opening remarks alluded to the role played by the Met Office, which has been helpful in predicting the likelihood of the landfall location, allowing us to pre-position some food supplies, medicine, cholera kits and shelter and to help to secure a response.

My right hon. Friend rightly mentioned the UK's leadership in the area. We have shown leadership by being one of the first to announce additional funding to address the disaster. He will know that we already have experts deployed on the ground, and he will have heard from his contacts that the Disasters Emergency Committee will shortly announce a further appeal. The UK is playing a crucial role in assisting both our Commonwealth and suspended Commonwealth friends and in providing leadership. I was in Beira only last month and can testify to the strength of not only the bilateral relationship between ourselves and the people of Mozambique, but the link between Beira and the city of Bristol.

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I begin by echoing the Minister's feelings. This House is united in our thoughts about the tragic impact of this devastating cyclone, which may be the worst-ever disaster to strike the southern hemisphere.

I welcome the £6 million relief effort from the Department for International Development, and I am delighted to hear that it is now reaching people on the ground. However, unless immediate action is taken to halt catastrophic climate change, extreme weather events such as this will become more frequent, and the poorest people in the global south will suffer the most. This event must be a wake-up call for Governments everywhere to deliver urgently on the Paris agreement target of keeping global warming below 1.5 °C. If we are serious about that, we must start reducing our own global carbon emissions now, so what are the Government doing to ensure that that happens? Another key component of the Paris agreement was a commitment to address the devastation caused to poor nations by climate change through funding for loss and damage. What Government support is being given to fund that strand of the agreement?

Finally, Mr Speaker, Mozambique's ability to respond and rebuild following this disaster will be seriously impaired by the country's debt crisis, triggered by \$2 billion of secret loans from London-based banks. What action are the Government taking to ensure London banks are held to account for their role in the crisis? Will the Minister work with partners to relieve Mozambique's debt burden so that the country can rebuild?

Harriett Baldwin: I endorse the hon. Lady's comments about the UK's important leadership role on climate change. We have already committed £5.8 billion during

this spending review period to work with international partners on international climate finance. We are also able to show leadership not only through our track record as one of the leading countries for reducing carbon emissions, but by sharing our technical skills, such as those in the offshore wind and solar mini-grid sectors. The week before last, we hosted an event for African Energy Ministers, and a Mozambique Government representative was in attendance. Through the City of London and the green finance initiative, we have been able to provide not only our own contribution, but a further \$25 billion of green finance through more than 90 bond issues in seven currencies.

The hon. Lady referred to the role played by City of London institutions in the hidden debt scandal of a few years ago. She will appreciate that I cannot comment publicly on the specific details of the case, but I assure her that the UK will commit to ensuring that there is an investigation.

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): I start by declaring my interests in the region. I share the sentiments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and his sense of extreme urgency. He mentioned the cyclone in 2000 and the massive damage done to Beira, but lessons were not learned then about the need for permanent sea defences. When it comes to the reconstruction that the Minister promises, will she ensure that emphasis is put on the installation of permanent sea defences along Mozambique's north-eastern coast?

Harriett Baldwin: It sounds as though my hon. Friend has also visited Beira, so he will be aware that Mozambique's coastline is over 2,500 km long and is particularly vulnerable, but building sea defences is probably not the No. 1 way of improving the area's resilience when a cyclone hits. Beira's port has sustained significant damage, and the airport, where supplies are now arriving, has a reduced ability to accept flights. Indeed, many of the roads surrounding Beira are underwater. Unfortunately, heavy rain is still falling, so there is a combination of water from the sea and water from the sky. There are things that can be done to secure resilience, but building flood defences along Mozambique's entire coastline is probably not, as my hon. Friend will know as a Norfolk MP, the most compelling option in terms of value for money.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): The UN has described cyclone Idai as possibly the worst-ever disaster to strike the south hemisphere. I have visited the area and know it quite well, and it does not bear thinking about what it used to look like compared with where it is now. Although the damage and death such cyclones bring with them seem incomprehensible, this is just the beginning of the impact of increasingly extreme weather.

Last year, the International Development Committee heard from Dr Alison Doig, who noted that the UN framework for combating climate change has three pillars for averting such disasters or dealing with their impact: mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage. Does the Minister agree that loss and damage of property is a huge consequence of climate change? If so, why do the UK Government allocate official development assistance spending only to mitigation and adaptation? We can no

longer pretend that such events are freak accidents, because their frequency will only ever increase. Does the Minister therefore agree that we are living through a climate crisis? If so, why has that not been made a much more urgent Government priority?

Finally, on the behalf of the SNP, I express my shock and sympathy with all the families in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe who have been affected.

Harriett Baldwin: The International Development Committee, on which the hon. Gentleman sits, is doing important work in relation to DFID's overall approach on climate change, and I look forward to hearing what the Committee has to say. I recently gave evidence to the Committee about the £5.8 billion of international climate finance. He will be aware that that has already helped 47 million people adapt to the impact of climate change.

A lot of the work that we are doing is about ensuring that people can be more resilient to these more extreme weather events, which climate scientists predict will continue to occur. Our work was recently praised in an assessment by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which said that we showed good strategic leadership and that our work was effective. I agree that this is an important issue on which we need to focus, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that we continue to play an important leadership role and to spend a significant amount of money in this area.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): One of the longer-term effects of such disasters is the loss of the livestock upon which people depend for their livelihoods and to feed their families. My hon. Friend mentioned the Disasters Emergency Committee. There is not a single animal welfare organisation represented on the DEC. Will she ensure that that shortcoming is addressed so that when people are able to return to their homes, they can also return to the livestock on which they depend?

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend is right to highlight that, long after the waters have receded, there will be an impact on the local population's ability to continue to have successful food markets, whether that food is livestock or maize—given that it is a particularly maize growing area. There are early reports that much of the maize crop across the three countries has been damaged. This food is an absolute staple in the region, and any damage to the maize crop and the staple diet will have ongoing knock-on effects for the food resilience of the local population. We will be working with our advisers to understand the impact of that issue, and to see where there is an additional need for programming and international leadership.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I say for the benefit not just of the House, but of those observing our proceedings beyond it, that two wonderful but competing examples of seniority in the House are seeking to catch the eye of the Chair. The first is the Mother of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who is immensely senior, very distinguished and has a very busy diary. But on the

[Mr Speaker]

other hand, sitting immediately behind her is the Chair of the International Development Committee—a man of great seniority. I therefore have to be the arbiter of competing greats. I call Harriet Harman.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the former International Development Secretary, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), for bringing this matter to the House; I absolutely agree with all the points he raised. I also thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question.

The commitment of the Minister to this issue is evident, and it is also evident that everyone is dismayed about the scale of the problem. May I ask her about people in this country who will be particularly distraught about the situation—the people who have come here from Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique, who have made their home here, live and work here, bring up their children here, pay their taxes here, and contribute to our commercial and public life, but who are also contributors through their remittances to the countries affected by the cyclone? These people are desperately worried about their friends and family caught up in this situation. Will the Minister tell the House how she will engage with the diaspora communities to ensure that she understands the efforts that they are trying to make, and confirm that she will help in those efforts? Will she also inform those communities of what the Department is doing and listen to them, because they will often know what needs to be done? I pay tribute to the work of all the agencies and the Department in this very difficult situation.

Harriett Baldwin: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for putting the sorority of Harrietts at the forefront in calling Members today.

The right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) makes an important point about the links between the UK and people in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield alluded earlier. The right hon. and learned Lady also makes an important point about the ways in which we can work with the diaspora here. Let me make a commitment to hon. Members; should colleagues find it useful, I will convene a meeting with colleagues so that they have the opportunity to make representations on behalf of their constituents about what we could be doing differently to help and what information can be found about their relatives. I am happy to do that through a face-to-face meeting, on the telephone or through letters of inquiry.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on bringing this important issue to the House. At a time of humanitarian crisis, the British public are always incredibly generous. What arrangements is the Minister making to ensure that the British public, who will want to contribute money, food, clothing or other means of assistance, can do so in a constructive way so that we can immediately help the people who are facing this terrible crisis, rather than delaying?

Harriett Baldwin: May I pay tribute to the generosity of my hon. Friend's constituents? As I mentioned earlier, there will be a Disasters Emergency Committee campaign

launch to raise money for the disaster. As we have noted, there is a need for immediate relief—the UK has been at the forefront of pre-positioning some of that relief—but there will also be an ongoing need to rebuild the communities and help with food access issues. I urge constituents who want to make a contribution to await the imminent launch of the appeal.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome what the Minister has said today. As she described to the House, the Select Committee is currently looking at climate change. Rightly, today's focus is on humanitarian relief and the immediate challenges, but of course the long-term development needs of these countries must not be forgotten. What will DFID be doing—working with other donors and the countries concerned—to ensure that Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe can rebuild after this disaster, particularly with regard to necessary health and education investment?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman is so right to point to the long-term nature of this work. Although we need to put in place a short-term response, there also needs to be a long-term strategic response. Some of the very poorest countries in the world are also some of the most vulnerable to climate change—I think Malawi is estimated to be the third poorest country in the world, and Mozambique the seventh—so those of us paying in through international climate finance have a special responsibility to do whatever we can to encourage countries such as those affected in this instance to bid successfully for those funds. That is why we had the African Energy Ministers event. As part of our new approach to Africa, we are also hiring a further 20 climate specialists across our African network to help deploy some of that finance into these particularly vulnerable countries.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to the people of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. As has been said, this is not only about feeding and saving people now; it is also about feeding them into the future, and I am sure that the British farming community can help to get cattle and other things back into the region. One particular point that I want to raise with the Minister is about Zimbabwe, which is naturally suspended from the Commonwealth because of corruption, bad governance and a lack of democracy. It is quite right to suspend the country, but it is not the fault of the Zimbabwean people that they have such a corrupt Government. What more help can we give Zimbabwe, given that the country is very weak due to its lack of good governance and democracy?

Harriett Baldwin: We have always been a steadfast friend of the people of Zimbabwe. This year alone, we will have put some £84 million-worth of programming through the Department for International Development—none of which money, I must emphasise, goes through the Government of Zimbabwe but is designed to help the most vulnerable people with education, access to healthcare and some of the agricultural resilience work that I have alluded to. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to put on record the steadfast friendship between the people of the UK and the people of Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): This is another example of the devastating impact of climate change on the very poorest countries in the world—although, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), said, we are debating the humanitarian aspect today. What will the Foreign Office be doing at the UN and other multinational organisations to press the case for not just redoubling our efforts on climate change but re-trebbling them so that these incidents do not happen in future?

Harriett Baldwin: The other day, I was able to give evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, on which the hon. Gentleman serves, and one of the things I talked about was our new approach to Africa whereby we are putting increased emphasis on adaptation to climate change across, in particular, the poorest and most vulnerable countries there. With regard to the UN specifically, the UK has been asked to lead the work on resilience at September's UN climate summit, so that is a piece of work that we are taking forward to show real leadership in that area.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Minister will know that eastern Zimbabwe, particularly around Chimanimani, has been completely devastated, with roads closed and nobody really able to get in unless by helicopter—and there are of course the special circumstances of Zimbabwe already mentioned by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish). Will the Minister add just a little bit more on what our ambassador in Zimbabwe is doing and how we are making sure that we are really going to get the aid to the people who are going to need it most?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Lady, who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on Zimbabwe, will want to know that we have been at the forefront of trying to work with our partners to assess the scale of the need. The port of Beira is not just the port for a large part of Mozambique but also the port that is most used by Zimbabwe and Malawi for food imports and exports, so that is, in addition, a particular vulnerability. I understand from the early assessments that reports from eastern Zimbabwe suggest that there has been a severe degradation of the infrastructure as well, and it is very difficult to access all the afflicted populations. We cannot over-emphasise how difficult it is for us to be able to reach people. The pre-deployed kits have reached the airport at Beira, but at the moment many roads out of Beira are closed, and that will also affect eastern Zimbabwe's response. We are at the forefront of working with partners—for example, UNICEF—in eastern Zimbabwe, and that will need to inform, after the rain has stopped, our ability to respond to some of the lasting damage there.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is World Water Day on Friday, but for people in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, there is water everywhere but not a drop to drink. In the all-party parliamentary group on Malawi, which I chair, we have been following the effect of devastating floods that had already been hitting the country before the cyclone. The Minister might be aware that the Scottish Government have already made a donation to provide support for that, and civic society is responding as well. Specifically, what

steps will her Department take to improve resilience in these countries? Because of climate change, such extreme weather events are becoming more common, so how can countries be supported before a disaster hits to ensure that there is resilience in the infrastructure?

Harriett Baldwin: This allows me to pay tribute to the Scotland-Malawi partnership, demonstrated by the statistic that 43% of people in Scotland know someone who is, or are themselves, part of links between Scotland and Malawi. I know that civil society across Scotland will be engaging both with these local partnerships but also more widely through the appeal. I thank everyone in Scotland for their generosity towards this cause.

The hon. Gentleman asked specifically about the work that we will be doing on resilience, which is also for the United Nations. Resilience takes many forms, but one of the most important is the crops that are sown, the ways in which they are sown and the way that the land is used. That is an important part of the work that we are doing—helping farmers to make use of the land in a way that gives them the best resilience to these kinds of climate shocks.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): As has been mentioned, Bristol's links with the fellow port city of Beira go back a long way—in fact, back to the days of anti-apartheid campaigning when we were officially twinned. There is already a fundraising effort going on in Bristol to try to support people in Beira, but how can we best work with DFID to make sure that we can constructively share information and get the help to the people who most need it?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank the people of Bristol. When I was in Beira recently, I met its mayor, who personally asked me to thank everyone in Bristol for all that they do through that very strong partnership between two world-class port cities. I mentioned the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. I also mentioned, in my response to the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), that I thought it would be constructive to hold a meeting for colleagues to update them. I will take forward that suggestion and invite the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) to join us.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Ind): The port of Beira has a huge role in providing access to the Indian ocean for landlocked countries as well as the three countries that are specifically hit by this appalling disaster. Zambia, for example, has a lot of trade going through that port. What steps are being taken to assess the economic implications for the region as a whole, including other countries, and for the vital humanitarian, medical and other assistance to the countries directly affected?

Harriett Baldwin: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's extensive knowledge of these issues. He will be aware that I alluded to some of the impacts that are already apparent in terms of access to the port of Beira, and he rightly emphasises how important that port is to neighbouring countries. We are going through a process of assessment in terms of reopening the roads, which, the House should be aware, have already been built on quite high causeways, so there has already been account taken of the fact that this is a flood-prone region with

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

many rivers flowing through it. Steps will need to be taken to ensure that there is access to the port and that it reopens as soon as possible because of the whole region's dependence on food imports and exports going through it.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): There is an increasing body of scientific evidence linking extreme weather to increasing carbon emissions. What diplomatic efforts is the Minister's Department making, in partnership with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to make the case both to our partners around the world and to our own Government that we need to reach our net zero carbon emissions target sooner rather than later?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the work that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth is doing in having commissioned work to see how the UK can show leadership on net zero. We await what comes out of that report. He will be aware of the UK's leadership so far in terms of our ability to have reduced our own carbon emissions very significantly. He will be aware of the programming that is being done through international climate finance, which has already helped to avoid or mitigate some 10.8 million tonnes of emissions in the atmosphere. He will also be aware that we are leading through our international networks. I mentioned the uplift in our new approach to climate change in Africa, but we will be convening the international community at the United Nations to deal with the all-important issue of resilience.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Our hearts go out to the hundreds of thousands of people across Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe who have been affected by this terrible disaster. It reminds us of the huge need to focus on the fight against climate change. I welcome what the Minister says about how important that is, but the DFID departmental plan used to list climate change as a stand-alone strategic priority, and the current version does not. In this time of climate emergency, is that not a case of getting our priorities wrong? We should be increasing the urgency of the action we take to fight climate change, not downgrading it to a subheading.

Harriett Baldwin: I can reassure the hon. Lady that, since climate change is a major threat to achieving the sustainable development goals, tackling it is a strategic priority for the Department for International Development. We work across the Government on this with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am glad that the independent ICAI report

said that UK international climate finance shows a "convincing approach", with some "good emerging results" in influencing others and making some good strategic choices.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Ind): We hear reports that aid trucks are stuck on impassable roads and that conditions are limiting air operations. Bearing in mind what the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) said about the slowness of this response by comparison with some other disasters, what discussions are taking place to overcome those problems? I hear what the Minister says about the pre-deployment packs, but transport is always a problem, particularly in southern Africa, when there is an environmental or health disaster. What short-term and longer-term measures are the Department and the Government looking at?

Harriett Baldwin: I take issue with the criticism that this response has been slow. In fact, we were pre-positioning what was needed to relieve the situation in advance of the cyclone. The facts are that it continues to rain very heavily, and a lot of the access by air, water and road is severely hampered. That will be difficult to overcome, and it is at the forefront of the work that our teams on the ground are doing to provide logistic support to this operation.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I welcome what the Minister has said. As she knows, I chair the all-party parliamentary group on deaths abroad and consular services. Of course the focus right now is on humanitarian aid, but can she say a bit about what she can do to support constituents like mine—I have a small Malawian community in my constituency—who have family or friends there and want to travel back, and British nationals who are caught up in this horrendous disaster? What work will be done with local communities? We all have local church groups and community groups who will want to fundraise and support the people of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. What will be done to ensure that grassroots community organisations in our constituencies can contribute to support?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank the hon. Lady for her work on the all-party parliamentary group, and I thank everyone in Scotland and the UK for what will no doubt be a very generous response to the emergency that will be declared. I highlight the announcement that the Secretary of State made earlier this week about making it easier for small charities across the UK to access support. There have been a number of requests for a further update when colleagues have had the chance to hear from constituents who have strong links to Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. I would like to commit to the House to organise an event next Monday for colleagues, once all the casework has come in from their constituencies.

EU Withdrawal Joint Committee: Oversight

1.34 pm

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union if he will outline what checks the House of Commons has over the powers of the “Joint Committee” contained in the proposed EU withdrawal agreement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Kwasi Kwarteng): As is common in international agreements, the withdrawal agreement provides for a Joint Committee comprising representatives of the UK and the EU to govern the implementation and application of the withdrawal agreement. The Joint Committee will have the powers listed in article 164 of the agreement, to ensure that both parties are able to discuss any issues that may arise concerning the management and operation of the withdrawal agreement. As set out in paragraph 3 of article 166, the Joint Committee will make all its decisions and recommendations “by mutual consent” of the parties. In other words, it cannot act if the UK does not agree. This is an important protection for the UK that Members should welcome.

Clearly Parliament will expect to be able to undertake scrutiny of the work of the Joint Committee, as indeed will the European Parliament. Quite how that will operate is something that the Government will discuss with Members of this House and the other place, should this House give its support to the withdrawal agreement. But this House should be in no doubt: the Government’s approach at the Joint Committee will be underpinned by full ministerial accountability to Parliament.

Mr Francois: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. The Prime Minister is due to attend the critical European Council tomorrow and Friday. However, despite the imminence of those crucial negotiations, very few Members of Parliament in this House are even aware of the extensive powers of the EU-UK Joint Committee contained within the withdrawal agreement. It is very important that those powers are brought to the attention of the House before the Prime Minister attends the Council tomorrow, hence my request this morning.

The Joint Committee is designed to oversee all aspects of the operation of the agreement and, crucially, managing and supervising the implementation and operation of the future relationship. Its potentially wide-ranging powers are contained in articles 164 to 166 of the withdrawal agreement and its rules of procedure, which are an integral part of the treaty found at annex VIII, almost literally at the back of the 585-page document; there is, in fairness, an annex IX.

The decisions of the Committee have full force in international law, equivalent to the treaty itself, as guaranteed in article 166. The Committee can meet in private. It does not have to publish its agenda, any minutes or even a summary of its minutes and can be chaired by two unelected civil servants, nominated by either side, rather than by Ministers. Under its rules of procedure, the two co-chairmen, acting outside normal meetings, can even make legally binding decisions in its

name by an exchange of notes, without any recourse to or consent from Parliament. Rule 9 of the rules and procedures, on decisions and recommendations, clearly states on page 565 of the treaty:

“1. In the period between meetings, the Joint Committee may adopt decisions or recommendations by written procedure, if the co-chairs decide to use this procedure. The written procedure shall consist of an exchange of notes between the co-chairs.

2. Where the Joint Committee adopts decisions or recommendations, the words ‘Decision’ or ‘Recommendation’, respectively, shall be inserted in the title of such acts. The Secretariat shall record any decision or recommendation under a serial number and with a reference to the date of its adoption.”

That is almost exactly the same procedure that is used for notifying and recording EU regulations and directives. Despite all of that, this Committee has hardly ever been mentioned in Parliament, and few Ministers have ever referred to it directly throughout the extensive debates we have had during this Session on the whole issue of Brexit. Crucially, the Joint Committee is contained in the treaty, and therefore has the force of international law behind it, but it is outside the backstop, which is perhaps why it has received less attention than other aspects of the withdrawal agreement to date.

I believe that this has been extremely cleverly drafted to hand control of future elements of this country’s destiny deliberately to unelected civil servants, rather than to Ministers—civil servants who are unanswerable to this House of Commons in the way that Ministers are. Those involved have thought of everything, as rule 12 of annex VIII is entitled “Expenses”, and it even lays out how they can reclaim their expenses. At present, Parliament seems blissfully unaware of the ability of the Joint Committee to take legally binding decisions relating to any future aspect of the treaty or the future relationship, in effect, above Parliament’s head.

There are clear issues of accountability to Parliament that, as far as I am aware, have never really been debated in the House at all. I ask the Minister to confirm that everything I have said is true, and if any of it is not true, will he point out what and why? If it is true, which it is, will he explain what checks and balances this House has over the operation of the Joint Committee?

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Take back control!

Mr Francois: Thank you, Bishop.

In summary, the Joint Committee contained in the draft withdrawal agreement has hardly ever been discussed in the House of Commons or the media, despite the fact that it potentially gives two unelected civil servants the power to make decisions that are binding in international law by an exchange of notes, without the knowledge, let alone the consent, of this House. If we are to approve the withdrawal agreement, we will approve this procedure too, which is why it is so important we should know about it. I believe that these facts must be exposed for debate in this House before the Prime Minister departs for the European Council tomorrow. I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the urgent question, and I look forward to hearing—I will be intrigued to hear—the Minister’s reply.

Kwasi Kwarteng: My right hon. Friend asked me which bits of what he said I agree with, or which bits I thought were true or not true. Clearly, I agree with some

[Kwasi Kwarteng]

of the things he said, and I think some of the things he said were slightly off the mark. The assumption underlying his question, as it seems to me, is that the Joint Committee is some subterranean plot with wire pullers attempting somehow to subvert the will of this House or to subvert our democracy.

My right hon. Friend will understand, as will the House, that the structure of the Joint Committee is very common in international agreements. An international agreement with two parties has to have a point of arbitration, and the Joint Committee, comprising representatives of the UK and the EU—[*Interruption.*] It is true that it is separate from the arbitration panel, but it will decide and govern the implementation and the application of the withdrawal agreement. This is entirely in keeping with what happens in international treaties. I would also suggest—

Mr Francois: Is anything not true?

Kwasi Kwarteng: If my right hon. Friend would not insist on heckling me, I would also suggest the key part of all of this is paragraph 3 of article 166, which refers to “mutual consent”. The Joint Committee simply cannot act if the UK does not agree.

On the point about the UK Government’s relationship with this Parliament, there will be full and ample opportunity, as we have provided in the last four months, to debate the provisions or recommendations of the Joint Committee. In this final part of my answer to my right hon. Friend, I would like to stress that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister herself has spent no fewer than 20 hours at this Dispatch Box in the last four months. There is a full and ample range of debate and discussion.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) on securing it.

The Joint Committee has attracted a significant degree of attention over recent weeks in relation to its role in the operation of the Northern Ireland backstop, but as the right hon. Gentleman made clear, it is important to remember that the Joint Committee and its specialised sub-committees are also responsible for the application and implementation of the entire withdrawal agreement. Under Article 166, paragraph 2, any decisions made by the Joint Committee would have “the same legal effect” as the entire withdrawal agreement. The right hon. Gentleman has done this House a service in providing us with an opportunity to scrutinise more carefully this important part of the agreement and to seek reassurances about the role of Parliament in overseeing its operation.

To that end, may I ask the Minister the following questions relating to the role of this House in scrutinising the work of the Joint Committee, should the deal ever be approved? First, will the Government commit now to making a statement to this House before and after each and every meeting of the Joint Committee, and to make all of its documents available to Members? Secondly, what plans, if any, do the Government have to create a dedicated Committee of the House to oversee the withdrawal agreement, including the Joint Committee? Thirdly, the withdrawal agreement makes it clear that

the Joint Committee will be made up of representatives of the United Kingdom and the European Union, so what role do the Government foresee Parliament having in the appointment of the UK representatives? Fourthly, is it the Government’s intention that the UK representatives include individuals from the main political parties, as well as those from the devolved Governments and Assemblies? Finally, specifically in relation to the Northern Ireland protocol, will the Minister confirm that it is the Government’s view that an indefinite application of the backstop would not constitute an unforeseen situation under article 164, paragraph 5(d) in such a way as might provide for amendment of the treaty itself?

Kwasi Kwarteng: On that list of questions, it would be absolutely customary and right for a Government Minister to make a statement when the Joint Committee had opined or made recommendations. That is absolutely in order. With regard to the hon. Gentleman’s request about a Committee, that is a matter for the House. It is not for the Executive to decide which Committees of this House can or cannot be formed.

We have ample and very full discussions with the devolved Administrations. They will of course be involved in aspects of the Joint Committee’s decisions, particular with regard to the question of Ireland and the backstop. There is no way, and this is carefully documented in the withdrawal agreement itself, that the Joint Committee would be making statements or recommendations about the backstop or any other matters relating to Ireland without, on our part, some representation and involvement of the Northern Ireland Government. On that question, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there will be ample consultation and involvement of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) on securing this urgent question, and you, Mr Speaker, on granting it. May I simply ask my hon. Friend on the Front Bench about a particular point that was made by my right hon. Friend and the Opposition spokesman? With regard to “situations unforeseen” when this agreement was signed, who decides what is unforeseen?

Kwasi Kwarteng: On that specific question, the Joint Committee will have a role in suggesting what has not been foreseen. This is a very hypothetical question. What I find so extraordinary in this whole episode is that all of this is contingent on the withdrawal agreement being passed, yet my right hon. Friends who are asking these questions have consistently voted against the agreement. It seems very bizarre to me—[*Interruption.*] No, the point is that there is no way, as the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford suggested or seemed to imply, that this is some sort of mystical plot, as I have said, to undermine the democratic processes of this House. The Joint Committee will not be doing that. The British Government will be in wide consultation with the House, there will be ample room for debate and everything will be done with the utmost transparency.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I commend the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) for submitting this question. I share some of his concerns,

although after listening to his horror story about all the evils in the way this Joint Committee will operate, I have to say that 90% of it applies to the workings of the British Cabinet and 99% of it applies to the way international trade deals will be negotiated on our behalf without our knowledge or consent in the great new world that he seeks to achieve after Brexit.

On accountability and openness, I appreciate that parts of the agreement would insist on confidentiality in some circumstances, but will the Minister give an assurance that the UK Government will publish and lay before Parliament as much about the workings of the Committee as is permitted under the agreement as soon as possible?

Everyone now knows that it was a mistake to exclude the devolved Administrations and other people with potential skills from the Brexit negotiations. Everyone knows that it was a mistake not to ask for views and support from across the House much earlier in the process. Will the Minister therefore answer the question that he did not answer when the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook) asked it, and give an undertaking that the UK delegation to this vital and exceptionally powerful Committee will properly reflect the political and social diversity of these nations? Will he also undertake that, particularly when it is looking at items within the devolved competences of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Governments of those nations will be properly represented as part of the negotiating team and not simply left in a side meeting to be told what has been decided on our behalf afterwards?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I want to clarify that there is no scope within the Joint Committee for some form of delegation or negotiating team. Its sole function is to ensure that the terms of the withdrawal agreement are complied with.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) so ably enunciated, all the workings of the Committee are to be found in annex VIII of the agreement. The annex is some 20 to 25 pages long and very carefully sets out how the Committee will work.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Why do the Government think it acceptable that any legal dispute about European law will be resolved by a decision of the European Court of Justice—a court for one of the two parties to the agreement—given that practically every legal dispute would be about a matter of European law, because both parties would still be under comprehensive European law?

Kwasi Kwarteng: There are two stages to the process. Clearly, there is the period after the end of the implementation period when the CJEU will decide matters of EU law. During the implementation period, as my right hon. Friend knows, it will be as if we were a member state—that is what the implementation period means. As my right hon. Friend suggested, within the implementation period, matters of EU law will be decided by the CJEU. After that, its powers are restricted only to matters of EU law, which we would be outside. That is the position as clearly set out in the withdrawal agreement.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I do not know about you, Mr Speaker, but it feels to me that this sorry saga proves that the Conservative party is now entirely run by the European Research Group. It puts me in mind of a limerick, which was much repeated in the 1930s:

“There was a young lady of Riga,
Who went for a ride on a tiger.
They came back from the ride
With the lady inside
And a smile on the face of the tiger.”

The Prime Minister has tried to ride the ERG tiger for all this time and frankly, she is now inside it, isn't she?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have not been consumed by a tiger and I am still smiling. If we get the deal through the House—I look forward to his support in that—we will leave the EU and be able to move forward, I hope, in a progressive and measured way. However, I thank him for his poetic interjection.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I take the Minister's points about this structure being used in several contexts in international treaties. Many of my constituents would say that it was still unacceptable, and that they would like more transparency. However, even assuming that the structure is acceptable in the context of some international treaties, what is my hon. Friend's response to the comment that the treaty would be uniquely powerful, were it to be adopted, because it would involve this country and this House being subject to laws made for us by other people, over which we had no say?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I do not accept the premise of my right hon. Friend's question. Clearly, our relationship with the EU over decades was complicated and involved and the withdrawal agreement is a capable way of getting out. Few of its provisions last beyond the end of the implementation period. It is a clear and orderly way of leaving the EU, and I urge hon. Members, including my right hon. Friends behind me, to support it.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Minister explain precisely, for the benefit of Members on both sides of the House, what input Members will have in advance of any meetings of the Joint Committee?

Kwasi Kwarteng: As I have said to the House, there will be ample scope for debate and consultation. The Government fully understand that the House has to have an active role in shaping and deciding what our position as a country will be. I stress once again that paragraph 3 of article 166 says that no recommendations or decisions can be made without mutual consent. The mutual consent is between the UK and the EU, but as far as the Government are concerned, part of that mutual consent means engaging fully and transparently with the House.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) on applying for this urgent question and I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting it.

[Mr Owen Paterson]

Ever since the very first Parliaments in Shropshire, the primary function of this House has been to control the manner in which money is levied from taxpayers and the way in which it is spent. I was astounded when I turned up on day one in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, where I had the honour of being Secretary of State, to discover the level of disallowance—that is an EU expression for “fine”. For example, Amyas Morse, the Comptroller and Auditor General, said of the 2016 accounts that

“the total value of cumulative disallowance penalties incurred under CAP 2007-13 is £661 million”,

which amounts to more than £90 million a year. I therefore view with some horror article 171, which states:

“The Joint Committee shall, no later than by the end of the transition period, establish...an arbitration panel.”

Article 178 states that the arbitration panel

“may impose a lump sum or penalty payment to be paid to the complainant.”

What are the limits on the size of those payments? If the House of Commons objects, what can it do?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am afraid that my right hon. Friend has too little faith in the UK Government. We have repeatedly said—and he knows this as well as anyone—that such payments or penalties would be imposed only by mutual consent. That is the key element. There is no way that the Joint Committee can unilaterally impose fines on us that we have not agreed to.

Mr Francois: That is not correct. That is wrong.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Thank you. I stress that we have been very successful in restricting payments when we needed to. There is no reason to suppose that the Committee will impose swingeing penalties that we will be forced to pay without our consent.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): As has already been drawn to the Minister’s attention, under article 174, if the arbitration panel above the Joint Committee cannot agree on a matter of law, it has to be referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union. Does not that confirm that the Prime Minister has been prepared to relax at least one of her red lines to enable binding rulings from the CJEU to be accepted after we have left the EU? Does not that show that it is possible for her to relax other red lines to try to get us out of the mess that we are currently in?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I disagree with the hon. and learned Lady. The terms of the withdrawal agreement relate largely to the implementation period. I remind the House that during the implementation period, we will technically be a member state. [Interruption.] During the implementation period, that is the case. After that, the CJEU will have some role in interpreting EU law, but we will be outside its jurisdiction.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Further to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), and since we are treating of matters that are both controversial and

complex, may I invite my hon. Friend to commit today—since he must, if he is going to do it—to lay letters and other papers in the House of Commons Library by the rise of the House tomorrow, setting out what the Government know the Committee shall be able to do and shall not be able to do, and the authority for that statement, so that we can all be perfectly clear on the scope and authority of the Committee, and the Government’s view?

Kwasi Kwarteng: The scope, the rules, the jurisdiction, if you like, and the powers of the Joint Committee are very ably set out in the withdrawal agreement. I suggest that my hon. Friend peruses those once again.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) for securing the question and for the concern that he shows for unelected bureaucrats because, of course, we sit in a Parliament where more than half of parliamentarians are unelected bureaucrats. Will the Minister possibly tell us what role the fully elected European Parliament will play in this Committee?

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is obviously up to them to decide how they would conduct matters with respect to their delegates in the Joint Committee.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I return to the question raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) to contest my hon. Friend the Minister’s rather doubtful assertion that this is normal for an international treaty? I do not know of any other international treaty where one of the signing parties is submitting to a law-making power by the other, the laws will be made in a Joint Committee that can sit in secret, and any matters of dispute will be referred to the court of the other party. Can he give any examples of an international treaty of this nature where those arrangements exist, and where the laws being made are directly applicable and have direct effect in the domestic law of only one of the states?

Kwasi Kwarteng: What I would say to my hon. Friend in respect of his question is that we were in the EU for 46 years. During that time we were absolutely and totally 100% under the jurisdiction of the EU. The withdrawal agreement essentially seeks to get a tunnel, or a pipe, away from that jurisdiction into a situation where we have left the EU absolutely. Now, my own understanding is that this is a wholly unique set of circumstances. In that respect, the withdrawal agreement seeks to be transitional—it is trying to get from state a to state b—so it is understandable that we will not be able to get immediate freedom, if that is how he would put it, but the withdrawal agreement substantially gets us from one state to another. If it is endorsed, I think we will be able to proceed in an orderly way out of the EU.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): The Minister speaks about mutual consent, but where there is mutual consent there are never any problems. The problems come when that consent breaks down. With the Joint Committee, is it not correct that, surely, where mutuality

of consent breaks down the final arbiter will be the European Court of Justice, irrespective of why the arguments arise?

Kwasi Kwarteng: That refers to circumstances that relate to EU law. There will be other points of dispute that do not involve EU law. It is clear that after the end of the implementation period the Court's jurisdiction will be restricted.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: There is nothing disorderly, but I must say that I am saddened to see the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) holding, until he just put it away in his pocket, his mobile telephone. I have long been conscious that the hon. Member possesses, and indeed uses, such a mobile phone. However, it does conflict very, very, very heavily with my image of the hon. Gentleman as the embodiment of tradition and as someone who thinks that the 17th century is indecently recent.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Regrettably, I was explaining why I was delayed for a 2 o'clock appointment—so that I would have the pleasure of being in the Chamber to listen to this important urgent question. My apologies for being unduly modern. I hope, Mr Speaker, you will follow in my footsteps of antiquity as a general rule.

To come to the gist of the question, I wonder whether it is correct that the Joint Committee will be subject to article 4 of the treaty, which means that any rulings it provides are senior law in the United Kingdom and therefore could overwrite statute law—making Henry VIII powers, which have been a matter of some controversy in this House, seem relatively minor?

Kwasi Kwarteng: Obviously, this is a rather circular point. Article 4 is the conduit pipe, if you like, through which the provisions of the withdrawal agreement would come into UK law. The point of the Joint Committee is to look at the implementation of the withdrawal Act. There really should not be a conflict between article 4 and the Joint Committee. As I say, if there is a dispute, that would have to be resolved within the Joint Committee. As far as the British Government are concerned, there will be ample consultation, debate and questions in this House.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Scrutiny is always welcome, but I have to say that I believe this urgent question is driven less by urgency and more by a desire on behalf of the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) to continue his deeply unattractive and frankly tin pot tyrant-like attacks on civil servants. Will the Minister deprecate those attacks on civil servants? Will he clarify, in terms of the oversight of the Committee, what the enhanced role for the devolved nations, which the Prime Minister promised at the Dispatch Box just a few weeks ago, looks like?

Kwasi Kwarteng: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I would like to put it on the record that we have an extremely fine and professional body of civil servants. I think that that is undisputed in this House. On the

second point, as I have said on a number of occasions, we hope and expect to have full involvement and engagement with the devolved Administrations.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Annex VIII of the withdrawal agreement provides that the Joint Committee will be co-chaired by a member of the European Commission and a Minister of the British Government or, alternately, a "high level official". Given the hugely important role that this Committee will play in the governance of this country, does not my hon. Friend agree that, as far as the British side is concerned, the chairman or chairwoman should always be a Minister rather than an official, so that he or she is answerable to this House? Is he prepared to give an undertaking to this House today that that will always be the case—if, of course, the withdrawal agreement is ever concluded?

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is absolutely the intention of this Government to have ministerial responsibility, ministerial attendance, at meetings of the Joint Committee. We fully envisage that that will be the case.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): May I press my hon. Friend the Minister further on his earlier answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith)? The Joint Committee will make legal decisions in unforeseen circumstances. [*Interruption.*] Can he confirm that the Joint Committee will itself decide what circumstances are unforeseen? [*Interruption.*]

Kwasi Kwarteng: Once again I have to say that I think all my colleagues, all my right hon. and hon. Friends, have very full confidence in our civil service. With regard to my hon. Friend's question, yes, the Joint Committee will decide, and will have a view on what circumstances are foreseen or unforeseen, but I have to address this point: the Joint Committee's purpose is not to hoodwink or in any way subvert what we do as a democracy in this House. It is the Government's full intention to engage extremely attentively to opinion in this House.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Can I be on it? For a fresh approach—and I won't bang on.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I admire my right hon. Friend's brevity and succinctness.

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) will regard it as the encomium of all encomiums to have tribute paid to him by the junior Minister; he may well feel so uplifted by the tribute that he wishes to have it framed. However, I say gently to the Minister that his tribute suffers from one notable disadvantage: despite its generosity, it offered no answer to the question.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): The Minister has referred several times to the devolved Administrations, but he will be aware that the Northern Ireland Assembly has not sat for over two years, so how does he think the Joint Committee will take note of the thoughts coming from the Province on what is, of course, one of the big issues of the whole agreement?

Kwasi Kwarteng: We fully anticipate and hope that the Assembly will be restored, but in the absence of its restoration we will engage, as we have done, with those of all shades of political opinion across Northern Ireland, to ensure that their representations, their feelings, are reflected in the decisions of the Joint Committee.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Can the Minister confirm what he said earlier—that any decision making of the Joint Committee will be subject to ministerial oversight unless it is democratically accountable in this place? Secondly, he mentioned engagement with the devolved nations; can he confirm that that engagement specifically on reserved matters will take place through the MPs who represent those constituencies in this place?

Kwasi Kwarteng: With regard to the Joint Committee, if we assume that the implementation period lasts until the end of 2020, as is set forth in the agreement, there will certainly be ministerial involvement—Ministers will be involved—in, I suspect, every meeting of the Joint Committee. With regard to devolved matters, I know that my hon. Friend, in another capacity, is an extremely active MP who represents the interests of his constituents, and he and other colleagues across the House will be fully engaged in devolved matters, as has already been the case.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Marcus Fysh.

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and very well done for granting this urgent question. I have been really concerned about this matter for a long time.

I want to talk about the mutual consent provision in article 166. Effectively, in certain circumstances, it gives the EU a hard veto over what the decisions are. The Minister said that no negotiation was planned, but we know that the customs procedure embedded in the plans for a backstop, should we be unable to agree a subsequent agreement, is admitted by the UK Government and the EU to be unworkable in its current form, is non-compliant with the Union customs code and is incomplete with respect to matters such as what happens to VAT at our borders or what happens with the export

declarations. The customs procedure itself specifies that unilateral measures can be taken by the EU, should it not be satisfied with that procedure. The whole point is that these matters, and the rectification of these matters, are fundamental to the collection of taxes at our borders. There is no way in the world that we as a House should ever contemplate giving the EU power over how they are changed, as this provision does.

Kwasi Kwarteng: My hon. Friend is quite right to say that the EU may have a veto, but just as the mutual consent provision gives the EU a veto, it also gives us—the UK Government—a veto over such decisions. On VAT and other matters, much of what my hon. Friend said referred, in my understanding, to phase 2 of the negotiations, in which there will be, one hopes, a more comprehensive free trade agreement. That is the ultimate goal to which we are tending.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): For five years from 2010, I was a member of the European Scrutiny Committee, which went through reams of directives from the European Union every week. One of the reasons why many of my constituents said that they voted by a majority to leave the EU was the lack of transparency and accountability of that bloc. To continue on the theme of big cats, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant): a leopard does not change its spots, and I do not think that the EU will either. Will the Minister therefore make a commitment that if the withdrawal agreement goes through and this Joint Committee is constituted, we will have a statement from a Minister at the Dispatch Box after every meeting of that Committee?

Kwasi Kwarteng: My understanding is that the Government's engagement with this House will be full, and as transparent as possible, in respect of decisions and meetings of the Joint Committee. I look forward to my hon. Friend's participation in further scrutiny Committees when we have got the agreement through the House and when the Joint Committee sits.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am most grateful to the Minister and colleagues. We now move on to an urgent question from Mr John Baron.

No-deal EU Exit Preparations

2.15 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on no-deal Brexit preparations.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Chris Heaton-Harris): I thank my hon. Friend for his urgent question and congratulate him on securing your approval for it, Mr Speaker.

The Government have always been clear that leaving the European Union without a deal is not an outcome that we want. Last week, Parliament voted against leaving with no deal, signalling a clear majority against such an outcome. However, the legal default is that the UK will leave the EU without a deal unless an alternative is agreed; any agreed extension would not change that. A longer extension would also entail holding European Parliament elections in the UK. As the Prime Minister stated in her letter to Donald Tusk, we “do not believe that it would be in either of our interests”—the UK’s or the EU’s—“for the UK to hold European Parliament elections.”

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Chris Heaton-Harris: It’s a UQ!

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not wish to be unkind to the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), for whom I have the highest regard, but this is an urgent question—stop the clock, please.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): It’s been a while.

Mr Speaker: Well, the hon. Lady graced the Front Bench with considerable distinction and it is some time since she has sat on the Back Benches. It is entirely understandable that she did not know the procedure, but there is no scope for intervention when the Minister is delivering his mercifully brief oration.

Chris Heaton-Harris: Thank you, Mr Speaker; I apologise to my hon. Friend.

The Government have undertaken significant action to prepare for a potential no-deal scenario. We have published 450 pieces of no-deal communications since October 2018, including information on reciprocal healthcare arrangements with the EU, on driving in the EU after exit, and even on how to take a pet abroad. We have contacted 150,000 businesses that trade with the EU to help them to get ready for no-deal customs procedures. We have held meetings, briefings and events with stakeholders across the economy, including around 300 engagements in the past month alone. We have responded to stakeholder feedback to make sure that communications are clear by updating approximately 1,300 pieces of gov.uk content based on their input.

More than 11,000 people are working on EU exit policy and programmes across the Government. We have launched a public information campaign, which includes information on gov.uk, to help citizens and businesses to prepare for leaving the European Union. TV adverts started today and radio, press and outdoor

poster advertising are ongoing. Furthermore, the Treasury has provided £4.2 billion for EU exit preparations, including preparations for a no-deal scenario, and £480 million has been allocated to the Home Office to ensure that it is fully prepared.

Getting ready for this scenario depends on action not only from the Government, but from a range of third parties, including businesses, individual citizens and the European Union itself. Despite Government mitigation, the impact of a no-deal scenario is expected to be significant in a number of areas. Leaving the European Union with no deal is the legal default until Parliament passes a deal or agrees on an alternative. We are focused on achieving that, but until it has been achieved, we will continue to prepare for no deal and we advise businesses to do the same.

Mr Baron: I thank the Minister for that response. It is important that the Government recognise the current position. Whatever the possibilities for how Members may vote in this place or how the EU may respond to requests for extensions, he is absolutely right to suggest that the current legal default position is that the United Kingdom will be leaving the European Union on 29 March, with or without a deal. It is important in more than one sense that those on the Front Bench recognise that. The narrative that seems to be emerging from No. 10 is that Parliament has not expressed its view as to what should happen. I would suggest to the Minister that it has. In February 2017, by a majority of 384, the House clearly said that with or without a deal we would leave on 29 March 2019. There was no equivocation about; it was black and white.

The Government have said they are making adequate preparations. Many of us on the Government Benches—and, indeed, on the Opposition Benches—have questioned the Government about those preparations. We know that billions of pounds have been spent, and we have had assurances from the Government, including from the Dispatch Box and in Committee. On 12 February, I asked the Prime Minister if she could

“reassure the House that should we leave on 29 March on no-deal WTO terms, we are sufficiently prepared”.

She answered very directly:

“We are indeed. We have ramped up our preparations. We are continuing our preparations for no deal.”—[*Official Report*, 12 February 2019; Vol. 654, c. 752.]

I applied for this urgent question because media reports, including some emanating from this place, suggesting that a no-deal Brexit would prove a profound economic shock mirror the incorrect warnings before the 2016 referendum and are causing—[*Interruption.*] This is an important point for Members to appreciate, as we sit in this Westminster bubble. These pronouncements are causing concern across the country. It is easy for Opposition Members to say, “Oh, don’t worry about it”, but for a lot of people sitting in their homes, these dire predictions of economic gloom, which are unfounded, are causing concern.

I remind the Minister that prior to the 2016 EU referendum there were dire predictions of 500,000 extra unemployed people that proved unfounded—so much so that the Bank of England, among others, had to apologise. We have had record low unemployment, record manufacturing output and record inward investment. I suggest that economic reality trumps predictions any

[Mr Baron]

time. In order to reassure and better inform the public, will the Minister detail to Parliament the extensive preparations the Government have made for a no-deal exit? Especially given the proximity to 29 March—just a week away—the Government need to reassure people that they are prepared, having spent two years and billions of pounds on no-deal preparation. I look forward to hearing what he has to say.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I found it interesting that my hon. Friend was barracked by Opposition Members for pointing out how strong our country's economy was. I would have thought they would be proud of that.

I hope that in my opening answer I gave the House a sense of how much preparation the Government have done since August 2016, although preparations have of course been ramped up in the last few months. I will list a handful of points: more than 550 no-deal communications have been sent out since August 2018; we have had 300 stakeholder engagements since February; we have been signing international agreements with our trading partners and rolling over others; 11,000 people are working on EU exit policy and programmes across Government; a number of IT programmes are ready to go should we need to activate them; and we have published the HMRC partnership pack containing more than 100 pages of guidance for businesses on process and procedures at the border in a no-deal scenario. The Government have been preparing assiduously and quietly behind the scenes for no deal, but we want to get a deal over the line; that is the most important thing for us.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for granting the urgent question.

The hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) talked about the wishes of the House, and he was right to do so, but the House has twice ruled out leaving the EU without a deal and twice rejected the Government's deal by historic margins. It is simply unacceptable that the Prime Minister continues to doggedly press ahead with her Hobson's choice of her deal or no deal. Resilience is an admirable quality; obstinacy is not. Does the Minister recognise that by their approach the Government risk being considered in contempt of the House yet again?

The Government's energy at this critical time should be going to find a way forward that can command the support of the House and the country and that is not the Prime Minister's flawed deal, which the Government themselves have said would shrink the economy by 4%. The situation requires flexibility and the Government reaching out across the House, and that includes flexibility on the length of the extension of article 50. The Chancellor for the Duchy of Lancaster said last Thursday of a 30 June extension:

"In the absence of a deal, seeking such a short and, critically, one-off extension would be downright reckless and completely at odds with the position that this House adopted"—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 566.]

Does the Minister agree that rather than this focus on no deal, the Prime Minister's priority should now be to create opportunities for the House to consider all the options available to get the country out of the impasse she has created?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I think the hon. Gentleman will find that a lot of hon. Members sitting behind him represent seats that voted to leave the EU in big numbers and would be surprised to hear that Her Majesty's Opposition are trying to stop that happening. As I said in my opening answer, the legal default is that the UK will leave the EU without a deal unless an alternative is agreed. No agreed extension will change this fact.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend to his place. Has he noticed that in the last few hours Monsieur Barnier has issued an instruction declaring that the EU must now prepare for the no-deal scenario, claiming that only two elements of its work need to be completed? One is short-term visas and the other is the budget for 2019. Does that mean that the EU considers that if we do not reach a deal we will leave on the 29th?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I have outlined the legal default position a couple of times already. My Department monitors the European Commission's no-deal announcements and those of individual member states. The Commission has made no-deal announcements on Erasmus, social security, fishing, air transport, aviation safety, road haulage, trade and exports and dual-use systems, EU funding for the Peace programme, energy efficiency, the Connecting Europe Facility, shipping inspection and a whole host of other areas. The European Commission, like us, would be ready in that circumstance.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): Save for what one Conservative MP referred to as the headbanger wing of the Conservative party, everybody thinks that Brexit is a bad idea—businesses, medical personnel, universities. Parliament voted to rule out no deal because it represents a colossal political failure. The hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) talked about what concerns people. I will tell him what concerns people: a decade of Westminster austerity hitting schools, the NHS and other public services. We are spending £4.2 billion on a no deal, including millions for ferries. No one voted to leave on 29 March. No one voted for a no deal. Will the Minister take no deal off the table and invest the money in hard-pressed public services?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I think the hon. Gentleman will find that 17.4 million people voted to leave the EU and that a huge number of them, including in Scotland, will find his comments very disappointing. As I have pointed out to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) and other hon. Members, the legal default is that the UK will leave the EU without a deal unless an alternative is agreed.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): May I pursue the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith)? In a statement issued yesterday, Mr Barnier said, quite correctly, that

"voting against 'no deal' does not prevent it from happening."

He also said:

"Everyone should now finalise all preparations for a 'no deal' scenario.

On the EU side, we are prepared...and are working on the two last measures that still need to be adopted, namely on short-term visas and the EU budget for 2019."

Will those two issues be resolved in 11 days' time, and how many issues does the Minister think the UK Government still have outstanding?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Unfortunately, although I was a Member of the European Parliament for 10 years, I cannot honestly comment on how long it would take the European Union to complete its final two measures, although budget rounds are very interesting debates in the European Parliament. There are a number of matters that we are still finishing off in our no-deal preparations, but the vast majority are in a good state.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): May I ask the Minister about national security? One thing that is undoubted is that if we leave without a deal, British police forces will no longer be able to use up-to-date information from all the other police forces in Europe, and we will no longer be able to use the present extradition arrangements in the European Union under the European arrest warrant. What will the Minister put in place to make sure that we are safe?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his very sensible question.

The continued safety and security of both UK and EU citizens remains our top priority. In a no-deal scenario, the UK would lose access to the mechanisms that we currently use to co-operate with EU member states on security and law enforcement. The Home Office is working intensively with operational partners to put no-deal plans into action, and to ensure that the UK is ready to “transition” our co-operation with our European partners and make best use of the alternative channels with EU member states should that be required. We are preparing to move co-operation to alternative non-EU mechanisms should that be required, and our contingency plans are largely tried and tested mechanisms which we already use for co-operating with many non-EU countries, including making more use of Interpol and Council of Europe conventions. They are not like-for-like replacements, but they would not result in a reduction in mutual capability.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): We have been treated to plenty of lurid stories over the past few months about a shortage of the radio isotopes on which a million people in our NHS depend every year. Will the Minister confirm that advanced plans are in place to ensure that in the event of our leaving the European Union with no deal, no one would be disadvantaged?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I can confirm that we have plans for the items to which my hon. Friend has referred. Indeed, a written ministerial statement describing the details of those plans was laid nearly three weeks ago.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): If Macron, like de Gaulle before him, says “Non” to the Prime Minister’s request for an extension, we will not get one, because there must be unanimity. Does the Minister agree that in those circumstances—as a matter of fact—the only way to avoid no deal would be to revoke article 50, which the House could do, because, contrary to what the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), suggested yesterday, the House has not as yet voted on a motion to revoke it?

Chris Heaton-Harris: As a matter of fact, the best way to prevent that from happening is to vote for the Prime Minister’s deal.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): My hon. Friend has acknowledged that the default position is that this country will leave the European Union on 29 March without a deal. Can he tell us in what circumstances the Government will conclude that a deal is impossible, and does he not accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) that the public are entitled to reassurance in that regard?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I should like to think that we are giving some reassurance through the vast array of publicly available information on how we are preparing for no deal, and, indeed, through the ongoing advertising campaign that I described in my statement. In my personal view, leaving without a deal is—I know that some Members do not like this word—suboptimal. The optimal way of leaving is with a deal that takes no deal off the table completely. However, we are as ready as we can be at this point, and the huge amount of information that is in the public domain should give his constituents and mine the reassurance that they deserve. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) is concerned, but the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) is back in the Chamber. I do not think that I need to dwell on the matter. Suffice it to say that there can, in extremis, be a reason why someone has—very, very, very briefly—to leave the Chamber. When the call of nature sounds, that person cannot pretend to be deaf. I do not say that in a pejorative spirit; I simply mean that one cannot pretend not to be aware of the immediate requirement.

Mr Baron: I was relieving myself, Mr Speaker. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: I was trying to signal as much in a somewhat more tactful and seemly manner, but the hon. Gentleman has now blurted out the truth, and the nation is aware of what was his requirement. As he has now returned to the Chamber, he can beetle back to his seat and listen to the remainder of the exchanges.

Mr Baron: I will do so. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Very good. Well done.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I understand that the cost of Brexit has been estimated to be £500 million per week. Does that include the cost of school meals, hospital meals, and meals in social care settings?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I am afraid that I do not recognise that figure one bit.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): As the Minister will know, it is now being widely reported on Twitter that President Macron is minded to veto any extension of article 50 at the Council tomorrow. Can he confirm that, should that occur, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union will initiate Operation

[Mr Mark Francois]

Yellowhammer—the Government’s no-deal plan—on Monday? If that is so and there is no extension, why do we not just vote down the rancid withdrawal agreement and sprint for the line?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will not expect me to comment on whether or not the President of France is active on Twitter at this point in time. He and I disagree on one fundamental issue. Having been involved in European negotiations in the past—albeit of a much more minor nature than anything like this—I know that occasionally there are times when one should bank what one has. My right hon. Friend disagrees with me about that, but it is a principled disagreement.

We do have Operation Yellowhammer, which is working to deliver the biggest peacetime project in the history of the civil service. Leaving the European Union with a deal remains the Government’s top priority, but a responsible Government must plan for every eventuality including a no-deal scenario, and these preparations are taking place alongside work to deliver on the Government’s policy priorities.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): It is essential that the largest businesses, and indeed the trade associations that depend on them for information about the progress that is being made on the rollover trade deals, are kept fully informed. Can the Minister explain why the Department for International Trade stopped the roundtables with large businesses?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I have to say that I did not know they had done so, but I do know that there are ongoing engagements throughout the Government with business representatives and organisations, some of which I myself have attended very recently.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): It would be stupid to go out panic buying, would it not?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Yes.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) seems gravely perturbed that the fact that he is seated behind the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) might disadvantage him. What I say to the hon. Member for Huddersfield is that I can almost always see him, and even if I can’t see him I can absolutely certainly hear him, so he has nothing to worry about at all. Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I tell the Minister that I am usually an optimist but I do not know if he shares with me a feeling of dread and doom today? Here we are in the greatest national crisis for 100 years with the Titanic steaming towards the iceberg. He is a nice man but he is a Parliamentary Under-Secretary being sent to reassure the House that the preparations are all in good order. Even at this late stage we can go to Europe and ask for a longer rather than a shorter extension. We can also listen to the voice of reason behind him, the Father of the House the right

hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who made a very serious contribution earlier today. Surely at this stage the Minister could actually speak up for the nation and say, “Enough is enough, let us put this on hold and get a sensible relationship with Europe agreed across these Benches.”

Chris Heaton-Harris: I think I can stand up and speak for the nation when I say the only sense of dread and doom I have is when the hon. Gentleman is ready to speak.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I remind my hon. Friend that we both stood on an election promise that no deal was better than a bad deal, but beyond that can he confirm that aviation agreements are in place so that planes will be flying to and from Gatwick and other UK airports on 30 March?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Yes, I can confirm that we have signed a whole suite of aviation agreements and that is the case.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): There is a good reason why this House has resoundingly objected to and rejected a no-deal Brexit: because Members here have looked at the evidence of the real-world harms. Just one such area of concern is the position of healthcare for British citizens who are pensioners who have retired to countries across the European Union. The Minister will know that a reciprocal arrangement could not be made with the EU as a whole but would have to be made with 27 individual countries. Can he set out in how many of those 27 countries our fellow citizens who have retired to the EU now have the absolute certainty that in nine days’ time they will have reciprocal healthcare arrangements in place?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Actually, a whole host of countries are now enacting legislation through their processes to do exactly as the hon. Lady says. The hon. Lady is completely correct in the fact that health in general terms is tied up in social security policy in nearly all EU member states. This needs legislation in individual EU member states, and I believe—I will write to the hon. Lady later today to clarify this—that pretty much every member state has started that legislative framework process.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Kent MPs have been meeting regularly about preparations for Brexit with the roads Minister my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), the Department for Transport, Highways England, Kent Police, the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel. If my hon. Friend the Minister cannot answer this in the Chamber will he write to me with assurances that Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, and in particular the customs part of it, is ready for Brexit and for the extra volume of customs procedures that may be needed to make sure we do not have queues in Kent?

Chris Heaton-Harris: My hon. Friend rightly raises concerns for her constituents. Extensive work to prepare for a no-deal scenario has been under way across Government for two years and we are taking steps to ensure that the border continues to operate as effectively

as possible from the day we leave. We have three objectives for the UK border to be delivered on day one and beyond: maintaining security; facilitating the flow of goods and people; and revenue protection. We will prioritise flow at the border, which means any increase in the number of checks will be kept to a minimum by conducting only essential checks, which will help to reduce friction at locations like Kent.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I know we have got the TV adverts today, but what official advice are the Government giving to families across the country as to what they should do to prepare for or cope with this country exiting the EU without a deal?

Chris Heaton-Harris: It does rather depend on what aspect of people's lives will be affected, so there is a huge range of information both online and now available in advertising as well, where people will be able to see what will happen in circumstances such as if they were concerned about taking their pets abroad or about their holiday. That is all available online.

Toby Perkins: It is patently obvious that the Government are not remotely prepared for us to leave without a deal, and at the same time we have a Government who are ploughing on with a plan that has been twice rejected, refusing to bring votes and refusing to stick to commitments they have made to this House. If the chief executive of a major FTSE 500 company or a hospital were to run a major project in anything like as shambolic a way as this every single Member of Parliament would be demanding they resign; why doesn't the Prime Minister resign?

Chris Heaton-Harris: It is the Leader of the Opposition who did not want to prepare for no deal in any circumstance whatsoever and did not want to spend any money on getting this country ready in case we were to leave without a deal. So if the hon. Gentleman should call on anybody to resign, it should be his leader, the Leader of the Opposition.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): I am afraid that I still see no case to extend, but in the event of an extension, does the Minister envisage there being any further no-deal planning, or is all of that no-deal planning completed and there is nothing further to be done?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I can assure my hon. Friend that in an extension there would be further no-deal planning, and lots of plans would have to be adjusted because they are obviously targeted currently at one particular date and that would be moving.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): From the 10,000 or so constituents I have spoken to since the EU referendum I have heard many different reasons why people voted to leave the EU but none of them included to be poorer. So given that we know that all the credible economic analysis shows that the economy would shrink and there would be an increase in poverty, how is the Minister making preparations for if and when an extension to article 50 can be quickly implemented in this House?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I did not hear the last bit of the hon. Lady's question, but Treasury analysis published by the Government back in November shows that in every scenario the economy of this country will be growing.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Has the Minister seen the call from the president of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland today asking the Government to abandon their proposals for applied tariffs in the event of a no-deal Brexit? As he points out:

"Without the maintenance of tariff protections, we would be in danger of opening up the UK to imported food which would be illegal to be produced here".

In the 1970s the Minister's predecessors in the Conservative Government then regarded our fishermen as expendable; it is beginning to look as if this current Government have taken the same attitude towards our farmers.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I disagree entirely. The tariff schedule which has now been published is designed to look after certain segments of the economy including agriculture. The right hon. Gentleman then went on to talk about standards, and we are not dropping the standards of what we expect in agricultural goods.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Minister has said on numerous occasions already during this urgent question that the default legal position is for the UK to leave the EU on 29 March next week. So can the Minister tell the House what the process is for changing the date in the EU withdrawal Act and what day next week we will get that?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I would assume that a statutory instrument would do that particular piece of work.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Government expenditure on no-deal preparations can be expressed as a sum of £63 per person per annum for three years. Wales's net benefit from the EU budget is £79 per person per year. Which does the Minister consider to represent good value?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I think preparing the country for every eventuality that this Parliament has voted for is good value for money.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): This House has unequivocally excluded the idea of no deal—it has ruled it out, out of hand—so the only ways to avoid no deal would be for the Government to bring forward a meaningful vote again, which you have excluded, Mr Speaker; to prepare to revoke article 50; or to accept crashing out with no deal. So what are the Government going to be doing?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I would never presume to guess what Mr Speaker might do in allowing different things on the Floor of the House. Indeed, every day seems to be a bit of a surprise at the moment. However, the legal default is that the UK will leave the European Union without a deal unless an alternative is agreed. The alternatives are—[*Interruption.*] Well, I would like to think that we are going to vote for the deal.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Ind): There really would be no need for this urgent question if the Government were to accept that no deal had already been ruled out by Parliament and that there were two ways forward from that: the revocation of article 50 or its suspension. May I offer the Minister another alternative, which would be to bring back a very different meaningful vote next week that would have embedded in the approval motion the principle of the ratification of the Prime Minister's deal by the people, with remain on the ballot paper?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I welcome, as the Prime Minister does, all conversations about how the meaningful vote can be passed by this House. However, last week, the House voted by some big number—more than a majority of the number of MPs in this House—to reject a people's vote.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), who said that the cost of Brexit was currently £500 million a week, the Minister said that he did not recognise that figure. The Governor of the Bank of England says that the figure is actually £800 million a week. Which figure does the Minister recognise?

Chris Heaton-Harris: Obviously the Governor of the Bank of England did not recognise that figure either.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): The Minister has rightly said that, in the event of no deal next week, we now have an aviation agreement with the European Union which means that planes will be able to take off and land. What he did not say was that this will mean no route expansion during that time. Manchester airport in my constituency has 30 million passengers annually, with the capacity for 55 million, and 74% of its flights go to other EU destinations. This must surely be a bad agreement for the people of the north of England.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and I know that he represents his constituents assiduously and understands the need for Manchester

airport to work. I will have to come back to him, because I believe that the European Commission has moved on this, but I might be mistaken. I think that it has said that it will allow route expansion in this coming year, but I will come back to him to completely clarify that point if I may.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Can the Minister tell me how many of the 17.4 million people who voted leave in 2016 voted for the Prime Minister's deal and how many voted for no deal? If he cannot do so, is it not time that he and his Government stopped using the term "the will of the people" unless they are prepared to find out what the will of the people is by putting the deal back to the people with the option to remain?

Chris Heaton-Harris: One thing I know is that 58.9% of voters in my constituency, and 17.4 million people in the country, voted to leave the European Union.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): This has been a classic display of what over-promotion looks like, in front of the entire House this afternoon—*[Interruption.]* No, I will not "come on". This stuff from the Minister has been grimly depressing. Can he confirm that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) was 100% spot on when she said that if the Council does not grant the extension, and if Parliament does not pass meaningful vote 3—assuming that you would allow it to come back before next Friday, Mr Speaker—revocation is the only way to stop no deal?

Chris Heaton-Harris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and his comment. His kind remark will do me the world of good on my election literature in my middle England constituency next time. The constituency voted to leave and it expects the Government to deliver on its wishes and to deliver on leaving the European Union. The best way to take no deal off the table is to vote for the deal.

Points of Order

2.54 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We live in interesting times, if I can put it that way; we are in a constitutional crisis. We are aware that the Prime Minister is going off to Brussels tomorrow, and out of that we will learn whether we are going to have an extension to article 50. We need to reflect on the fact that we are a week away from the intended departure date from the European Union. The threat of no deal from the Government is very real, and we ought to be aware of the consequences. The Government have told us about the threat to the supply of medicines, to food supplies and to public order. These are serious matters, and given that we have very few days left, I have today written to the Prime Minister and demanded that, in the circumstances, this House should convene on Saturday so that we can plot a way ahead. We need to use the opportunities granted to us in these few days that are left, and we might indeed need to use the opportunity to revoke article 50 if the Government are serious about taking us forward on a no-deal scenario. Mr Speaker, I ask your forbearance, and I ask what opportunities you can suggest that are open to us to ensure that, in these times of crisis, we have the opportunities that we had at the time of the Suez crisis—the last disaster visited upon us by this Government—to ensure that we can stand up for our constituents and protect our people from the catastrophe of no deal.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. When he seeks my advice, my response to him is to say—as I indicated to the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) yesterday—that a Saturday sitting, or indeed a Sunday sitting, would be perfectly possible. It would, however, be possible only if there were a resolution of the House to that effect. Indeed, any change to the thus far set out—and therefore by Members anticipated—sittings would require a resolution of the House. If the right hon. Gentleman reflects on the point that I have made, he will be keenly conscious that such a resolution could, potentially, be put to the House either tomorrow or indeed on Friday, as this Friday is a sitting day. I am not seeking to engender an expectation, and I have no indication at all that the Government are thinking in these terms or that they would necessarily be sympathetic to the right hon. Gentleman's request, but this would be perfectly possible in procedural terms. My advice is that he should await a reply to his letter.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): Further to that very good point of order from the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), Mr Speaker, would it be in order for us all to be here on Saturday in the circumstances that he has described, given that many hundreds of thousands of people are due to march in London on that day in support of a people's vote? Many of them will be young people who are demanding a say about their future, given that they will be bearing the burden of Brexit. In those circumstances, would the House be able to rise to go out and greet those hundreds of thousands of people who rightly want a final say on Brexit and a people's vote?

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Lady's point of order contains a twin, or at any rate double, hypothesis, and we shall have to wait to see. As I always say, invoking the late Willie Whitelaw, it is best across bridges only when we come to them. Her use, and some would say abuse, of the point of order procedure displays a notable, though not altogether uncharacteristic, cheekiness—a fact of which she is well aware—but she is nothing if not dexterous in her use of available procedures.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) is, of course, right about a resolution of the House being required to sit on a Saturday, but staffing arrangements and much else are needed to run the House. Can I be assured the planning is in place in case of such a resolution?

Mr Speaker: That is a very sensible point. Planning will be under way lest that scenario should arise, and not least out of consideration for the staff who serve us so loyally and so well, it is essential that that is so. They have already in recent times been very gravely inconvenienced as a result of our deliberations. That is the way it is, and they very graciously accept it, but we should not take their loyalty for granted. They must be treated with respect.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Anyone who heard the urgent question from the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) and all those who responded to it will know how there are many Members who absolutely love and indulge themselves in long discussions about arcane matters of European legislation and its different articles and who spend far less time worrying about the disastrous potential consequences of their actions. Are you aware of whether there are any plans for grief counselling for those Members? In the event that we leave the European Union, those Members would no longer spend many long hours talking about these things and they would have to spend some time concentrating on the poverty in their constituencies.

Mr Speaker: I am not aware of any plans for grief counselling, but my expectation is that the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) would focus his beady eye on a vast range of other important topics.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)
rose—

Mr Speaker: I have no reason to think that the right hon. Gentleman is about to contradict me but, if he really insists, I feel that on the strength of our 35-year acquaintance I must indulge him.

Mr Francois: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. To save the House and the country money, if we leave at 11 pm on 29 March—we are at D minus 9—I will have no need or requirement for grief counselling, but I might have a whacking hangover on the morning of 30 March.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. This has been an afternoon in which colleagues have volunteered more personal information than is customary.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you inform me of how I might best do my duty? As leader of the Plaid Cymru parliamentary group, I have been invited to No. 10 at 6.15 pm, but I have also been invited to a meeting, at between 6 pm and 7 pm, with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union. The meetings clash, and I seek your advice on how best to proceed.

Mr Francois: Follow the money.

Mr Speaker: Well, it is not for me to endorse or, indeed, to repudiate the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion. The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) is clearly a much sought after individual. I have always regarded her as important, and I know she has a very full diary—no doubt there are many competing claims upon her time and, as I say, her attendance is required by noted celebrities within the Government. My advice to her is very simple: trust your instincts and, very simply, to thine own self be true.

If there are no further points of order, I will in a moment call Keir Starmer to make an application for leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration under the terms of Standing Order No. 24. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has up to three minutes in which to make such an application.

Article 50 Extension

Application for emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

3.4 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing time to hear this application for an emergency debate on the following motion: that this House has considered the matter of the length and purpose of the extension of the article 50 process requested by the Government. I note that the Standing Order No. 24 procedure requires a specific and important matter to be before the House, and I think there can be few more important than this.

Last week, the House passed a motion by a majority of 210 requiring the Government to request an extension to the article 50 process. The Prime Minister voted for that motion. The wording of the motion itself and the speeches from the Government Dispatch Box, including by the Minister for the Cabinet Office, led the House to believe that the Government would seek either a short technical extension, if the Prime Minister's deal were passed by today, or a longer extension if that were not the case.

Parliament could not have expected the Prime Minister, instead, to pursue a course described at the Dispatch Box by the Minister for the Cabinet Office as “downright reckless”, yet today we learn that is exactly what the Prime Minister intends to do. She has now made a formal request to the President of the European Council for an extension of article 50, but she has not made a statement to this House.

Therefore, the only opportunity for Parliament to debate this issue before the Council meets tomorrow is through this Standing Order No. 24 application. It is vital that the Prime Minister and the Government are held to account on this and that we have an opportunity to scrutinise the Government's approach, to consider the terms of the extension that is being sought and to ask whether this approach abides by the will expressed by the House last week.

I therefore ask for this emergency debate to be held at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman asks leave to propose a debate on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration—namely, that this House has considered the matter of the length and purpose of the extension of the article 50 process requested by the Government. I have listened carefully to his application, and I am satisfied that the matter raised is proper to be discussed under Standing Order No. 24.

Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman the leave of the House? [*Interruption.*] I say as much for the benefit of those observing our proceedings that there is an objection from the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). I heard it very clearly, and he probably wants everyone to know. In those circumstances, it is necessary for at least 40 right hon. and hon. Members to rise in their places to validate the application, and it is entirely obvious that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has indeed obtained the leave of the House.

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

Mr Speaker: It is commonplace for such debates to take place the following day, but it is by no means required that they should do so. I have on a previous occasion, because of the circumstances, ruled that such a debate should take place straightaway. This is such a circumstance. The debate will be held today as the first item of public business—that is to say after the ten-minute rule motion—and it will last for up to three hours, and it will arise on a motion that the House has considered the specified matter set out in the right hon. and learned Gentleman’s application.

BILL PRESENTED

FRACKING (MEASUREMENT AND REGULATION OF IMPACTS) (AIR, WATER AND GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Geraint Davies, supported by Jonathan Edwards, Tulip Siddiq, Neil Coyle, Caroline Lucas, Chris Evans, Dr Rupa Huq and John Mc Nally, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to measure and regulate the impact of unconventional gas extraction on air and water quality and on greenhouse gas emissions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 March, and to be printed (Bill 360).

Destitution Domestic Violence Concession (Eligibility)

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

3.9 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to report on extending eligibility for the destitution domestic violence concession to European Economic Area nationals and persons other than those granted immigration entry clearance as a partner; and for connected purposes.

This Bill seeks to level the playing field, righting a significant wrong and protecting people at the time they need it most. In 2010, the UK Government introduced the destitution domestic violence concession, which gives those who entered the UK as a dependant on a spousal visa access to social security for three months while they apply for indefinite leave to remain in the UK, providing that their relationship ended due to domestic abuse. This breathing space is vital; without it, many domestic abuse survivors could not access housing benefit and so could not escape their homes. However, the DDVC is not open to everyone. There are increasing numbers of people who have no recourse to public funds yet did not come to the UK on a partner or spousal visa. If someone comes to the UK on a student visa, as a domestic worker or on a visitor visa, or they are here as an EU national but without settled status, they may have no recourse to public funds but will not be eligible to apply for the DDVC.

I am asking the UK Government to report on extending eligibility for the DDVC. As this is a ten-minute rule Bill, I cannot introduce a Bill whose main purpose is to have a charge on the public purse, which is why I am requesting that a report be made by the Government.

The issue first came to my attention because a pregnant European Union national who had no recourse to public funds came to my office. She had expected to be eligible for housing benefit, but because of her husband’s financial control over her she had not worked for long enough to have gained settled status. Financial control is a significant issue in many abusive relationships, meaning that EU nationals in abusive relationships are far less likely than others to have built up a right to reside here. I discussed this with the No Recourse, North East partnership, an organisation set up to advocate on behalf of those with no recourse to public funds in north-east Scotland and to work to ensure that those of us supporting individuals without leave to remain can give the best possible advice and assistance. The partnership confirmed to me that this was not an isolated case but was in fact the tip of an iceberg. Its concern and advocacy on behalf of individuals encouraged me to bring forward this Bill today.

Last year, I wrote to the Home Secretary asking for consideration to be given to extending the DDVC to European economic area nationals. I was genuinely convinced that this was an accidental oversight in the immigration legislation passed at the time, but the reply I received from the Minister for Immigration said:

“Our position is that we expect people who arrive in the UK as the partner of a temporary migrant to return to their home country if their relationship with that person breaks down.”

[Kirsty Blackman]

That is an unrealistic and unreasonable ask; many of those fleeing would be ostracised by their communities or would even be at risk of physical injury. The UK Government must now bring forward a report on extending eligibility for the DDVC. Organisations that support women have been raising this issue for some time. They are faced with the reality of women coming to them and asking for support. They are faced with the reality of women being forced to stay in, or even return to, abusive homes.

I have heard the story of a woman whose partner subjected her to severe emotional, physical and sexual abuse. He forced her into terminating pregnancies. She left with her young child to escape him and stay with family members, but they could not house her for long and she was forced to return to her husband. If she had had access to the DDVC, she would have been able to claim public funds, including housing benefit. Refuges and shelters are under pressure, feeling the squeeze of austerity. They are reliant on the ability to claim housing benefit on behalf of those they give a safe haven to. Without access to social security, many refuges do not have the funding to provide safety for those fleeing. With access to housing benefit this woman would have had breathing space and may have been able to gain safe, permanent housing, instead of having to return to a man who physically, emotionally and sexually abused her—her child is also in this home.

I have read a case study of an EU national woman with a young child who managed to escape an abusive home. She wished to return to her home country, but her partner obtained a court order preventing her from taking their child out of the UK. She is therefore forced to stay here but is refused access to public funds. She has no choices and no options left. She should have been treated with compassion and given support to access public funds and safe housing. Women and men are finding themselves and their children left destitute as a result of lack of access to public funds. Getting out of an abusive home is difficult enough, but doing so when you do not have the certainty of a roof over your head or of food to feed yourself and your family is even harder. Survivors of domestic abuse should not be forced to rely on charitable organisations to provide the most basic necessities. The UK Government must step up to ensure that people have access to shelter, food, and specialist services that can begin to help healing the long-term damage caused by domestic abuse.

In addition to support from the No Recourse, North East partnership, the following organisations are among those that have been advocating for changes to the DDVC: Scottish Women's Aid, Grampian Women's Aid, Southall Black Sisters, Liberty and Refuge. I am indebted to them for their case studies and their work in highlighting the significant hardships and impossible choices many people face as a result of the narrow scope of the DDVC. I would also like to thank JustRight Scotland for its help, and the Public Bill Office for its invaluable assistance in drafting this Bill and getting the procedure right.

On Monday, I attended an event in Parliament chaired by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), and I am pleased to say that she supports this

Bill. The event was supported by Southall Black Sisters and a number of other organisations. One of those speaking at the event detailed her experience as a migrant woman subjected to domestic abuse. She said:

“Little by little I was becoming invisible in this country. When I look in the mirror I do not recognise the person I am.”

This is not a comfortable issue to raise. Many of the first-person accounts I have seen and read have been absolutely harrowing. People are being forced into impossible choices; they are facing a choice between continued abuse, destitution, homelessness, further physical and emotional harm and returning to an abusive home, or returning to a country where they have no roots or will be at risk of further harm due to leaving a marriage. We owe it to those who are suffering to take on this issue and to commit to allowing them the chance of a better life. Being safe from physical and emotional abuse is a basic human right. I want to live in a country where we allow survivors of domestic abuse the ability to reach safety, but more than that I want them to have the safety to come forward and report their experiences to the police without fear that their immigration status will be questioned. We need a culture where the first priority is protecting people from harm, no matter what their country of birth, nationality or immigration status.

The current concession is open to women and men, and to those in civil partnerships or same-sex marriages. I would hope that the Government would extend the eligibility on the same basis. I also hope they will consider extending the DDVC from three months to six months, given the length of time involved and high cost that people can face when attempting to apply for leave to remain. This is a particular issue in areas such as mine where people may have to travel to Glasgow in order to submit an application. That is a costly journey and it takes at least three hours—so we are talking about the best part of a day to go both ways. At a time when we are all seeing increasing numbers of people caught in the Home Office's hostile environment, with no access to public funds, it is vital that the UK Government make this change. Life for these women and men is hostile enough. The UK Government should allow them to access this life-saving concession to allow them to flee abusive homes.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am most grateful to the hon. Lady. Just before I put the question on her ten-minute rule motion, I hope that the whole House will want to join me in offering the warmest possible birthday wishes to her. She obviously knows how to enjoy herself on her birthday, and we are very grateful to her.

Kirsty Blackman I cannot imagine a more important way to spend my birthday, Mr Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered.

That Kirsty Blackman, Stuart C. McDonald, Jess Phillips, Dr Sarah Wollaston, Angela Crawley, Liz Saville-Roberts, Caroline Lucas, Stephen Kerr, Danielle Rowley, Gavin Newlands and Jo Swinson.

Kirsty Blackman accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 March, and to be printed (Bill 361).

Article 50 Extension

Emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

3.19 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of the length and purpose of the extension of the Article 50 process requested by the Government.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this debate, which provides a vital opportunity to scrutinise the Prime Minister's letter to the President of the EU Council and, of course, the wider Government approach to seeking an extension. An issue of this importance should not have to be dealt with through a debate under Standing Order No. 24. The Prime Minister should be here to answer questions. There should have been a full statement to the House. I appreciate that we had Prime Minister's questions earlier, but this is a very important decision about the future of the United Kingdom, and the Prime Minister should be here to make a full statement setting out why she has applied for the extension she has applied for, and to answer such questions as there are across the House. It is symptomatic of the way the Prime Minister has approached many Brexit issues, which is to push Parliament as far away from the process as possible.

The House has rejected the Prime Minister's deal twice, and not by small margins. It has voted to rule out no deal, and it voted to require the Prime Minister to seek an extension of article 50. I appreciate that on Thursday the last words of the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union at the Dispatch Box were:

"I commend the Government motion to the House"—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 628.]

before he promptly went off to vote against it, which caught me slightly by surprise—he is probably rather hoping that we do not divide this afternoon. However, given where we got to last week, when we ruled out no deal and required the Prime Minister to seek an extension of article 50, one might have expected the Prime Minister, in the intervening days, to reflect on where we are at and to recognise, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) said earlier, that perhaps she is the roadblock to progress. She could, at this stage, act in the national interest and, frankly, show some leadership and take a responsible approach, which I think would be to seek an extension to prevent no deal and to provide time for Parliament to find a majority for a different approach.

I think many Members are yearning for the opportunity to move forward and break the impasse, but the letter to President Tusk makes it clear that that is not the Prime Minister's intention. It says:

"The UK Government's policy remains to leave the European Union in an orderly manner on the basis of the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration agreed in November".

The letter continues,

"it remains my intention to bring the deal back to the House"—

not a new deal, a changed deal, or a deal, compromise or position agreed by this House, but

"the deal back to the House."

It does not speak of seeking time for change or to consider other options that could win support in Parliament. The only mention is of

"domestic proposals that confirm my previous commitments to protect our internal market, given the concerns expressed about the backstop."

There is nothing new; it is just the same deal, to be brought back as soon as possible.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. and learned Friend is making a powerful speech about the real predicament and crisis we currently face. There have been indications from the Government of France that they may well not permit an extension to article 50. Faced with that proposition, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Government are in a real fix? Unless they meaningfully change the deal that is on offer to Parliament and bring it back urgently, the Prime Minister will be faced with the difficult choice of whether to revoke article 50 or crash out with no deal.

Keir Starmer: I do understand the difficulty, but I do not think it is appropriate for me to respond to or comment on what may or may not have been said by Heads of State about what may or may not be agreed tomorrow. The point I am making is about the expectation of this House as to the approach that the Prime Minister would take. There is an even greater expectation—a yearning, which I can feel across the House and which I could feel last week—that this House be given an opportunity to break the impasse for itself by finding a way forward. I am afraid the Prime Minister's approach is the same old blinkered approach, which is, "All I'm going to do is seek time to put my deal, exactly the same, back before the House for another vote."

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Based on the Prime Minister's letter, I am not entirely clear why the EU would grant an extension in the first place, but the question for us all is the length of the extension that it would grant, and for what purpose. What is the Labour party's policy?

Keir Starmer: I shall come to that later, but I will make this point. The period should of course be as short as possible, but it must be long enough to determine the purpose. In other words, the purpose has to determine the length. One of the mistakes we have made in the past two years, on which we have struggled and challenged the Prime Minister, is that if we let the clock, rather than the purpose, dictate we end up exactly where we have ended up now.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is absolutely ridiculous to suggest the idea of participating in democratic elections this May as the main reason for this House, or this nation, not to do what is in our national interest? It is complete nonsense.

Keir Starmer: Last week we touched on the difficulty of the EU elections and discussed the legal position and what the political position may be, and we need to bear that in mind. Of greater importance is that, given that we are discussing the future of the United Kingdom and its relationship with the EU, we take time to find the purpose of the extension and a majority that the

[Keir Starmer]

House can get behind, so that we know why we are seeking the extension. That will begin to answer the question of how long an extension should be for.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I fully agree with my right hon. and learned Friend's last point. The problem really is that the EU negotiators have said that there would have to be significant changes before they would look at an extension. The problem we have, certainly on the Back Benches and I am sure shared by my right hon. and learned Friend, is that nobody knows what the Prime Minister is going to ask the EU for in relation to that extension. Does he agree that it is disgraceful for the House to be kept in the dark in this way?

Keir Starmer: The problem with the Prime Minister's approach is that last week we voted on a motion that said she would seek a short extension if the deal was passed by today—that was in paragraph (2) of the Prime Minister's motion—and it has not been put before the House today, and that she would seek a longer extension if that was not the case. So, there was an expectation that the Prime Minister would do the opposite of what she has done today. Equally important is that there is a growing expectation that the House needs to have time to decide what happens next. A different Prime Minister might have reflected on what happened last week and come to the House this week to say, "I recognise that my deal is not going to get through as it is and I, the Prime Minister, will provide a process of some sort, or ask the House to help me with a process of some sort, to decide where there is a majority, so that we can move forward." That is what is being missed in the letter.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): As ever, the right hon. and learned Gentleman makes a powerful speech. He has given a description of what he would have expected the Prime Minister to do in the circumstances; what explanation does he put forward as to why the Prime Minister has not behaved in that way? Is it because she is stubborn, or is it because she is in the pockets of the European Research Group—the hard Brexiteers who are essentially running this country and this Brexit process? What does he think the explanation is?

Keir Starmer: The immediate concern is that the Prime Minister does not appear to be acting in accordance with her own motion of last week, but the deeper problem, which is what I am most concerned about, is that the Prime Minister still thinks that the failed strategy of the past two years, "My deal or no deal"—a blinkered approach with no changes and no room for Parliament—should be pursued for another three months. In other words, all she will do is use the three months in exactly the same way to bring back the deal over and over again—or as many times as she can without breaching the rules of the House—and try to force it through. That is the strategy that she has been pursuing throughout these negotiations and it has failed badly. We must not allow another three months to be used up on the same approach.

The letter sent by the Prime Minister this morning makes two requests to the Council—that it approves the documents agreed in Strasbourg on 11 March, and that

it allows three months for the Prime Minister to get the same deal through Parliament. If I have read and understood the letter properly, I think the Prime Minister may be planning to bring the deal back on the basis that the documents that were before us last time have now been approved formally at the Council, and that some domestic arrangements have been agreed with possibly other parties, which means that she can then say that the deal can now be put to another vote, notwithstanding the fact that the documents on the table are exactly the same as the ones that we voted on last week. Obviously, that will raise the issue as to whether that is in accordance with the Standing Orders of the House, which will have to be addressed at the time.

The letter continues,

"it remains my intention to bring the deal back to the House."

That is not a new deal, but the same deal. That is extraordinary, given how the House voted last week. It does not reflect the motion that was passed. Paragraph (2) of the motion clearly mentioned a short technical extension if the deal was passed by today—that was when the Prime Minister had the intention of bringing the deal back for today—or a longer extension if that was not the case.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. He said a few moments ago that there was no point in asking for an extension, particularly a long one, in the absence of a clear purpose. I gather from those remarks that he thinks a long extension is appropriate; can he confirm that? If he does think it is appropriate, will he tell the House what his purpose would be?

Keir Starmer: As I said earlier, I will get to purpose a little later in my speech.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I wonder whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman can clarify something that he appeared to say just now, which was that the Prime Minister was not following her own motion because she had said in the third part of it that she would seek a longer extension. However, after reading the motion, I can say that it does not appear to say that. The first part says that she will seek an extension. The second part says that if the deal went through by today, she would seek a short extension, and the third part merely notes that if the deal did not go through and a longer extension was sought, it would require participation in the European elections. She did not say that she would seek a longer extension. I should be grateful if he could clarify that for the record.

Keir Starmer: I am grateful for that intervention because it allows me to read out what the Minister for the Cabinet Office said on this motion from the Dispatch Box. He was promoting the motion, and he actually voted for it, so perhaps what he said can be taken seriously. He said this at that Dispatch Box last week:

"In the absence of a deal"—

what he meant by that was a deal going through by today—

"seeking such a short and, critically, one-off extension would be downright reckless and completely at odds with the position that this House adopted only last night, making a no-deal scenario far more, rather than less, likely."—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 566.]

Those are the words spoken from the Government Benches on the interpretation of the Government's own motion. In other words, if a deal had not gone through by now, the Minister for the Cabinet Office said that, in those circumstances, simply to go for a short, one-off extension would be "downright reckless" and would make a no-deal scenario more rather than less likely. Members in this House should be concerned about that.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I am very grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. He is making a powerful case. The motion that the House agreed made it clear that, if there was not a deal by today, the likelihood would be that the European Council would require a longer extension. Is it his view that when the European Council meets tomorrow, they are likely to require that?

Keir Starmer: We will have to wait until tomorrow to see what the Council's response is. It may simply say that it will consider any request, but it does need to know what the purpose is. This is where the Prime Minister may get into some difficulty. If she says that the only purpose is to allow her to keep putting her deal for the next three months, that may or may not be seen as realistic with regard to what will happen in the next three months. None the less, it is a question that the Prime Minister will have to answer.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Keir Starmer: I will give way twice.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. Just going back on his point—and he may agree with this—it is apparent that the remarks of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster were made not just out of the air, but in order to explain and justify the Government's wording of that motion, which came in for a considerable amount of criticism as appearing to be opaque. He may agree with me that the words uttered at the Dispatch Box could be taken authoritatively as the Government's assurance about what they intended to do.

Keir Starmer: I do agree with that. The reputation of the Minister for the Cabinet Office in this House is that he is someone in whom others invest assurance and confidence because of what he says and the way in which he says it. It may also have been some preparation for the meaningful vote to come back this Tuesday with the message, "If you don't vote for it next Tuesday, then the Government will have to apply for a different extension." There was at least that dual purpose.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): The emphasis on the word "short" is subjective, because for many people short is long and long is short—*[Interruption.]* It is by definition subjective. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman is comparing one statement of "short" with another statement of "long", but the matter is purely subjective even in that case.

Keir Starmer: I suppose that I accept the proposition that one person's short may be another person's long, but the words of the Minister for the Cabinet Office did not come in isolation or out of the blue; they came in

the middle of a debate, which was quite heated at times, about what the motion meant and how we should interpret it. I do not think that anyone who was in that debate would, in all honesty, doubt what the Minister for the Cabinet Office was saying and what he meant by it, and I took

"a short and, critically, one-off extension"—*[Official Report, 14 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 566.]*

to mean an extension for up to three months with a cliff-edge at the end.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not find it extremely regrettable that the Government's strategy on such an important issue for the nation is to bamboozle everybody, so that nobody knows what was meant or what was said?

Keir Starmer: I certainly agree that this is not the first time that most of the people voting for a motion think it to be pretty clear, only to find that what it meant is disputed within a week.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman as confused as I am? Given that we have had assurances from the Prime Minister and other Ministers that they know the will of the people and that the matter has been decided, if they are so sure, why are they so fearful of asking the people again?

Keir Starmer: That is really a question for the Government. My point is that we have to find a way through this impasse, and that requires us to come together as a House to consider and vote on the options and to provide a process for that. It is not helpful to put the deal, which has already been rejected, over and over with differing threats. Having accepted a motion last week to take no deal off the table, the Prime Minister is now trying to put no deal back on the table within a week by just changing the date of no deal, so that she can again ram the deal up against the deadline with the old "my deal or no deal," response. I have no doubt that the three months will be run down and that we will get close to the June deadline with exactly the same strategy, which is the great cause for concern.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is absolutely outrageous for the Government to bring back the same deal, just a week later, to see whether MPs have changed their minds, but completely refuse, almost three years later, to give the public the opportunity to say that they have changed their mind?

Keir Starmer: That is a powerful point. The argument that we were making last week was that, realistically, the deal had not changed since the first time it was put eight weeks earlier. There was obviously the suggestion that the Government would simply bring it back this week, without even pretending that there had been any changes, and just say, "It's now a week further on. How would you like a different threat?" to see whether they could get it through. That has to stop.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I am unsure whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman is aware that today is the International Day of Happiness. Does he agree that one way of making both sides of the

[Tom Brake]

Chamber happy might be to have a people's vote on the Prime Minister's deal that included the option of staying in the European Union? We can then all be happy, including him.

Keir Starmer: I am not sure how another day with me at this Dispatch Box and us here discussing Brexit could be considered a happy day in anybody's book.

Anna Soubry: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is being very generous in giving way. I am sure he is aware, though it may have escaped his note, that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made the purpose of the Government's motion very clear in his opening remarks on Thursday 14 March, and that it is recorded in column 562 of that day's *Hansard*. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman has already told us, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made it clear that the motion was to deal with this House approving the withdrawal agreement and a short extension, and he then said:

"If for whatever reason that proves not to be possible, we would be faced with the prospect of choosing only a long extension"—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 562.]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has said that more than once, and the purpose of the motion was extremely clear to the House.

Keir Starmer: I really do think it was clear to anybody who was in that debate. The Minister for the Cabinet Office also went on at least to hint that if the deal did not go through this week, he at least would be open to some sort of process by which the House could come to a different agreement and move forward; I think he indicated that that would be next week. Of course, on Monday we are due to vote and possibly amend the section 13 motion that the Government have to table as a result of the last meaningful vote failing.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this is about not the length of the extension but its function? The EU will need to see either a change in the process—that is, a vote of the people of this country—or a very different deal. The Prime Minister's deal is clearly dead and cannot come back to life.

Keir Starmer: I agree. Also, it is not very seemly for the United Kingdom to be in a situation in which a deal is simply put and re-put and re-put and re-put. If it eventually got through by just a few votes after many times of trying and with threat levels changing, it would not be a proper basis for the future relationship with the EU because it will have lost all credibility; the meaningfulness is sucked out every time this process is repeated.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Keir Starmer: No, I am going to make some progress. I will give way in a moment.

We are now acting in the absence of a deal, with the express will of this House to prevent no deal. One of my biggest concerns is that the Prime Minister's actions

make no deal far more likely, not less—and that is the very issue that we were trying to deal with last week. If agreed by the EU, a short extension for the purposes of forcing through this deal would simply push the cliff edge back to 30 June, and we would start down the same track. The Prime Minister is repeating the same flawed strategy that she has been pursuing for two years in order to recreate the binary choice between her deal and no deal that this House rejected last week.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Keir Starmer: I am just going to make some progress before I take any more interventions.

After voting as we did in last week's debate, we recognise that an extension to article 50 is now needed, and it is the failure of the Prime Minister's approach that has caused the requirement for an extension. Of course, any extension should be as short as possible, but it has to allow a solution to the mess that the Prime Minister has got the country into—to provide a route to prevent no deal, not to make it more likely. It also has to provide a way for this House to prevent the Prime Minister from forcing the same deal on us over and over again. That is why we believe that the focus in the coming days and weeks should be on finding a majority for a new direction—to allow the House to consider options that can resolve the current crisis.

For Labour, that centres on two basic propositions: a close economic relationship with permanent customs union and single market alignment; and a public vote with credible leave options and a remain option. Those propositions, and possibly others, need to be discussed and tested, and we need to come to a consensus to see whether we can move forward. That is what extension should be about, not about the narrow interests of the Conservative party and trying to keep the Prime Minister in post.

Thank you again, Mr Speaker, for allowing this debate today. I look forward to hearing the Secretary of State explain the Government's approach and how they plan to prevent Parliament from going back to the same place in three months' time.

3.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (**Stephen Barclay**): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). He started his remarks by saying that the Prime Minister should be here to answer his SO24 debate, but then, slightly oddly, went immediately on to note that the Prime Minister had been here for just under an hour answering questions on the extension, in particular. Whether that, taken with two urgent questions to my Department this afternoon, an SO24 debate and much of Prime Minister's questions also being taken up on these matters, constitutes International Day of Happiness, as the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) mentioned, I leave it to others to determine.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Secretary of State might be wise to be aware of the fact that the Prime Minister's letter to Donald Tusk was not

released until after Prime Minister's questions had started, and it was not released to this House but to journalists. Is that not the case?

Stephen Barclay: It is always good to take wisdom from all sources. My understanding is that the letter was placed in the House of Commons Library. On the precise timing of that, given the length of time that Prime Minister's questions ran, I think it was probably in the Library while she was still answering questions.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Secretary of State has been standing here describing how much time this House has spent talking about Brexit, but that is not the problem. The problem is that we are nine days away from leaving and the Government appear to have no policy. Is that not the case?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Lady is correct that the House has spent a lot of time talking. What the House has not done is spent a lot of time deciding, and what we have seen is what the House is against.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): There is a famous phrase that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. We have kicked the deal out twice and historical precedent in this place says that it cannot come back again. The EU has said that it is not going to accept an extension unless something different comes forward. At what point will we accept that we have got to go back to the people to put an end to this, because we cannot keep going over and over the same thing?

Stephen Barclay: Well, I do wonder whether the hon. Lady is describing her own Front Benchers' policy, because they have put forward a proposal that the House has rejected and yet seem to be intent on still putting forward the same policy. From speaking to EU leaders, as I know the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras will have done, what consistently comes across from senior figures in the EU is that the proposal put forward by the Leader of the Opposition is simply not credible. For example, he thinks that he can retain control over state aid and that he can have a say on EU trade deals. These are things that are simply not on offer.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State seems somehow to be surprised that the House has been asking urgent questions today, has been seeking this debate, and has been subjecting the Prime Minister to scrutiny. This is the greatest crisis that this country has faced since Suez. Countries around the world are looking at us, our international reputation in tatters. Our businesses are losing jobs and investment day by day, and we are peeing millions of pounds down the drain that could have been spent on our public services. And he wonders why this House is asking questions. It is absurd.

Stephen Barclay: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, that was not the point I was making. Of course it is quite right that the House asks questions. Mr Speaker, you have always personally championed the House asking questions—indeed, urgent questions are something in which I think, quite rightly, you take much pride.

But the point that the hon. Gentleman is not addressing is that people around the world also look to this country to respect its democracy. They say that this House gave the people the decision. Indeed, the Government of the day wrote that we would honour that decision, but—*[Interruption.]* He chunters from a sedentary position, but what is damaging to our reputation around the world is a sense of our asking the people for a decision and then not acting on it.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. Could he give an answer to this simple question? The Prime Minister has revealed today that she has applied for a short one-off extension, and yet her de facto deputy described such an extension as “downright reckless” from the Dispatch Box last week. Could the Secretary of State explain to the House what the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was thinking of when he made that statement?

Stephen Barclay: First, I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the comments that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made on that very issue when she was asked about it more than once at Prime Minister's questions. It also relates to the point that the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras made in his opening remarks. He referred at length to paragraph (2) of the motion last Thursday. The point about that motion was that it was conditional on a meaningful vote taking place, which has not happened.

The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), as so often, raises a very serious point as Chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee, but my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was also talking in the context of what EU leaders would be willing to give. If we look at the public statements of EU leaders, we see that they have said there is very little appetite in Europe for a long extension, particularly when they see the uncertainty that we have had in this House.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way; he is very generous with his time. It was put to him just now that we have no plan, but the plan is the deal. The only plan that Labour has put to us is closer alignment with the customs union, which is basically staying in the EU, and that is not what the people voted for. The people voted to come out, and all this obfuscating is only delaying that. Does he agree that we have to consider business, and the longer we dispute, discuss and debate and the less we come together, the more difficult it is for the economy and our businesses?

Stephen Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to say that businesses in Taunton Deane and, I am sure, elsewhere have made clear their desire to see this deal backed and to address the uncertainty that we face. People have been saying to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that she should compromise. She has compromised—she did not want to have an extension. She has listened and acted on that, but the House has to compromise.

Mark Pritchard: Is not the only way to avoid no deal to vote for the withdrawal agreement, and the only way to vote against a long extension is to vote for the withdrawal agreement? Is there not some intellectual

[Mark Pritchard]

inconsistency in the Opposition's argument? They say they want to put a vote back to the people based on a deal, but they are suggesting that the Prime Minister does not really want a deal and wants no deal. That is not consistent.

Stephen Barclay: My hon. Friend is right that not only the Prime Minister but the EU says that the only deal on the table after over two years of negotiation is the deal that she has negotiated.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): The Secretary of State says that the House is not very good at deciding what it wants, but we are crying out for the opportunity to vote for what we want. He said that countries around the world are looking to us to respect democracy. Will he respect democracy in this House and give us the chance to vote on that now?

Stephen Barclay: The right hon. Gentleman talks about respecting votes and whether the House has had an opportunity to vote on issues. His party wants a second referendum—a people's vote—yet we had a vote on that issue last Thursday. Indeed, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras did not vote for a people's vote. If the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) is going to practise what he preaches, I say with respect that we had a vote on the people's vote last Thursday, and the House spoke on that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Stephen Barclay: I will give way one more time and then make some progress.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. The Prime Minister has proved that she is not prepared to give us the opportunity to consider alternative options in the light of the failure of her deal twice. She is putting us in danger of crashing out by the end of next week, which means a real danger of food shortages, medicine shortages and potentially civil unrest. If that is the case, will the Government commit to revoke article 50?

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Lady is usually one of the most forensic questioners in the House, but on this issue I am afraid that I fundamentally disagree. First, the Government have made it very clear that we will not revoke article 50, because we are committed to delivering on the referendum result. Secondly, it is again a slightly illogical charge for the hon. Lady to say that the Prime Minister is seeking to crash out on 29 March when she has today sought an extension to the end of June.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Stephen Barclay: I will give way once more, and then I will make some progress.

Wes Streeting: One of the reasons why we wanted the Prime Minister here this afternoon is that, whatever her shortcomings, we can at least trust that when she stands

at the Dispatch Box she believes every word she says. That cannot be said for the Secretary of State, who can make an argument in one breath and then vote in the other Division Lobby in the next. [Interruption.] He should not be laughing this afternoon—by the way, people are laughing at him, not with him—because we are nine days away from crashing out with no deal, there is no sign of a plan from the Government and even the extension letter the Prime Minister has submitted fails the basic test of explaining why an extension is required. Is not the simple reason that there is no plan, and if there is a plan, what is it, Stan?

Stephen Barclay: I think the hon. Gentleman is wilfully misrepresenting the way the amendable motion played last Thursday—the fact that amendments were defeated—and we have given a further commitment to an amendable motion on 25 March. Perhaps his frustration is displaced from his frustration with his own Front Bench, because what we have not had from the Leader of the Opposition is clarity about when a second referendum will be put.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Stephen Barclay: I am conscious that this is a time-limited debate, so I should make some progress.

We have requested an extension under article 50(3) of the treaty on the European Union until 30 June, as it is now not possible to ratify the deal before 29 March. The request to the President of the European Council, delivered today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, gives us a final chance to uphold the democratic responsibility to deliver Brexit in an orderly way. As requested, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has set out the intentions of this Government, and the letter has been placed in the Library.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Stephen Barclay: Given that it is my right hon. Friend, I will give way.

John Redwood: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we have had plenty of time to consider all the other options? Throughout the proceedings on the EU withdrawal Bill, a lot of options were tabled and vetoed, and again last week, we had a series of indicative votes. I think every option has been looked at, and the truth is that they were voted down.

Stephen Barclay: My right hon. Friend is right in that the suggestion that this House has not had sufficient time—that was one of the points made earlier—self-evidently does not reflect the extensive debates we have held. The idea that the House has not had the opportunity to express its will, when it has done so repeatedly on the issues, including last Thursday, is simply not credible.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Ind): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Stephen Barclay: I should make some progress, and I am conscious, Mr Speaker, that you will no doubt say I am taking too many interventions, but given it is the hon. Lady, I will give way.

Dr Wollaston: The Secretary of State will know that this House has rejected the Prime Minister's deal twice by historic margins now—it is neither the will of the House nor the will of the public—and it has also rejected very resoundingly leaving with no deal. However, we have not yet had in Government time an opportunity to do just what he asks, which is for the House to give an indication of what it would support. Will he support bringing forward the opportunity to give an opinion on indicative votes in the next week, preferably on Saturday?

Stephen Barclay: I am not sure that Saturday would be the most popular of responses with colleagues across the House, but we have given a commitment, as the hon. Lady knows, to a meaningful vote on Monday and, following that, there will obviously be opportunities for the House to have its say. Let me make some progress.

Any extension is the means, not the end, but any extension of whatever length does not allow this House to escape its responsibilities to decide where it stands: whether to keep its commitment to deliver on the decision it gave to the British people or to walk away from doing so. Nor should an extension mean that a guerrilla campaign can be run to overturn the result of the referendum and frustrate the will of those who voted to leave.

I disagree with the suggestion of the shadow Chancellor, who is not in his place, that any extension should be open ended. I think he said that it should be “as long as necessary”. Indeed, he was at odds with other Labour Front Benchers. The right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) said only the day before that the Labour party would back an extension just to July because

“it would be inappropriate for us to stand for the European Parliament”.

An open-ended delay would be likely to mean no Brexit and disregarding the votes of the 17.4 million people who voted to leave.

We now need to use any additional time to ensure that an orderly Brexit is delivered. The Leader of the Opposition has not said to date how long an extension he seeks. I do not know whether Labour Front Benchers wish to use the opportunity of this emergency debate to put on record exactly how long an extension they support.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Stephen Barclay: Will the hon. Lady clarify Labour policy on the length of the extension? I look forward to hearing her date.

Catherine McKinnell: The north-east chamber of commerce has stated that its members do not want a messy and disorderly exit from the EU. They are perplexed by the Government's allowing a no-deal scenario to be seen as a credible outcome. They have asked for article 50 to be extended for a sufficient time to enable the Government to engage fully with businesses and stakeholders to form a consensus on Brexit. Will the Secretary of State stop ignoring the will of thousands of job creators in the north-east?

Stephen Barclay: What is remarkable about that intervention is that chambers of commerce up and down the country have been saying, “Back the Prime Minister's

deal” because they want the certainty that it offers. I am therefore grateful to the hon. Lady for drawing the House's attention to the voice of business. It is not a voice that usually gets much of a hearing on the Opposition Benches. I note that the hon. Lady ducked the challenge. I have still not heard anyone on the Opposition Front Bench tell us how long an extension they seek.

Geraint Davies *rose*—

Stephen Barclay: We have a volunteer! We look forward to hearing the date from the hon. Gentleman.

Geraint Davies: Given that it is clear from the historic votes that we cannot agree the deal in this House, and given that the Government confidently say that they are reflecting what the people voted for, surely they have the confidence to put that back to the people, in which case the extension should be longer than the 22 weeks needed for a public vote—that is five months, of course. I therefore suggest that nine months is an appropriate period to keep all our options open.

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman has not even persuaded Labour Front Benchers of his position. He says that he wants a nine-month extension, yet we have no clarity from the Labour Front Bench. He also says that he wants time for a second referendum, but I have yet to hear clarity about the question. Would there be two questions or three? Would “remain” and “leave” be on the ballot paper?

Geraint Davies *rose*—

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con) *rose*—

Stephen Barclay: I have given way to the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) once and I think the Father of the House wants to intervene, so I will obviously let my right hon. and learned Friend intervene in a moment. However, even the question for a second referendum, as well as the length of time it would take, is unclear, and the hon. Gentleman cannot persuade Labour Front Benchers of his policy.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: We are sadly wandering around the point of how long and why we are having an extension, with Front Benchers on both sides, with respect, not being altogether clear. Are there not various basic facts? First, if the withdrawal agreement is defeated again, that cannot be the agenda for any further extension. Secondly, useful negotiations in Brussels will be very limited for the next few months because a new Parliament is being elected and a new Commission is being appointed, so we will not be able to get under way till some time in the summer. If we use that time for the British generally—Parliament and Government—to reach some conclusions about what we are pursuing, some time after that will still be needed. I would have thought that until the end of the year is the very minimum time that is needed to sort out this crisis sensibly and constructively from now on. We have not been doing that thus far.

Stephen Barclay: The Father of the House makes a very reasonable and well-made point. Indeed, it is a point I have made to some of my colleagues who voted leave in the referendum—if they continue to fail to support a meaningful vote then the House may opt for a softer form of Brexit. That is a risk that many who

[Stephen Barclay]

campaigned to leave need to be mindful of. The equivalent risk, for those who may cling to that life raft as a preferable option, is that it remains unclear whether the House would then ratify that, given the way the withdrawal agreement Bill would need to be passed. It is a major piece of proposed legislation and the sustainability of that coalition would come under question with the subsequent risk of a no-deal outcome.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The Secretary of State's favourite outcome is the acceptance of the Prime Minister's deal. If that cannot happen, what is his second preference? It does not sound like he is very much in favour of extension. The only two sovereign, independent choices to be made are no deal or revocation of article 50. Which one would he go for: over the cliff or turn back?

Stephen Barclay: I forgive the hon. Gentleman for not necessarily having listened to various media rounds where I answered that question on multiple occasions. If we take it to its absolute extreme—I think I have been very clear on what I think about both outcomes—no Brexit is hugely damaging democratically and a no-deal outcome is very damaging economically. Of the two, I think no Brexit is more fundamentally damaging to our country. I have made my view clear. That is notwithstanding—also being clear—that no deal would be economically disruptive, but I think it would also have difficulties for our Union, not least because the hon. Gentleman would seek to exploit a no deal in terms of a future indie referendum. I think both outcomes are undesirable, but, as the Prime Minister has repeatedly set out at the Dispatch Box, there are only three outcomes. However much Parliament might want to kick the can down the road and delay this, there are only three outcomes that we can have: no Brexit, no deal, or to back the Prime Minister's deal, which the EU itself has made clear is the only option.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Stephen Barclay: I will give way once more and then I will wrap up, because I am conscious of time.

Stephen Timms: In his last speech in the House, the Secretary of State commended a Government motion to us and then voted against it. Will he explain to us what on earth he was doing?

Stephen Barclay: Again, I touched on this in various media rounds I did yesterday. The point, looking at the entirety of my speech, is that all of my speech except the final line addressed the substance before the House that day: the amendments, in particular the amendment from the Chair of the Exiting the European Union Committee, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central, which would have taken control of the Order Paper away from the Government. I happen to feel, and the Government felt, that that was not just damaging to Brexit but constitutionally significant. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, the Government won that vote by two votes. There were three votes. What was reported was that the conclusion of the speech was quickly followed by a vote. What actually happened was that the three amendments were defeated and it was only at

that point, following a commitment to a further amendable motion on 25 March, that the Chief Whip was in a position to change the Whip. So it was not just my view that changed, but the Chief Whip's and the Government's. [Interruption.] He chunters away. He asked a question and he is getting a straight answer.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Stephen Barclay: I am conscious that I have taken quite a lot of interventions.

Three years after the country voted to leave, Parliament continues—

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Almost surreptitiously, the Secretary of State announced a couple of sentences ago that we were going to have the next meaningful vote on Monday. That has not been announced in this House. I had no knowledge of it. The Father of the House has been making sensible suggestions for how we can, together, progress what we want to get out of the deliberations. Those will be confounded by the fact that the meaningful vote is being brought forward to Monday.

Mr Speaker: My understanding—

Stephen Barclay: It is an amendable motion.

Mr Speaker: Order. We will hear from the Secretary of State in a moment, but my understanding was that he had specified a meaningful vote on Monday. I thought that he used the words “meaningful vote”, but I may be incorrect; if so, he can clarify that. [Interruption.] Order. It is certainly the case that there is due to be a motion, pursuant to earlier resolutions of the House, and that it is due by Monday; I believe that it is listed in the remaining orders. My expectation is that there will be such a motion on Monday. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could helpfully clarify to the House precisely what the Government intend for Monday—assuming that they know—and what they do not intend.

Stephen Barclay: I am very happy to clarify: what I was referring to was the amendable motion that the Government have committed to. I refer back to the remarks of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who made that commitment on the record in *Hansard*.

Three years after the country voted to leave, Parliament continues to debate the manner in which we should leave, while some, having stood on a manifesto to respect the result, work tirelessly to frustrate that decision. The EU has repeatedly made it clear that after two and a half years of negotiation, the Prime Minister's deal is the only—

Stephen Doughty: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the Secretary of State, but if a point of order is raised, I must take it. I call Stephen Doughty.

Stephen Doughty: I am sorry to interrupt, Mr Speaker, but I am afraid that I am not satisfied with what the Secretary of State says. Given its importance in relation to next week's business, I wonder whether it is possible to check with the Official Reporters of *Hansard* what the Secretary of State actually said. He has said lots of

different things at the Dispatch Box before and left the House in confusion, and all sorts of rumours are swirling around about what is happening on Monday.

Mr Speaker: It would be difficult to get it immediately, although those who take down verbatim what is said in this House work extremely skilfully and conscientiously, so it is reasonable to expect that what was said will wing its way to the Chair before very long. Moreover, if the Secretary of State in any sense misspoke, it is open to him to clarify what he meant.

Stephen Barclay: If I did misspeak, of course I will apologise to the House and seek to clarify the record. I think the point being made was about a meaningful vote—sorry, I have just done it again; it was about an amendable motion. That was the point, and I think the shadow Secretary of State accepts it: we were referring to an amendable motion.

Mr Sheerman *rose*—

Stephen Barclay: I give way.

Mr Sheerman: The Secretary of State is very kind, but I pulled him up on a point of order because I thought I had heard what he said. Will he address the concern that the Father of the House keeps raising? If we rush into this, we will not have time to do exactly what the Father of the House has been proposing: give ourselves some objectives, so that we know that we are going into Europe to say, “In this extra time we have, this is what we think is achievable.” This House could come together and do that, but if we have too early a vote, we will have no chance to get our house in order and do it.

Stephen Barclay: The hon. Gentleman’s interventions are always very reasonable. I am grateful for the opportunity to clarify on the record that I was referring to the amendable motion. On the substance of his point, we will come back on Monday and set out at the Dispatch Box exactly how we will honour the commitment that was given by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Stephen Barclay: I am conscious that I have used a lot of time, so I will conclude.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Stephen Barclay: Well, once more—go on.

Anna McMorrin: I am very grateful. A few moments ago, the Secretary advocated no deal over no Brexit. That is wholly irresponsible and will cause huge problems in our communities and for our businesses. This short extension only pushes a no-deal brick wall a few months down the line. Will he confirm that he is not advocating no deal over no Brexit? That is not what we want.

Stephen Barclay: What I am advocating is a deal, because I accept that an outcome of either no Brexit or no deal is highly undesirable. Going back on the referendum result and on the hon. Lady’s own manifesto pledge at the last election would be hugely damaging to our democracy and to public trust in this institution.

In seeking a short extension to 30 June, the Government intend to bring the deal back to the House as the best means of ensuring an orderly exit. If, however, the House continues to refuse a deal, and if alternatives through other votes do not provide sufficient numbers for both a deal and ratification, it is clear that the House will need to decide between no deal, a softer Brexit and no Brexit at all. Some Members would prefer a general election to no deal, which is why those of my colleagues counting on a no-deal outcome are set to be frustrated, and others who think that Brexit can be stopped by holding European parliamentary elections and so enabling further long extensions might find that some Members prefer other outcomes. The best way for the House to deliver on the will of the people in the referendum is to support the Prime Minister’s deal. That is the way forward and is how the Government should proceed.

4.15 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful for the chance to speak in this debate, and I commend the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) for having secured it.

Despite the Secretary of State’s protestations—I can understand why, out of loyalty to his Prime Minister, he has to make them—the Prime Minister’s deal is finished. She will not get that deal through next week. She will not get any changes to it this week, this month or even this year. She is now acting like a motorist who brings a car back to the garage week after week and then runs to the press expressing her frustration at the mechanic for refusing to take a decision to give an MOT when it is perfectly obvious that she is driving a clapped-out old banger that should have been consigned to the scrapheap weeks before. An extra coat of paint on this deal will not make it road worthy; it should be scrapped, and if there is to be any attempt at a deal, it has to be a deal reached on the basis of consensus and engagement with the whole House, including the 90% who do not agree with the Prime Minister’s vision.

The options are a significant extension, not just for a few weeks or a couple of months; the complete revocation of article 50, which would give a future Government the option of trying again; and crashing out with no deal. It was very noticeable today at Prime Minister’s questions that the Prime Minister repeatedly went through a litany of options that she was refusing to take forward because the House had voted them down. None were voted down by anything like the same calamitous margin as the option she is now determined to bring back for the third time, in flagrant violation of the traditions of the House, which—remember—was supposed to get sovereignty returned to it by this whole Brexit fiasco. Given that the Prime Minister has failed twice to get her deal through the House, surely it is well past time that she and her Government accepted it is not Parliament that is out of step but the Government.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is misinformed. Last week, the House voted down a proposal for a second referendum by 249 votes, which was a crushing defeat for the amendment and demonstrated that there was no support for a second referendum in the House.

Peter Grant: One of the Prime Minister’s own allies has just argued very eloquently why the Prime Minister’s deal should also be dead.

[Peter Grant]

With 15 days to go to the cliff edge, Parliament voted to ask for an extension. The Prime Minister quite deliberately used 40% of the available time to do absolutely nothing. Having made a statement on Friday saying she would write this urgently needed letter, it still took her five days. What was she doing? Looking for a pen? A stamp? I could have given her either if she had asked.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): We have heard repeatedly from across the Floor that the Government have to follow the democratic will of the people. Does my hon. Friend accept that the 2017 elections to this House and the 2016 elections to the Scottish Parliament also represented the democratic will of the people, that both the Scottish Parliament and SNP Members in this House have repeatedly and resoundingly called for the Government to listen to Scotland and that time and again they have failed to listen to either the Scottish Parliament or this House?

Peter Grant: That is a valid point. It is worth recalling that the only time in 25 years when the Conservatives have had a majority in this place was when they had stood on a manifesto to keep us in the single market and the customs union. As soon as they stood on a manifesto to take us out of the single market and the customs union, their majority vanished like snow off a dyke.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Ind): I think it worth ensuring that the House is aware that in the last five minutes Donald Tusk has confirmed that a short extension will be made available only if the House approves the withdrawal agreement next week. That is clearly not going to happen. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there should be no more smirking at the Dispatch Box, no more playing games and no more poker about no deal? The Government are on the edge of bringing this country down. No more! The Prime Minister must bring indicative votes to the House as a matter of urgency and a national imperative, because the risk that is facing us right now, given that the withdrawal agreement will not succeed next week, is that we are looking at no deal.

The House must be allowed to exercise its democratic mandate on behalf of all our constituents. We must have those indicative votes, unwhipped. Let us not play the game of saying that the House has had the opportunity. We all know how the whipping system works. We need free votes to enable us, as Members of Parliament—representatives of the wellbeing of our constituents—to have our say and to stop this madness now.

Peter Grant: I agree with a great deal of what the hon. Lady has said. Perhaps the most telling phrase that she used was “no more playing games”. This is indeed a game to many of these people. Far too often, when we are talking about the most serious threat that these islands have faced during peacetime in recorded history, we see smirks and joking on the Government Front Bench every time an Opposition Member speaks.

I find it incredible that the Secretary of State—perhaps he will now put down his phone—took the best part of half an hour to explain why the Prime Minister was justified in going against the clear will of the House yet again after last Thursday’s vote, and spent about half

that time throwing eggs and tomatoes at the Opposition Front Bench. I agree with him to an extent—I do not think that the Labour Opposition’s position has been at all clear, and I do not think that they have been an effective Opposition—but there is no excuse for any Government to say, “We have not caused this disaster by being in government; someone else caused it by not being a good enough Opposition.” If the Government cause a disaster, the Government, and no one else, are responsible for it.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: May I pursue the intervention from the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen)? It seems that there are also rumours on Twitter that the Prime Minister is talking about a general election. Surely it would be the height of irresponsibility to leave the United Kingdom in the furnace of economic meltdown to run a general election without first revoking article 50. If the Prime Minister is calling a general election, she must write a letter to Brussels to get article 50 revoked before she can hold any general election. Anything else would be utterly irresponsible. There is no time: a letter must be written first.

Peter Grant: It might well be irresponsible, reckless and thoroughly irrational, but that does not mean that this Prime Minister will necessarily rule it out.

Within the last three or four days—the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) made this point very well earlier—we have received a clear message from the Government. They plainly intended the House to believe that we would be voting for a long extension if the agreement were not accepted.

The Prime Minister has whipped herself to vote against a motion that she herself tabled and presumably supported at the time when she tabled it. The Secretary of State—although he tried to say that this was not what he had done—has commended a motion and later voted against it. As two Members have pointed out, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, on behalf of the Government, has said that asking for a short, one-off extension would be reckless, a few days before the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government, went off and asked for a short, one-off, reckless extension.

The Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), who is present, told us that there had been many votes in the House against Scottish National party amendments for revocation. There have not; there have not been any. He told us that the presidential rules for the Joint Committee under the withdrawal agreement did not provide for delegations. Rule 3 of annex VIII refers explicitly to delegations, so the Minister was wrong again. The same Minister told my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) that during the transition period we would still be in the European Union. That was a clear statement from the Dispatch Box, and it was absolute nonsense.

We have reached a point at which the House can no longer take at face value anything said by Ministers at that Dispatch Box. One of the most ancient and surely most sacred traditions of this House is that when a Minister speaks at the Dispatch Box, their word can be taken as being correct. That no longer applies, not through any ill will on behalf of individual Ministers but because far too often a Minister says something

that was true today and different Ministers say something tomorrow that makes it cease to be true. This is no way to run a Government and no way to run a Parliament.

Anna Soubry: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the House on, I think, Monday when the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), who is present now, was answering an urgent question or whatever—there have been so many—stood at the Dispatch Box and said it is

“very plain that if we are given the meaningful vote, we will seek a short extension, if we get that through the House, and if we do not, we will seek a longer extension.”—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2019; Vol. 656, c. 818.]

So that is yet another Minister giving a promise—a commitment—at that Dispatch Box which, with respect, has not been worth the paper it has been printed on in *Hansard*.

Peter Grant: I thank the right hon. Lady for giving yet another example. It is becoming increasingly clear that when Ministers come to the Dispatch Box to defend their Government’s handling of Brexit, they will say what they think needs to be said, and if it happens to coincide with the truth that is useful, but if it does not, someone has to come back afterwards and correct it. How can we expect European negotiators to have any faith in what British Government representatives are saying when time and again it is abundantly clear that we cannot take at true face value anything Ministers say from the Dispatch Box? We have a system of government and Parliament that depends entirely on being able to trust what Ministers are saying, and Ministers are simply not bothering to check the facts before they declare them in some circumstances.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the real crisis of democracy is not that we are asking the people again, because I can never understand why more democracy can be less democracy, but that this Government ignore democratic votes in this House?

Peter Grant: That is part of the crisis of democracy, but it is certainly not the only part of our democracy that is in crisis.

The Government claim to be working to respect the will of Parliament and the will of the people, although it has been made perfectly clear that the people are not allowed to change their minds. The about-turn from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster’s speech to the Prime Minister’s actions, both on behalf of the Government, tell us that five days is enough time to allow 100% of the Cabinet to change their minds but almost three years is not enough time to allow 3% of the population of these islands to change their minds, because it only needs 3% of the population to change their minds to get a different result in another referendum. The Government think there has been a significant shift in public opinion; that is why they do not want to allow the public to have another say. If they were confident that leave would win another fair, uncheated referendum they would not be running away from it so quickly.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): There is a rumour that the Prime Minister intends to make a statement in No. 10 this afternoon, or this evening possibly. Does the

hon. Gentleman agree that it would be far more appropriate—in fact, it would be an insult to this House if this was not the case—for her to come here first before making any such statement?

Peter Grant: I am not sure that what is appropriate and what is an insult to this House is a consideration for the Prime Minister and indeed the rest of the Government; they will do what they think will get their way through Parliament regardless of whether it upholds the traditions of this House. I find it astonishing that I am defending the traditions of this place to a Bench full of Conservative Ministers. When I first got elected, I never thought I would be doing that, but we have a Government who have been held formally to be in contempt of Parliament and I believe a lot of their actions—certainly in the past couple of weeks, and what they intend to do next Monday by all accounts—demonstrate that that contempt of Parliament has only deepened since the House had to pass that shameful resolution against them last year.

Several hon. Members rose—

Peter Grant: I have given way a good number of times and need to make some progress.

When we see the First Ministers of the national Governments of Scotland and Wales being frozen out almost completely and the leader of a non-governmental party effectively being able to pull the strings of half the Conservative party—the leader of a party whose total election vote in 2017 is smaller than the population of Scotland’s second city, not even our biggest city—we have to wonder where the democratic principle in that is.

It became quite clear last weekend that attempts to persuade DUP Members to back the deal were not about persuading them that it was actually better than they had thought, or that the backstop was not as big a threat to them as they had thought; it was about trying to find out how much money could be dug out of the Treasury to buy their support. What kind of an honourable way is that for a Government to work? We know that DUP Members do not agree with the deal, and that they think it will be damaging to their constituents, but the Government are trying to send in money so that their constituents will not notice how damaging it is. In any other context, that practice would be viewed very differently; it would not be considered an honourable practice at all.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): The hon. Gentleman mentioned how minorities can lead a majority. Is it not the case that in Scotland, a small group of six, rather than the Government, has inflicted tax rises on the people of Scotland?

Peter Grant: There is an important difference there. The reason that the Scottish Green party was able to have some influence on the Scottish Government’s business is that when it was invited to talks, it accepted the invitation. Other parties with significantly more political clout, and therefore presumably much more opportunity to influence those talks, choose not to accept their invitations. They went away in a huff. They wanted to have something to complain about, but they could not find anything proper to complain about so they invented something. We heard their bogus outrage about a tax

[Peter Grant]

that has actually been legalised and is part of the policy of the hon. Gentleman's own party within this Government. The Conservative party did not take part in discussions with the Government of Scotland because it turned down the invitation to do so. Our party has often not taken part in discussions with the Government of the United Kingdom because we have not even had an invitation, and neither have any of the other parties represented here apart from the DUP—although it has no representatives here today.

The United Kingdom faces a grim choice between two futures. We are now almost hours, rather than days, away from the time when the only option left will be to revoke article 50 or to plunge off the cliff edge without a deal. We are running out of time for anything else. The Prime Minister has taken us 99% of the way from the referendum to cliff edge day, yet she still has no idea how she is going to avoid the cliff edge.

The people of Scotland are facing a choice between two futures as well. It is becoming increasingly and alarmingly clear what our future will be if we remain tied to this failed and dysfunctional Union of so-called equals. Do we want to be part of a Union that treats elected national leaders with contempt and kowtows to the leaders of parties that in the not-too-distant past have invoked homophobia and bigotry as a way to garner electoral support? Do we want to be part of a true partnership of equals in which half a billion people and their Governments will stand shoulder to shoulder with the Government of a nation of barely 3 million people to ensure that those 3 million cannot be bullied by a bigger neighbour? Or will we remain part of a Union that has made it perfectly clear that, even though our people rejected this disastrous Brexit by a majority of almost 2:1, we will have to take it because we are part of that Union?

I want to see a long extension to article 50, because I want the people of the United Kingdom to have a chance to say, "We made a mistake." I do not need to hope, because I know with absolute certainty that, before very much longer, the people of Scotland will be given the chance to say, "In 2014, we made a mistake." This time, there can be no doubt whatever what the choice of the people of Scotland will be. I look forward to seeing the people of Scotland taking our place beside our Irish neighbours and cousins as full, independent sovereign members of the equal partnership of the European Union.

4.33 pm

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Like many in the House, I find it impossible to overstate my concern for our country today. We are nine days away from Brexit and, as things stand, we have no agreed strategy for the country to follow. Instead, we have a Government who continue to put their head in the sand about a deal that has simply not been accepted by this Parliament. There will be many books written about why we have ended up in this position, but the reality is that this situation was clear months ago. It was clear from the Chequers agreement and the subsequent White Paper that the strategy would not command consensus in this House, and that has proved the case ever since. I will briefly talk about the damage it has done to his place, before

finishing by returning to the fact that, even if the Government were to get a deal through, it would be a pyrrhic victory that serves no one, including themselves.

This Government have delayed. We are debating the extension today because they have not been prepared to confront the fact that their deal has not been accepted by this House. The reality is that, in doing all this, they have undermined the procedures of this House, which are there to help this democracy and those of us privileged enough to be elected to represent our communities. They have damaged the fabric of this place, because Parliament is meant to work by us coming here to represent our communities with our votes and, on the back of our decisions, the House moves on to the consequences. Instead, on Brexit and on this deal, the Government have refused to allow that to happen.

First, the Government refused to have a vote and wasted precious time this country does not have by simply delaying because they did not want to confront the fact that their deal, which had been unpopular in the summer, was still unpopular at Christmas. We finally had a chance to vote before Christmas—I had made my speech—before the vote was cancelled and the debate was suddenly cut short. The deal was not just narrowly defeated; it was significantly defeated. If ever there was a vote that expressed the House's will, it was that one. If ever there was a time when a Government clearly should have seen the writing on the wall, it was that moment.

The Government could have chosen at that stage to listen to what Members across the House and across parties were saying. Members were representing their communities, and they were not trying to be awkward, which is the impression Ministers have given to Parliament. The simple fact is that very few people were writing to tell us that they wanted their representatives to support the deal. Had the Government recognised that, we could have spent time, even since mid-January, debating, discussing and trying to conclude whether Britain could take another route forward that commands consensus in this House.

I listened to the approach of the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union to this debate and, yet again, it is about party politics. This could have been a three-hour debate to test the House and see whether there is any consensus on what kind of extension the Government should be seeking. Again, the approach has not been to do that. The approach has simply been to brush off the points raised by other Members and to argue as if this is some kind of debating society, rather than a House in which decisions need to be taken at the 11th hour to save jobs and investment in our country.

That approach has massively undermined this place because, fundamentally, we take decisions by voting on motions and legislation. If our votes do not count, it strikes at the fabric of how this democracy works. I have heard Members say today that the vote against a second referendum was very big, but that is not the point. We all know that we might have another vote on a second referendum. We know that we might have a second vote or a third vote on lots of things, because the Government's approach to Brexit has undermined the very basis on which this House debates: to have one vote on an issue. If a Member supports the motion, they should vote for it—and they should not expect it to come back to the House for another vote at a later time.

Those rules are there not only to protect Members but to make sure that this democracy works, and we have seen those rules fundamentally undermined when it comes to Brexit. We are not meant to have three votes on a deal, and the rules are meant to protect Members from being bullied by the Whips. They are meant to protect our democracy from becoming a “pork barrel” democracy in which billion-pound funds are launched purely to get Members on side for the next round of voting. That is not how the UK Parliament is meant to run. It is totally unacceptable.

Mr Sam Gyimah (East Surrey) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful case for parliamentary sovereignty, which is, after all, what the referendum was about in many ways. Does she agree that in trying to ram through a deal by bullying MPs to vote for it, the Government are not building a sustainable majority, which is needed not just for this deal, but in the months ahead, because so much about the Prime Minister’s deal is open-ended and not settled yet?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that, and I will come to it shortly in my closing remarks.

The extension that we require clearly needs to be for a purpose. There are only so many versions of Brexit. We can do a clean-break, hard Brexit, which I know many MPs want, and I respect that. Indeed, the millions of people who voted to leave had that kind of Brexit as their expectation. Alternatively, we can have this soft Brexit that the Government are proposing, but I see very little support for it in this House or among the public more widely. The last opinion poll I saw on this deal showed just 12% of the public supporting it.

Anna Soubry: My right hon. Friend—she will remain my friend, and she is a great friend of this House, who speaks with great authority and good sense—has, in the past, talked about shabby deals behind doors. Does it concern her to learn, as many of us are learning on Twitter, that the Prime Minister is meeting leaders of parties and groups—I believe this is the first time she will have met all the party leaders, including the Independent Group, in one room at one time—and is then meeting a group of hard Brexiteers, presumably from the Back Benches of the Conservative party? Apparently, at 8 o’clock she is then not coming to this place to make a statement to this Parliament, but making a press announcement of some description in Downing Street. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that that speaks volumes about the entirely inappropriate and shabby way that this entire process has been conducted from the outset?

Justine Greening: I agree about that.

In a sense, there are two issues here: the substance of the decision we need to take, which I was just talking about; and the manner in which the decision is taken in a way that makes it a sustainable one. The substance is that there are only so many routes forward on Brexit. This House just needs to decide whether it can find a consensus on any of them. If we cannot, we need to confront what that means for finding a decision for the country as a whole.

I have been clear that I felt back in July that it was obvious that this place was gridlocked. I take no pleasure in the fact that that has been proved absolutely correct.

It has not served this country well that the Government have sought simply to avoid that fact, putting their head in the sand, and that therefore we are days away from Brexit with no decisions having been taken. There is no point in saying that a referendum will waste time, given that the Government have wasted far more time than a referendum would have ever taken. For this extension debate to have any quality or meaning, we should be debating whether we want to delay until the end of the calendar year, the end of a fiscal year, or beyond that. We should be talking about the rationale for the different strategies on Brexit—there are only so many. I do not think that the way this debate has been approached or how it reflects the broader Brexit process has served our democracy well—it has been hugely counterproductive.

I wish to finish my comments this afternoon by talking about what happens even if the Government win a vote on their deal next week—if they are allowed to have one; I listened to your ruling and felt you were right to make it, Mr Speaker. Even if somehow a third meaningful vote on a motion not substantially different was allowed to be put to the House and it was won, the Government would not have won the argument. Brexit is not a moment and a vote in this House; it is about a process—a journey on which we will take Britain over the coming years—so just cobbling together a majority at one moment does not fix anything. It does not take the decision for those of my colleagues who genuinely feel that this version of Brexit is not what 17 million people voted for; it does not address their concerns. Quite rightly, they are simply not going to accept this version of Brexit when they feel so passionately that the thing for which they have campaigned for so many years is not being delivered. Such a vote will resolve nothing. It will end up feeling like the Government have simply tried to get something over the line for the sake of ticking a box, when this process should have been about so much more than that. It will not work and it will not be sustainable, so it not only serves our democracy badly but serves our country badly. I predict that we will have to revisit these issues anyway.

I know that what I am saying will not be welcome to Ministers’ ears. They have set their face for years—certainly for months—against listening to comments in this Chamber that are contrary to Government policy, but the time has now come when they need to face facts and face reality. It seems the one thing this House cannot do is take decisions per se for the Prime Minister and make her follow them. We need Government Ministers to wake up, smell the coffee and start acting responsibly on behalf of this country. This House rejects the Government’s deal. We want an alternative. We must allow the House to have the debate that can find the alternative, and if we cannot do that, allow it to take a decision about what we need to do as a Parliament. We cannot just steadily get to the 29 March cliff edge and simply ignore the fact that this is a grave crisis for this country that will affect people’s livelihoods and jobs. Having grown up in a place where there was unemployment, I find that totally unacceptable.

4.47 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): It is a genuine privilege and pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening), who just made an outstanding speech about the state we are in. Let me

[Hilary Benn]

just add that for sheer chaos, the past 24 hours will take some beating when the annals of Brexit finally come to be written. Should we be entirely surprised, as a House? I do not think so, because it is consistent with a pattern of behaviour that dates right back to the first days after the referendum result. We know that the House has had to persuade, cajole and push the Government, at every single stage, to listen to our views and votes as Members of the House of Commons. One consequence of their refusal to do so is that there is a terrible lack of trust in the Government and their intentions and processes. We need trust if we are going to make progress, because at the moment we have absolutely no idea where we are heading.

I wish to say three things about the priorities for the House of Commons and for the country. Priority No. 1 is that we must achieve an extension to article 50, which is why we voted against leaving with no deal on Wednesday last week, and why we voted in favour of requiring the Government to make an application for an extension to article 50 on Thursday last week. If we do not get an extension, we will leave with no deal in nine days. We can move whatever statutory instruments we like in this place, but we prevent a no-deal Brexit only if, on the one hand, we have changed the law in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and on the other hand the EU agrees to grant an extension. In other words, the two have to come together at the right moment to guarantee an extension. We will all have paid careful attention to what we have read on our phones about what Donald Tusk had to say about a short extension being dependent on a positive vote on the withdrawal agreement next week. I only hope that what he did not say about an alternative extension being available is in his mind if the House decides that it will not vote for the deal if it comes back.

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, in the light of what President Tusk has just said, it would be remiss of the House not to consider the deal another time next week, given that he has encouraged us to do so and made it clear that an extension is conditional on our having considered it again?

Hilary Benn: I can only presume that Mr Tusk is trying to encourage Parliament and the country finally to come to a decision. As the hon. Gentleman will be well aware, there is great frustration on the part of the EU. At a recent meeting with members of the Select Committee, Michel Barnier said that what we do not really need now is more time. What we need, he said, were some decisions. I would express that frustration at the Government, because the story of this sorry tale that has brought us to our present condition is one of an unwillingness to take real decisions about the future choices that we face as the fantasies of the leave campaign have collided harshly with the reality of the past two and three quarter years. If the Government had been willing to make those decisions, then perhaps they could have been able to command a majority in the House.

Wera Hobhouse *rose*—

Hilary Benn: I will give way to my valued fellow member of the Select Committee.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the right hon. Gentleman not find it extraordinary that the Government accuse the House of indulging in not making a decision over Brexit, when actually the blame should be placed clearly at the feet of the Conservative party?

Hilary Benn: I agree with the hon. Lady. It seems to me that the story of indulgence over the past two and three quarter years is the indulgence of one section of the Conservative party that has held the Prime Minister, and therefore the country, to ransom. That is why it was a bit rich of the Prime Minister to accuse Members on the Opposition Benches of indulgence, when she is the one who has been practising it for two and three quarter years.

Mr Gyimah: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the whole language of blame and of trying to assign blame is incredibly juvenile, given what is at stake for the country? We should be talking about what is in the national interest. As the Father of the House argued earlier, we are at an impasse. The Prime Minister's deal has been rejected heavily twice by this House for a reason. If we want to make progress, we need to be able to discuss the alternatives in a structured and coherent way with the Government's full support. That is what this House is crying out for, and that is what this Government should support if we are to make progress.

Hilary Benn: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am not terribly interested in blame, but I am interested in analysing how we have come to this point. Some may regard that as apportioning blame; I regard it as a description of what has happened.

The second thing I want to say is that, as a House, we must demonstrate that we intend to use the time, if we get it, for a purpose. We cannot sit here for three months or longer, twiddling our thumbs; the public expect us to try to find a way forward on which we can agree. The Prime Minister has a perfectly fair point with her strictures: we know what we are against, but what are we for? That purpose should be to consider and then vote on a number of different ways forward. I am an advocate of indicative votes. The word "indicative" is used for a really important reason. A sensible place to start is to say to Members, "Look, you can move in the direction of a free trade agreement." Then Members in the House would argue for that. "You can decide that you want a customs union. You can argue that you want Norway and a customs union, or a customs arrangement. Which of those three would you like us to explore further?" In my case, I would vote for two of those options. I would not vote for the free trade agreement, for the reasons that the Prime Minister has set out as to why it would not work for Northern Ireland; or indeed for friction-free trade, but I would vote for the other two when we got to that moment. That would then give us an indication of where support might lie in the House of Commons.

Monday is our opportunity—I am talking here about the motion that the Secretary of State clarified for us when he said that he was talking about the motion in neutral terms—to start that process, and the House must take it.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): Once again, my right hon. Friend is making an outstanding speech on this issue. Is he able to surmise what may happen next week if the Government make a statement on

Monday and do not bring a third meaningful vote until perhaps Tuesday or Wednesday? We would be left in a situation where President Tusk has already said that an extension to 30 June would be given only if the deal passed, and we would still have to change primary legislation—the date in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018—by next Friday. What does my right hon. Friend think the Government are trying to do? I suspect that the Prime Minister is trying to bounce us and bribe us into backing her deal.

Hilary Benn: I think that—not quite in fairness to the Prime Minister—her purpose and her method has been obvious for a long time. To Opposition Members, it has been, “My deal or no deal.” In recent months, there has been a variation for others that she hopes to persuade to get on board with her proposal, which has been, “My deal, no deal, delay or no Brexit.” Ultimately, it falls to us as Members of the House of Commons to determine what happens and, courtesy of the important Wightman judgment, if the worst came to the worst next Friday, revocation is the one other option that we have, because it does not require the approval of the other 27 EU member states. I really hope that we do not get to that point, and I cannot see how it can be in the interests of the European Union to force us out with no deal, because it will get all the blame for all the consequences that would flow from that.

After we have been through the process that I described in answer to the intervention by the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), I urge the Government to listen to what Parliament says. It is no good inviting us to say what we are for if the Government say, “We are not prepared to go in that direction. We are not prepared to change.” If we are going to move, the Government will have to move along with everybody else, but the past two and three quarter years have shown that the Government have been unwilling to move one inch. The Government should then come back with a revised plan, because that is their responsibility. We do not want to seize control of the process for the sake of it, but if the Government are not acting, Parliament will have to act in their stead. The Government should bring a plan back, having listened to what the House said, so that we can debate, amend and vote on it.

Anna Soubry: Does the right hon. Gentleman share the frustration of many of us when more hon. Members voted against no deal—the original Spelman amendment—than voted for the Brady amendment? However, the Prime Minister completely ignored the vote that rejected no deal and, to put it in crude terms, kept banging on about the benefits of Brady.

Hilary Benn: The right hon. Lady makes a powerful point. There is a certain selectiveness in the Government’s reflection on the decisions that we have made. The public expect us to get on and do our job. If we can agree a deal or if we remain deadlocked, I look forward to the moment when we get the chance to vote in favour of the proposal for a confirmatory referendum proposed by my hon. Friends the Members for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) and for Hove (Peter Kyle), so that the British people can make the final decision.

In conclusion, if it is democratic, as the Government argue, to come back not once but twice and—who knows?—maybe three times to ask us to change our

minds on the Government’s deal, why is it undemocratic to ask the British people whether they, on reflection, would like to change theirs?

4.59 pm

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I have been in this House for long enough—nearly 22 years—to know that Governments face great difficulties and often have to adjust to circumstance, so one should get used to the fact that occasionally Governments say things in this House that they intend to do and then subsequently are unable to do. But I have to say that the process of Brexit has brought me face to face with the fact that the underlying integrity that one hopes one will continue to see from Government, even in difficult circumstances, now seems to be fast running out. That troubles me very much. I have been a member of the Conservative party for over 40 years and find myself in a state of amity with my colleagues, even though Brexit has introduced a revolutionary upheaval into our affairs which means that we have divergent views on a specific issue, which is causing the party great difficulty. Notwithstanding that, we and the Government we are being asked to support have to try to maintain some sustained integrity through that process.

What, therefore, am I to make of a situation in which only a few days ago, in order to avoid something that the Government did not want, which was the possibility of this House taking control of the Order Paper to debate alternatives outside the control of the Government, Ministers of the Crown standing at the Dispatch Box gave a series of plain assurances to the House on what the Government intend to do if their deal cannot go through regarding how they are going to approach the negotiations with the European Union thereafter and the length of extension they are going to seek? That is what happened; and subsequently, today, these assurances have been entirely renegeged upon.

Most extraordinary of all, one might have expected the Secretary of State for the Department for Exiting the European Union, who is no longer in his place, to come along and provide some coherent explanation for why this had happened, but he did not. Indeed, the only explanation he half advanced was a total irrelevance. It was the suggestion that this situation was due, Mr Speaker, to your ruling that the motion could not be brought forward a third time, which is of course nonsense, because the Government know very well that, had they so wished today, they could have brought forward a motion to disapply our conventions and, had they wished to do so, to move on to a meaningful vote on their motion. It is beyond comprehension and rational analysis how a Minister of the Crown standing at the Dispatch Box this afternoon can say that that is the justification for having changed the position and decided that the extension is going to be extremely short, when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had described such a short extension, on behalf of the Government, as “reckless”.

Now, of course this is part of a wider pattern of the complete disintegration of collective responsibility in Government. We have Ministers coming to the Dispatch Box and saying entirely contradictory things. We have Ministers publicly dissociating themselves from the Government policy and staying in post. We have Ministers who come up to one in the corridors, acknowledge that

[*Mr Dominic Grieve*]

the situation is very serious and that they disagree with what the Government are doing, continuing to serve in a Cabinet with which they apparently fundamentally disagree.

When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister came to the Dispatch Box today at Prime Minister's questions, I confess that it was the worst moment I have experienced since I came into the House of Commons. I have never felt more ashamed to be a Member of the Conservative party or to be asked to lend her support. She spent most of her time castigating the House for its misconduct. At no stage did she pause to consider whether it is, in fact, the way that she is leading this Government that might be contributing to this situation. I have great sympathy for her. I have known her for many years and we have a personal friendship beyond and outside of this House, but I have to say that I could have wept—wept to see her reduced to these straits and wept to see the extent to which she was now simply zig-zagging all over the place, rather than standing up for what the national interest must be.

Now we are told that there is going to be a short extension. We are told that next week we will have an opportunity, perhaps, for a meaningful vote, which I very much think is going to lead to the Government's deal being rejected, because, for a whole variety of reasons, Members of this House feel very strongly that it is bad for our country. But, if I may say so to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, that view cannot simply be cast to one side, whether it comes from hon. Members and hon. Friends with whom I disagree or those with whom I agree on the issue of Brexit. It cannot just be lightly dismissed. It comes from their own analysis of what they think the national interest to be.

Of course, that is a huge challenge for the Prime Minister, and I have immense sympathy for her in that regard. But you do not meet that challenge by ducking and diving, and avoiding, and having a galaxy of Ministers appear at the Dispatch Box and say contradictory things; you have got to face up to your responsibility and, rather than coming along and showing contempt for this House, actually try to engage with it and making use of what this House can do pretty well, which is debate issues in a rational way which, in itself, by a process of debate, might lead to a reasonable outcome.

I have come in for quite a lot of flak over the past two years because of my various amendments, but most of them have been designed not to achieve a specific end but to try to facilitate process. Each time I put them up, the Government have tried to prevent them, so my view is bound to be coloured of a Government who seek to close down debate in this irrational fashion.

Next week we are going to face the same challenge again, but in a very concertinaed timeframe. We are in danger of crashing out with no deal. If the rumours are right, we are coming very close to the point where the EU—perfectly reasonably, in my judgment—may well be saying, “We’ve had enough.” Indeed, reading the statement that has recently come out, I think that that is probably what it is saying. What are we going to do next week? What is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister going to do next week? Are we going to extend across the House and try to reach some level of consensus on a way forward? Are we going to try to bring this sorry saga to an end by, for example, going back to the public,

as was suggested by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) as a possibility in putting the options to them and asking them, which I would be perfectly prepared to do—and to support my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in doing, if that would help? Are we prepared to look at alternatives when it seems so apparent that the deal itself is going to be rejected?

Just browbeating this House is going to serve no purpose at all. It brings us, undoubtedly, into contempt, but the contempt falls much more on the Government who are doing this than on Members who are voicing their individual views and doing the best they can to represent their constituents' interests. That is the challenge we now face, and we may face a very short timeframe for doing it—something which, on the whole, I rather hoped we might avoid. It is not perfect in itself, but that was the purpose of a longer extension—to enable the process to happen which has been shut down over past weeks and months.

We may now have to do this very quickly. But I have to say this in conclusion: if we do not do it, one has to ask oneself the question, what is the purpose of this Government? What are they doing? How are they furthering the national interest? How are they contributing to the quiet good governance that I think most people in this country want? We really are—I am sorry to say this—at the 11th hour and 59th minute. The Government's credibility is running out. Trust in them is running out. Unless my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, by some great exertion of will—and she has plenty of will and plenty of robustness—stands up and starts doing something different, we are going to spiral down into oblivion, and the worst part of it all is that we will deserve it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Ian Murray: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I will be brief. It has been confirmed in the last few moments that the Prime Minister is to make a statement in Downing Street at 8 pm this evening. Given that this debate can run until just after 6.20 pm, and there are two other items on the Order Paper that could take up to three hours beyond the moment of interruption, does this House have any mechanism to get the Prime Minister to make that statement to the House, rather than to the public via the media in Downing Street?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, of which I did not have advance notice, about which I do not complain; I am simply signalling that my response to what he has put to me is spontaneous. It would certainly be my expectation, if this debate runs its full length, that the House will be sitting at the time of the announced prime ministerial statement. It would certainly be open to the Prime Minister to come to the House to make the statement here. It is a matter for her to judge whether she wishes to do so. My sense is that that would be well received by the hon. Gentleman and quite possibly, in the light of what has been said, by other people. It is not for the Chair to seek to compel or instruct any Minister, including most certainly the Prime Minister, but I have noted what the hon. Gentleman has said. In so far as he is asking, “Can it happen?” the answer is: yes, it can.

I would like to suggest an advisory and voluntary time limit on Back-Bench speeches of six minutes or thereabouts, but I am not at this stage, particularly as I

have not given notice, imposing a formal limit. Let us see how we go. It would be helpful, in the name of maximising participation, if people did not speak for too long, but I will leave it to the wise judgment of the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern).

5.11 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I will take your advice, Mr Speaker. I have no intention of detaining the House any longer than necessary, particularly because this has possibly been the most frustrating debate that I have sat through in nine years in this House. I find myself very angry, which is not to say that it is not an honour and a pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). Some people in this House say that lawyers do not make very good politicians. He just proved them wrong. I agree with so much of what he said and his analysis of what the Prime Minister has tried to do to this House.

I saw one of the protesters holding a sign outside this place last week which said, “Parliament versus the people”. Is that not the message that we heard earlier from the Dispatch Box? Is that not what was said? Are we being told that we are frustrating the will of the British people? I say, that way populism lies. If we undermine the ability of Members of this House to deliberate, listen to each other, form a view, vote and take decisions, we open the door to the kind of behaviour that we are seeing right across the developed world, and it is dangerous. We can believe in democracy and letting people have their say at the same time as recognising that this House is entitled to express its view, and when it does so, it should be listened to by the Executive. I will talk more about that later.

Today’s debate has arisen out of frustration because of astounding events overnight. The Government have decided—as they had to, because the House has not supported their proposal for how to deal with Britain’s exiting of the European Union—that now is the time to delay the exit day that they set for us. As Members have said, we received a copy of the Prime Minister’s letter to President Tusk during the House’s proceedings—we find out what is happening from the media, and then we see a copy of the letter during the House’s proceedings.

Joanna Cherry: The hon. Lady will recall that I put that point to the Secretary of State earlier, and he told us that the Prime Minister had put a copy of the letter in the Library at 12.10 pm. However, I have made an inquiry, and it appears that the letter was not published online by the Library until 1.30 pm. Does she agree with me that it is cynical in the extreme to put a copy of the letter in the Library when we are all in here for Prime Minister’s questions, and not to publish it online where we could look at it, until PMQs are over and the Prime Minister has left the House?

Alison McGovern: I do not say this very often, but thank goodness for Twitter. When we were told that a copy of the letter would be in the Library, my very able assistant, Holly Higgins, ran across to the Library to see if she could get a copy. Meanwhile, I observed on Twitter that journalists had it already. Thankfully, we were able to see it none the less, but it is cynical. It is totally cynical, as the hon. and learned Lady points out.

This is cynical behaviour because, as other Members have said very clearly, the Government are trying to bully us. They are trying to exert their will and to force us to vote for their proposal, and we know this because of what the letter says. The Prime Minister says that she intends

“to put forward a motion as soon as possible...under the Withdrawal Act...and make the argument for the orderly withdrawal and strong future partnership”.

She says:

“If the motion is passed, I am confident that Parliament will proceed to ratify the deal constructively.”

However, other Members have already said at length how convincing the vote against the Prime Minister’s proposal has been.

We know that this House does not want that proposal, and following the amendments and statements put forward by other Members of this House, we know that the House of Commons has voted conclusively no to no deal. We do not want the Government’s deal and we do not want no deal, and the Government accept that. Therefore, by definition, the Government have to change course. They need to come to this House with a different proposal. That is also necessary for the Government’s own stated objective of having a delay, because we know that the European Union does not wish to agree to a delay for no apparent purpose; it wants to see a change of course. It is that simple.

I hear what other Members have said about proposals to allow this House to express its view in some way. No doubt, we will do that, because, Lord knows, if we have demonstrated anything over the past two years, it is that this House is capable of passing amendments if it wishes to. We will express our view, but we are the legislature, not the Executive. Therefore, by simple definition, we do not have Executive power, so we need the Government to commit to changing course. We need them to bring forward proposals for how a different path will be taken. Something else that is true is that the Executive are not the legislature. They cannot tell us what to do, and they cannot force our hand simply by fiat. We have to hear from the Government what their proposals are, and then we have to vote on them—either to accept or to refuse.

In the end, we can make the policies for process, discussion and deliberation as complex as we like, but it is as simple as that. We now need a change of course from the Government that we can deliberate on, vote on and decide on. We all have a responsibility here to make our political system function as it should. If we do not, it will not just be the Government who are complicit in opening the door to populism; it will be all of us. I do not say those words lightly.

We all know the consequences of getting this wrong, so I simply beg the Government to have no more bullying of this House and no more trying to bash us into voting for a deal that we have already voted down absolutely conclusively and convincingly. Let us have no more of that, but let us have a change of course and a policy that we can support. My frustration this afternoon—in having a debate that has been dominated by reams of words on process, and has not been about the central issue of if or how we leave the European Union—is nothing in comparison to the decisions that are having to be made now, as the Secretary of State knows because he is in charge of no-deal preparations.

[Alison McGovern]

Our frustration is nothing compared with that of individuals and businesses up and down this country having to make decisions that they do not want to take because the Government are simply unable to plot a course to help our country move on.

People in our country want us to focus on the things that really bother them, be it the desperate growth of food banks or the need for all young people in this country to have a proper chance in life. That is what they want us to focus on. I ask the Government: please change course, make a proposal, let us vote, and then let us move on.

5.21 pm

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I will be brief. I have listened carefully to the debate, at the beginning of which I had no intention of speaking. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), who touched on several points with which I entirely agreed, but I have reached a totally different conclusion.

Three international events are important. First, President Tusk said that we need to vote on the withdrawal agreement again. Given your stricture, Mr Speaker, which I support, that we cannot vote on the same text again, does that count as changed circumstances? I am very interested in your thoughts on that. You might like to address the matter in answer to a point of order later. Secondly, the *Le Point* magazine website put out a report at 1.6 pm that President Macron had stated that unless there is “a clear project”—that was the translation—France intends to veto any extension. Thirdly, there have been interesting reports from a respected BBC journalist that the letter from the Prime Minister has gone out too late for some Prime Ministers to consult their legislatures so they may not have the chance to make a decision this week. That is yet another muddle in this saga.

The hon. Member for Wirral South made a point about populism. I have said the following goodness knows how many times inside and outside the Chamber. The conundrum we face is that the House had three democratic mandates around the referendum. David Cameron said, “If you vote Conservative in 2015, I will give you an in/out referendum. It will not be advisory—it will be decisive. If I have a majority, the House of Commons will deliver what the people want.”

Peter Grant: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Paterson: Time is short and I would like to press on. Other people want to speak.

David Cameron won the election and then, probably to his horror, he had to deliver the referendum. The then Foreign Secretary made it clear when the referendum Bill was going through the House that MPs were handing back their sovereignty to the people and that the House would honour the people’s decision, whatever it was. The referendum was not advisory, but decisive. It was the biggest vote in British history and 17.4 million people voted for the broad slogan of “take back control”. The immediate question was, “What does that actually mean?” The Conservative party interpreted it as meaning that we would honour leave if people voted for a Conservative Government in the 2017 election. It would

mean leaving the single market, the customs union and the remit of the European Court of Justice. The Labour party broadly supported that. So 85% of the votes in 2017 went to the two main parties, which supported that proposition. That means that more than 60% of the seats in this Parliament represent that proposal.

To pick up on the comments made by the hon. Member for Wirral South, I am genuinely worried. This was a huge step by the British people. It was the first time, following a succession of referendums, that they had gone against the wishes of the establishment—the political establishment, the commercial establishment, the media establishment. We had had the 1975 referendum, the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland referendums and the alternative vote referendum. Each time, the people had gone along with what the establishment wanted. What we are now wrestling with this afternoon—the hon. Lady raises the question of populism—is how we deliver that.

My contention—I really mean it—is that I am seriously worried about the long-term damage to the integrity of our institutions. People are writing to me and sending emails. I have been mocked for making one particular comment. A guy came up to me on the tube and gave me his visiting card—the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) picked me up on this; she can come to my office and I will give her the visiting card of this guy if she wants to see it—saying, “Please stick to your guns, because we depend on you to see it delivered.” I appeal to Members of both main parties. The position of the Liberal Democrats and the SNP is totally honourable. They have been consistently against leaving the EU and voted against it. Of course, the Liberal Democrats got crushed in the general election as a result, but the two main parties did really well in the general election. The Prime Minister got the second-largest number of votes in history.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Paterson: Time is really short. I am just going to finish now.

The two main parties need to think about this. If there is any sort of extension beyond next week, it will be disastrous for candidates in the Conservative cause and, I think, disastrous for candidates in the Labour cause. The first 100 seats the Labour party has to win are 78 for leave, 73 strongly for leave.

This is an issue where the integrity of the idea of voting is absolutely at stake. Given that the Labour party is not going to vote for the withdrawal agreement and people like me are not going to vote for it—handing over the power to make law to 27 countries, a position where there is no manner in which a sovereign independent UK could leave, and a proposal that breaks up the United Kingdom and creates something appalling called UK(NI) is not acceptable to me—the only solution is to leave with no deal, which is the law of the land. As Mr Barnier said in his statement last night, the vote has not changed that.

I know this is not a popular view, looking around the Chamber at those who are present today, but talk from Opposition Members about crashing out is, bluntly, lazy. Ask why. I have been to Dover twice in the past three weeks. We have had discussions with those in Calais, including Mr Puisseuseau, and they all say that they are prepared. The Under-Secretary of State for

Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), answering an urgent question earlier, gave some very confident answers. Numerous statutory instruments, many of which I have sat on, have gone through. We have Mr Barnier saying that there are only two more issues, one of which is the budget which is really not going to touch on Brexit, that have to be sorted. So I appeal to Members that hiding behind the mantra of “crashing out” is lazy.

There may be hiccups. There was a lot of preparation for the millennium bug. We had exactly the same thing: virtually every business was prepared; they just thought that other businesses had not prepared. That may well be the case on this occasion. The damage from a bit of disruption is far less than the huge damage and the risk of populism should we thwart the wishes of the 17.4 million people.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I was reluctant to impose a formal time limit, hoping that we could get by without it, but I am afraid it is necessary because I want to maximise participation. There will be a five-minute limit with immediate effect, of which the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) has been notified and with which she concurred.

5.28 pm

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Several hon. Members have rightly said that the Prime Minister’s letter requesting an extension to article 50 was not what this House was promised or what this House agreed. I want to make a slightly different argument, which is that a short extension will not solve the huge problems that we face in dealing with Brexit. It is clear that the Prime Minister has refused to change course. She simply wants to run down the clock and blackmail MPs into supporting her withdrawal agreement. If we have another vote on the agreement next week and she loses again, even the EU agreeing to an extension would not solve our problems, because we will simply be back here in two or three months’ time. A cliff edge will have been replaced by a brick wall, and no deal will be back on the agenda, so that will not work.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): At Prime Minister’s questions today, I was conscious of how thoroughly disrespectful the Prime Minister was to every Member of this House. She is just being stubborn, and as she carries on with her vanity project, it is our country that will go down. We are very, very concerned.

Liz Kendall: I completely agree. I will come back at the end of my speech to the Prime Minister’s way of dealing with Parliament.

Even if the Prime Minister succeeds in getting her withdrawal agreement through next week, Brexit will not be sorted, because the withdrawal agreement will not resolve any of the fundamental choices that we face about our future relationship with the EU. We will be leaving without knowing where we are going, which means that we will simply end up back here, time and again. We will be back here at the end of the transition period, and when that, too, is inevitably extended, we will be back here again, grappling with the same problems.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way very briefly on that point?

Liz Kendall: Probably not, because I really want to let others come in. I am so sorry.

Extension has to be for a purpose, so it is about facing up to the choices that Brexit inevitably brings. Either we remain as close to the EU as possible, to protect jobs and prevent a hard border in Northern Ireland, but give up our say over the rules—or we cut all ties, with all the risks and uncertainty that that brings. We have never been straight with the British public about those choices, but doing that will require time. It will take time for this House to agree, if it can, on which option we should look at. It will take time to negotiate any other alternative with the EU, whether that is a customs union, a common market or whatever else. My view is that this must be not simply about what this House decides about our future relationship, but about what the public think. That is the only way to get a sustainable solution.

One reason that many people are concerned about a longer extension is that they are worried that it would mean our having to take part in the European Parliament elections, but I do not think that that is a foregone conclusion. Eleanor Sharpston, an advocate-general of the Court of Justice of the European Union, has called that view

“an oversimplified and ultimately fallacious presentation of the situation.”

She says that, just as the article 49 rules have changed for countries acceding to the EU, the article 50 rules could change for the UK. For example, the mandates of UK MEPs who have already been democratically elected could be extended so that they remain in place for months to come. It is not a foregone conclusion; it is about the political will to find a way forward.

Just as I believe that the Prime Minister should change course, I think that the EU should, too. The EU has insisted that we cannot discuss our future relationship until we have agreed on the withdrawal agreement with respect to money, EU citizens and the border in Northern Ireland, but the truth is that we cannot solve the issue of the border in Northern Ireland unless we know where we are going in the long term. Our very failure to agree how close we will remain to the EU has inevitably led to the requirement for a backstop, so the EU has to change course if we are to solve this.

I conclude by echoing my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern). Let me give a warning to the Prime Minister and others about pitting this Parliament against the public and about criticising and castigating us for not bending to the will of the people—as if there were one single will of the people that is clear and always the same. We are representatives, not delegates; we are here to exercise our judgment. It is our job to question, to scrutinise and to stand up for what we believe in. It is dangerous to try to pit this Parliament against the people, instead of defending our parliamentary democracy—one long-term challenge among many others that the Prime Minister has simply failed to live up to.

5.34 pm

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall). I share much of the frustration expressed on both sides of the House. We are all frustrated by the lack of progress. We are all frustrated that we are sat here

[James Heappey]

having another emergency debate about Brexit because we have not got exactly the right outcome we all wanted. We are frustrated that the arguments are not advancing. We are frustrated that in the national press this place is being portrayed with increasing vehemence. We are frustrated that the Government are not saying exactly what we want when we want. I share all those frustrations. Today alone on my Twitter feed, I have been called a traitor by Brexiteers and an absolute idiot and a failure by remainers. That is our world right now, and we all want to get out of it—of course we do.

I understand that I am accountable to my electorate back in Somerset and that the decisions I take here will be judged come the next general election. I understand it is my responsibility to weigh up all the options presented to us in this place and to reconcile them with the interests of my constituency, with what my Government and party advise us to do, with the manifesto I stood on and with how my constituency and the country voted. I understand all those things and I am constantly triangulating to do what I believe to be the right thing. It strikes me, however, that what I think is the right thing is changing all the time, because the circumstances are changing all the time. Our decision-making process on Brexit is iterative. Being asked the same question again and again is not a problem, providing we might be inclined to make a different decision, and the evidence so far is that people are.

I would say exactly the same, by the way, about the questions already put in this place on no deal, a second referendum and a customs union. The Library has been digging out the detail for me this afternoon. All those questions have already been put and decided upon, but it is not a problem that we should want to consider them anew if next week we decide against the deal, although I hope we do not, as I continue to believe it is the pragmatic and sensible way forward. That said, surely nobody in the House can say that as circumstances change we should not reconsider. They have changed significantly this afternoon with President Tusk's statement that a short delay is only an option if the House decides in favour of the withdrawal agreement. That is a seismic change in circumstances that warrants another meaningful vote next week on the deal. Nobody can say, however, that we should reconsider a second referendum, a customs union or any of the other things on which we have already voted, and then say we should not extend the same right to the deal.

The one thing the House is united on—I suspect you included, Mr Speaker, having seen the clip of you being followed across the road by journalists the other day—is that we are all very bored of being asked the same questions and of being on the receiving end of a very frustrated British public. Next week, we have the opportunity to make a decision at last. I hope that the House has an opportunity to vote on the deal and that we vote for it, but surely we have reached the end of the road. Next week, we must finally decide what we are in favour of and then accept a short delay while the deal is enacted.

5.38 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Ind): I will try to keep my comments short because many others want to speak and I have spoken a lot in the last couple of weeks.

As we all know, it feels like groundhog day, but we have had the privilege this afternoon of hearing some outstanding speeches. It is the content, in particular, of some of those speeches that should concern members of the Government and those who sit behind them. I am thinking, for example, of the comments of the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) and of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who did not hold back in describing his sheer despair, as a long-serving Conservative Member, at our situation—a situation that is of the Government's and, in particular, the Prime Minister's own making. It does not give anybody any pleasure to say that.

I listened with great care, as I always do, to the wise words of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who always speaks with dignity, wisdom and experience. In a pragmatic and sensible way, he seeks often to provide the very leadership that has been so desperately lacking in the past three years. He said that he did not like to engage in the blame game, and I agree with him. However, it is absolutely critical, as others have said—including the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), and, indeed, the hon. Member for Leicester East—[HON. MEMBERS: "Leicester West."] I mean the hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall). East or west, it is always very good in Leicester—not as good as in Nottingham, but that is by the way.

Let me say this, in all seriousness. Those Members made very important points, as ever, about how the Government are interpreting events and, quite wrongly, trying to set this place up as if it were in opposition to this thing called "the will of the people". That could not be further from the truth. There are many right hon. and hon. Members who, from the very outset, have spoken without fear or favour on behalf of their constituents, doing the job that we are here to do, which is to represent all our constituents, not just to pander to the members of our political parties.

I would like to think that this was an inaccurate tweeted representation, but what a shameful moment it was when, apparently, one Conservative Member asked another, "Why did you vote in the way that you did?" and received the reply, "Well, it is my association annual general meeting this week." That is the simple reality—the truth of the situation that we are in.

I have said this before, and others have said it as well. We know of Members, primarily Conservative Members, who regularly vote not in accordance with their consciences or what they believe is in the interests of their constituents, but because they are fearful either of being attacked or assaulted—and as you know, Mr Speaker, that is a very real threat to many—or of being deselected by their Conservative associations. That is a fact. It goes to the very root of democracy, and also, I believe, to the heart of much of what has happened over the past three years: the inability of people to speak with honesty, and to do the right thing by their constituents.

There is a sense of despair in the country, which is reflected in this place. I will not say who it was, but a Member who sits on these Benches, although not in the area where I sit—they know who they are—said to me at about half-past 8 or 9 o'clock this morning, "For goodness sake, will she," meaning the Prime Minister, "not now listen, and reach out, and try to form some sort of compromise and way forward?" I had to reply, "I am afraid to say, on the basis of my experience, that

this Prime Minister will not listen to anyone who does not agree with her, and when she does listen and does change her mind, it is only in response to those on the hard Brexit right of the Conservative party.”

What we should all seek to do is put our country first. Let me echo what was said by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield—and it must have been heavy and difficult for him to say it. I am afraid that time and again, when this Prime Minister should be putting her country first, she is putting her party first, and that cannot be right.

5.43 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in the debate, although again I have a sense of *déjà vu*. Here we are again, discussing this issue. It is the most important issue that faces us, but I did not seek election to the House to spend my time talking about just one issue.

I think there is a real sense that next week has to be different. Many people may be thinking that when we have another vote on Monday, it will be the same as those that we have had before. Everyone can vote against what they do not like and put up various ideas, some realistic and some not, and the Whips' Offices will be telephoning over the weekend. I see some of my favourite Whips in the Chamber now, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill). There will be a ring-round, we will come back on Monday, and we will all stand on our pedestals, vote for various options and agree on none.

The comments of Donald Tusk today make very clear what the options actually are. Just kicking the can down the road—a further extension—is not a solution in itself. It is a delay, not a decision. It is a question of what we actually want it for, and which of those options we are actually seeking to implement. For me there remain three clear choices. The first is not one I agree with, as I think the referendum itself has ruled it out, but I accept that some Members—those in the Scottish National party, the Liberal Democrats, probably the Independent Group—would go for it: the revocation of article 50. I do not think that would be the right thing to do—I do not think it would be appropriate—but at least that is a coherent choice.

The second—I listened with interest to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson)—would be that we chose to leave without a deal either next Friday or at the end of another extension, although I think it is becoming clear that the EU's patience in us just wanting to carry on debating is understandably coming to an end, as is most of the public's. I do not think leaving without a deal would be the disaster some make out, but the votes last week show the likelihood of this House agreeing that outcome.

That brings us back to the final unilateral option we can choose: to vote for the proposed withdrawal agreement. We have to be clear that that would not be the end of the process. There are various options, from Canada to Norway to any other idea someone might want to come up with—we might almost think every one of us could put our name to a new Brexit idea for all the ones that have been brought out over the last year—but this is the one option that we can actually agree and take forward knowing that the EU will agree to it and that we can

convert it into our own law. I am not going to say that it is perfect or the best thing I have ever read, but then again it was never going to be. There are clearly challenging issues; we are unravelling a 45-year relationship with many other economies. We would probably have ended up doing some of the things anyway as a sovereign state but they have become wrapped up as part of our membership of the EU.

Those are the three realistic and fairly stark choices that now face Members as we consider what will happen and what we do next week. Just saying, “I want no to no-deal” is nonsense. Saying that is a soundbite; it isn't a solution. We actually have to agree to a solution—to one of the two remaining alternatives. The same applies to just holding out in the hope that we might get no deal, when it is pretty obvious where the votes will go on that. I voted last week against extension; I am happy to have done that as I thought it was the right thing to do, but the way that vote would go again if we had it next week is fairly predictable.

Now is the time for Members; there has been a real and fundamental change with what has been said by the President of the European Council. We need to accept that the idea that there are all sorts of wonderful types of deals that we can do is not there; there are three simple choices available next week. Therefore, Members need to think carefully about which one of them they wish to take, or conversely wish to risk. If people want to revoke article 50, that is a principled position, but it is not one I will be voting for. We could manage no deal, but I do not see it getting through the House. So as I said back in December when I was concluding on why I would be voting for the deal at that time, it is the one way that guarantees that we actually get to Brexit. We can get some of the advantages that people voted for and leave, honour the pledges we made and respect the referendum. That is what I hope this House will do next week.

5.48 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster).

I was not intending to speak in this debate but now feel compelled to do so. I think the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) said that the outcome of the referendum was not advisory; my understanding from Members who were in this place at that time is that it was advisory and was not a straight decision.

However, we are having this debate today because there has been a catastrophic failure of leadership and management by one person: the Prime Minister. This has been a complex political and economic disengagement from Europe, but it has not been managed well and I am afraid that really has been down to her. I therefore cannot—and I am sure Members across this place cannot—listen to Members or this place being described as a laughing stock or it being said that we are somehow not following the will of the people. That seems so wrong.

Then we hear the Secretary of State in his opening remarks say that we are frustrating the process, when in fact we have been the ones who have been frustrated by the Government all the way through, whether by denying us access to economic impact analyses that we were told did not exist, or pulling the vote that was supposed to take place on 11 December—and so it goes on.

[*Matt Western*]

Let us look at the pattern of behaviour from the Government, and particularly at how the Prime Minister acted with her then Brexit Secretary, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), over Chequers. She would not share the documents relating to her outline proposal for Chequers with him, and I understand that it was not until the day before that she gave him access to them. So it goes on.

We realise that this is not a leader in the true sense who has chosen to take us with her on this project. She has acted almost in isolation, alienating us from the process. She has sought to plough her own furrow in order to see through some sort of legacy project for which she knew all along there would be no support. As a result, we have seen a divided Cabinet and a divided Government.

The Prime Minister never sought to engage or involve us at the beginning of the process. She never sought to scope out the implications with partner countries, with trade unions or with the devolved Administrations. We are now in the situation where we do not support her. Mr Speaker, I hope you will forgive my using a sporting metaphor when I say that she has lost the dressing room. She often repeats the phrase, as does the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, that we never state what we are for. That is because we have been frustrated by the process and have had no opportunity to say what we would support.

I would like to echo the points made so forcefully and well by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). We would love to have the opportunity to explore what other options could be considered, and that is what I would call for. I believe that that opportunity should be revisited in this place next week, because it is the only way in which we can begin to reunify not only this place but the country. We must explore the options that a majority can support, and then we must work at somehow resolving the crisis that we and the country are facing. If we are to find unity and strength next week, I urge the House to support such a proposition. I believe that that position is supported across the House, and it is the only way in which we will achieve a way through.

5.52 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): At this very point in time, I was meant to be at a reception to thank British MEPs past and present for their contribution to political life. The sad fact is that, during my time in the European Parliament, Labour, Conservative and Lib Dem MEPs from this country would often work together to find common solutions.

This is a very challenging time, but the circumstances were predicted. I recall that, in the winter just after the referendum, the then ambassador to Brussels, Ivan Rogers, came to visit me in my office to talk about what the last stages of the negotiation were likely to be. He wanted to decide what date he should recommend to be put on the article 50 letter. We discussed how intense the situation would be in the run-up to the European elections. We also talked about how, in the European Parliament, the first vote in a series of negotiations would often not get through and the matter would need to come back for a few little manoeuvres, and perhaps some side agreements, before getting through on the second or

third attempt. We particularly decided on the March date to ensure that if we needed an extension for a second or third vote, there would be time for that before the European elections. This was all predicted. The only thing that Ivan and I got wrong was that we predicted that the challenge would be to get this through the European Parliament, not to get it through here.

Let us look at what is now the real deadline. The real deadline is the European elections. Colleagues, I have fought a lot of European elections. I fought the one in 2009 in the middle of the expenses scandal. There were 58 Westminster MPs in the area that I campaigned in, and less than a handful were even prepared to show their faces on the streets in their own constituencies. The situation was toxic, but nothing like as toxic as it would be if we were to go back to our constituencies to fight another European election. Just think about who the candidates would be in those elections and what they would face. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) is not in her seat, but she has said that she wants a second referendum. She was not even brave enough to attend public meetings in her own constituency during the first referendum—I had to do it. Just think what the next elections would be like.

I do not underestimate how damaging a no deal would be. A no deal is not a good deal. It does not matter as much to people who are not affected by Europe, but for people who have relatives living in Europe, who are married to an EU citizen or who own a business that trades with Europe—like the stallholder at a market in my Essex constituency who told me last Saturday, “Vicky, we need a deal. I will be bust within a week if we do not have a deal”—we must find a deal.

There is only one deal on the table right now, and it is the withdrawal agreement and the future partnership. I have listened over and over again to Labour Members, and the shadow Brexit Secretary has said that, fundamentally, the Opposition do not have a problem with the withdrawal agreement but that they have a problem with the vagueness of the future partnership and the political declaration.

Donald Tusk picked his words carefully in his statement today. He said we can have this extension if we agree the withdrawal agreement. He is not committing us to one route or another on the future partnership. He said we should agree the withdrawal agreement, and we can then take that moment to work out where we need to land for our future relationship, because no deal is not a good place to be. This is too high a risk for our constituents. Even though I would like to have much more clarity on the long-term relationship, I will continue to vote for the withdrawal agreement because I do not condone the damage that crashing out in a no-deal Brexit would do to our country and to our relationship with Europe.

5.57 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): At Prime Minister’s questions, the Prime Minister accused the House of navel-gazing on the subject of Europe, which is rich from a party that, for the past 30 years or more, has spent all its time navel-gazing—some might say digging around in its navel or, indeed, picking the scabs of Europe. That has left us in the current position. It has always been about the Tory interest in relation to Europe and never the interests of the country.

That is best reflected in the fact that it has required a Standing Order No. 24 application to be granted to enable us to debate something that the Prime Minister should have brought to the House, particularly given the de facto deputy Prime Minister's comments, which many hon. Members have repeated, about how reckless it would be to seek a short extension.

I am afraid to say that the Prime Minister's letter immediately fails two basic tests. First, it does not explain the purpose of the extension she seeks. Even worse, as we heard from the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), it was not submitted in time. The Government's incompetence is unparalleled. They did not submit their letter seeking an extension in time for it to be considered at this European Council meeting.

I make it clear to the Minister why the Liberal Democrats and, indeed, other Opposition parties are seeking an extension to article 50. First, the extension should be longer than the three months that the Government are apparently seeking, and it should be for a very simple purpose, which is to allow time for a people's vote. If that requires European elections to be fought, we will fight them. We could well be, perhaps for the first time in British history, fighting European elections on the values and principles of the EU. We may have Nigel Farage's Brexit party, funded by who knows whom, from who knows where, fighting that campaign, but the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National party, the Labour party—one would hope—the Greens and so on may well be fighting the European Parliament elections on the basis of the values of the EU. These are the values that have ensured security and peace, and have ensured that the EU can deal collectively with issues such as climate change in a positive way. If we have those elections, bring them on. We would welcome the opportunity to talk positively about what the EU has done.

There is not very much positive about Brexit, but the one silver lining that I hope Members from nearly all parties—not the Democratic Unionist party but all the other parties in this place—have found is that the issue of Brexit has brought together Members of different parties who often have never worked together before. That has happened in a collegiate way, whereby we are willing to work together. As I understand it, that is how the Danes were able to get themselves out of the hole they had dug for themselves in 1992 with the Maastricht treaty. They resolved that by bringing the parties together and finding a way out of it together. That is not what our Prime Minister has done. Bearing in mind that we are 1,000 days after the vote of 23 June 2016, what she attempted, for a brief flash about 100 days ago, was to organise a series of one-off meetings with party leaders and with other members of those parties. She ticked that box and said, "I have talked to the other parties. It is all dealt with." I am not sure what is happening today, but I am not sure it will add much to the sum total of her connections with the other parties.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I hear what my right hon. Friend says about the Brexit situation bringing people together from different parties to work together. Does he accept that it has brought people together up and down the country? In this country we now have one of the largest pro-European movements in Europe, and we will see that on the streets of London this Saturday.

Tom Brake: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for that. We expect that this Saturday, hundreds of thousands of people will be coming into London on the people's march. If we are sitting on Saturday, as the Speaker has indicated might be possible if the Government want us to sit then, I am sure we will be able to sit here and listen carefully to those people's chants of, "Stop Brexit." That is something I will welcome greatly.

Mr Speaker: I apologise to colleagues, but it is necessary to reduce the time limit to three minutes in order to maximise participation. I appreciate the understanding of the situation on the part of the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David).

6.2 pm

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Like many people in the country and in my constituency, I am extremely concerned about the situation we are in, but I am also clear that the responsibility for where we are now rests exclusively with one person—the Prime Minister. Brexit was always going to be a challenge and it was always going to be difficult, but she has turned a drama into a crisis—a political crisis and an unprecedented constitutional crisis. My advice to her is simple—you are in a hole; stop digging. We have had two meaningful votes, which have been rejected by this House, by very large majorities. On both occasions they have been absolutely thrown out, with no question about it. As things stand, if a third meaningful vote is allowed by the Speaker, that will be rejected as well. It will be rejected because this House is full of hon. Members who will not be bullied, browbeaten or bribed.

This deal is, in my considered judgment, bad for this country, and on that basis I will not support it. I ask the Prime Minister to listen very carefully, to this House and to the country. The country is divided; on that there is no question, but this House is also divided. What we need is not blind dogma and dogmatism, but an effort by all of us, including, especially, the Prime Minister, to create a consensus for a sensible Brexit—one that puts the people first and does not put the interests of the Conservative party above the national interest.

If that consensus on what might be called a soft Brexit cannot be achieved, we have to go to the people for their vote. There is a lot to be said for a confirmatory referendum, and at this stage and in the very near future, careful consideration must be given to that. On that basis, we could salvage something out of the terrible crisis in which we find ourselves.

6.5 pm

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I did not think it was possible to feel more outrage at or contempt for the behaviour of this Government and this Prime Minister. The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) said earlier that he had never felt so ashamed to be a Conservative MP; let me reassure him that this is not about party politics. I feel ashamed that we have a Prime Minister who is prepared to behave in this reckless and arrogant way, with total disregard and contempt for Parliament and the views of the majority of people in this country.

At this moment of maximum peril for the United Kingdom, we have a Prime Minister and a Government who resort to trickery, and who say one thing to Parliament

[Mr Ben Bradshaw]

and the public one day and do another thing the next. Most Members of this House are prepared to live up to our responsibilities and find a way out of this crisis. If the Government do not allow us to do that, Parliament will have to do it for ourselves.

My message for those Ministers in the Government whom we are told could not under any circumstances contemplate a crash-out no-deal Brexit, some of whom might be prepared to tolerate a less damaging, softer Brexit, or even a public vote, is that the next few days are their chance finally to stand up and be counted and to do what is in the national interest. They have been played. They have been had by this Prime Minister. They have put their trust in her and she has betrayed them. The next few days will be the moment of truth for them: will they finally do what they need to do in the national interest to prevent this kamikaze Prime Minister from driving this country to destruction, for which she and they will never be forgiven?

6.7 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Without using vocabulary that I think you would find unacceptable, Mr Speaker, I cannot adequately convey the extent of my disgust at how the Prime Minister is treating Parliament. Together, we are the elected representatives of the people of the United Kingdom, yet the Prime Minister has treated us with serial contempt, as have her Executive.

Today's discussion about the extension of article 50 is the latest in a long line. There can be no doubt that when last Thursday we voted by a big majority to approve the Government's motion, we were voting to sanction a short extension in circumstances where the withdrawal agreement was approved, and a long extension in circumstances where it was not. There is no ambiguity whatsoever about that point, so for the Prime Minister then to seek a short extension without any approval of the withdrawal agreement is to turn the truth on its head and wilfully misrepresent the opinions of this Parliament. To people who are watching, and in particular to the leaders of the other European countries who will assemble in Brussels tomorrow, I say that when this British Prime Minister speaks tomorrow, she does not do so in our name and she does not represent our views.

We have had a long two and a half years of this Prime Minister refusing to countenance or accept any political view that is not found in the ranks of her own narrow governing party. She has ignored other points of view and tried to appease the unappeasable, and she stands accused of consistently putting her party before her country. By now, any reasonable and rational Prime Minister, having faced the scale of defeat over the length of time that she has, would have concluded either that she should leave the terrain altogether, or that it was time to go back to the drawing board, remove the arbitrary and erroneous red lines that she set at the beginning and reach out and try to build a new political consensus in this Parliament and in this country. The fact that she is unable and unwilling to do so is a matter of considerable regret and the people will judge her for it. It is not too late.

We now need a lengthy extension to this process—for as long as it does indeed take—in order to begin to create that new political consensus. My party stands

willing to be part of that discussion, although what we will agree to will be determined by an ability to put whatever finds a route to a majority in this Parliament again before the people of the United Kingdom to allow them the final say. To those who are hiding behind a distant and narrow mandate, I ask: what are they afraid of? If they really believe that this withdrawal deal is what 17 million people voted for, why not put it to them and let them decide?

6.10 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): We have been given these choices: deal or no deal; and then deal or no Brexit. We now face a situation of chaos. One million people or more will probably be marching over the weekend to ask for the right to have a final say. The Government say that they are implementing the will of the people. If their deal is the will of the people, they should put it to the people to decide. We cannot agree in this place. We voted down this deal by 230 and then by 149, and often for opposite reasons. One set of people say that we are not aligned enough with the EU, and the other that we are too much aligned with the EU. We cannot agree, so the deal should be put to the people. If this deal represents the will of the people, the people should decide.

This debate is about how long the extension should be. I put it to the Government that we should be requesting at least 22 weeks—five months—to allow time for a referendum. We probably could do with nine months if we are to look at the options. However, there is a real risk that the Government will go forward without a purpose, and we will simply be rejected by the EU, which will then force us into a situation where we will have either to take a no deal or to revoke article 50. In those circumstances, I very much hope that the Government choose to revoke article 50, because the people want to carry on with business as usual and not to have to face chaos.

In Swansea, people who voted leave voted in good faith for more money, more control, more trade, and more jobs. They are telling me now that they did not vote leave to leave their jobs. They can see that they will not get the trade and they can see that they will not get the control. They will not get the money, because there is a divorce bill. It is a complete shambles. People are not getting what they want. The Government are not representing the leave voters in Swansea and those voters now want the final say and they deserve that final say. That is what democracy is all about. Democracy is the right to change one's mind. People are dying for that. Keynes famously said:

“When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do?”

The facts have changed. When we had that vote, we did not have Donald Trump running around threatening people and undermining trade deals, environmental deals and world security. We did not have the Chinese getting rid of their democracy. We will be smashed between those two powers when we are trying to secure trade deals. We need to be part of Europe and share the values of Europe—of human rights, the rule of law and democracy. We need to work together in an uncertain world. People have woken up to the fact that that means staying in the EU. It is all very well having these stupid populist sayings, such as “take back control” and all the rest of it. People may have voted for that, but they now

realise that they are losing control. There are those who say, “Oh, well, people will be angry.” The fact is that people will be absolutely enraged when they lose their jobs.

We are seeing the outbreak of populism, fascism and violence. *The Daily Mail* reported a case of a woman who was beaten to a pulp by people who said, “You’re from Poland, go home.” This is what is happening as a result of Brexit. It must be stopped. The people demand a final say and it is our duty to deliver it.

6.13 pm

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): It is our job as MPs to speak the truth as we see it and to defend the interests of our country and of our constituents—in my case the people of Croydon. It is very hard to find the words to express the horror, the incredulity and the fear that those of us on these Opposition Benches and many, many on the Government Benches feel at the situation in which we find ourselves. There are nine days until we are due to leave the EU and we have no plan. The Prime Minister’s deal has been voted down in historic proportions twice, and yet she has written today to the European Council setting out her intention to try to get it through for a third time. We know, of course, that the Prime Minister’s deal was rejected because it is deeply flawed. The *Financial Times* said yesterday that

“although Ms. May’s package is often called a deal it is little more than a standstill agreement. She has bought 21 months of armistice in return for an indefinite continuation of the conflict.”

And we know that if her deal did pass, she would be replaced, most likely by an even more hard-line leader who would take us even further into isolation and economic decline.

The Prime Minister’s deal is something that this House could not agree to; it has no legitimacy and it does not have our support. Donald Tusk has confirmed this afternoon that, in his view, a short extension should be conditional on the Prime Minister’s deal passing, so it is clear that the Prime Minister will try to run down the clock, and blackmail, cajole and threaten us into voting for her deal in order to avoid no deal. But it is also clear that this House will not be bullied into voting to make our constituents poorer.

In her short time in this post, the Prime Minister has done irrevocable damage: to the basic principles of democracy, trust and integrity in this place; to our reputation around the world, which was so great when we hosted the Olympics in 2010, but is so trashed now; to our economy, as business shies away from investment, fearful of what she will do next; and to our constituents, who suffer from low pay, a cheap state and the politics of cut and care nothing.

This is very much a live situation, with the Leader of the Opposition in talks with the EU, trying to decide the best course of action, and the Prime Minister apparently ready to make a statement tonight. But we have nine days to avoid no deal, and avoid it we must. The Prime Minister must change course, shift her position and work across the House to find a solution; she must listen to the Father of the House and hold a series of indicative votes; and she must consider the best compromise in town, the Kyle-Wilson amendment. The Prime Minister must put country before party and, at this eleventh hour, do the right thing. If she does, we will all thank her for it.

6.16 pm

Keir Starmer: Mr Speaker, thank you again for granting this debate today. The extension of article 50 is an important issue and this has been an important debate, and it would not have happened but for this Standing Order No. 24 application and debate. I thank everybody who has contributed. There have been some very powerful speeches, and I think that there is a clear theme: a deep concern about the course of action that the Government are pursuing. It is reckless to seek just a short extension for the purposes of putting the same deal back up and to introduce a new cliff edge at the end of the exercise, and it does increase the risk of no deal. That has been the constant theme through so many of the speeches this afternoon. It is not what this House voted for last week, both in terms of the motions that were passed or the spirit of those motions; it is clearly not what this House wants.

I hope that the Government have been listening to the debate, and I hope that they will—even at this eleventh hour—reflect on the course of action and take a different course, which is to recognise that this deal is not fit to be put before the House for a third time, and that the alternative course of providing a process so that the House can come together, find a majority, move forward and break the impasse is needed now more than ever. It is my privilege to close this debate on this important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of the length and purpose of the extension of the Article 50 process requested by the Government.

Mr Speaker: I now have to announce the result of today’s deferred Divisions. In respect of the Question relating to consumer protection, the Ayes were 313 and the Noes were 267, so the Question was agreed to. In respect of the Question relating to the annulment of amendments to the Integrated Care Regulations 2019, the Ayes were 216 and the Noes were 317, so the Question was negatived. In respect of the Question relating to organic production and control of imports, the Ayes were 315 and the Noes were 39, so the Question was agreed to. In respect of the Question relating to organic production and control, the Ayes were 315 and the Noes were 38, so the Question was agreed to.

[*The Division lists are published at the end of today’s debates.*]

RATING AND VALUATION

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Rates Retention and Levy and Safety Net) (Amendment) and (Levy Account: Basis of Distribution) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 21 February, be approved.—(*Jeremy Quin.*)

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I remind the House that the motion is subject to double-majority voting: of the whole House and of Members representing constituencies in England.

The House having divided: Ayes 297, Noes 196.

Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England: Ayes 268, Noes 168.

Division No. 371]

[6.19 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve

Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie

Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote cast by Tracey Crouch*)
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa

Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John

Wiggin, Bill
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Rebecca Harris and
Amanda Milling

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Leslie*)
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Crausby, Sir David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Dakin, Nic
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Debonnaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim

Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
George, Ruth
Glendon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hillier, Meg
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Killen, Ged
Kinnoek, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*)
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Shabana

Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Norris, Alex
Onasanya, Fiona
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt

Rowley, Danielle
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sherriff, Paula
Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft*)
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Tami, rh Mark
Thomas, Gareth
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Williams, Dr Paul
Wilson, Phil
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to make a point of order before the start of the next debate, but during the vote, the Leader of the House walked into the Chamber and shouted angrily at me, jabbing her finger, saying that she deserved an apology from me because I, alongside other Members of all parties, had raised concerns about her comments on LGBT education earlier today. Do you think that it is appropriate for the Leader of the House to shout and jab her finger at another Member rather than raising the matter in private in an appropriate way, given that she is responsible for tackling bullying and for conduct in this House?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point of order. It is not a matter for the Chair, as I suspect he knows, but obviously we wish right hon. and hon. Members to behave with decorum.

Education

6.37 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I beg to move,

That the draft Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 25 February, be approved.

The regulations represent an historic step that will equip children and young people with the knowledge they need to lead safe, healthy and happy lives.

The world children are growing up in has changed considerably since the sex and relationship guidance for schools was last updated in 2000. Thanks to the internet, children are encountering a more interconnected and interdependent world. That presents opportunities and advantages, but also risks, as children have greater exposure to information, content and people that can and do cause harm. That is why, during the passage of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, thanks to the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and other hon. Members, the Government introduced an amendment to that measure requiring the introduction of compulsory relationships education for all primary school pupils and compulsory relationships and sex education for all secondary school pupils.

Having listened to concerns about mental health, the impact of the online world and long-standing risks related to unhealthy lifestyles, we also decided to make health education compulsory in all state-funded schools.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Although I accept that the proposal is necessary in this day and age, does the Minister accept that, in politics, we have to take people with us, otherwise it causes a great deal of resentment among our constituents? Many of my constituents do not go along with the proposal and there is a great deal of concern in the Muslim community and among those of Christian faith.

Nick Gibb: I do understand my hon. Friend's concerns. We worked very hard during and after the consultation process to ensure that we could assemble the widest possible consensus on the new draft guidance. We accept that it contains some very sensitive issues and I understand that some parents have legitimate concerns about their involvement in their child's education, particularly in primary schools. We have considered that very carefully.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I thank the Minister for giving way. I think he knows what I am going to ask him, because he has been very helpful prior to this debate. What can he say to reassure, for example, the Muslim community in relation to these proposals? Can he provide some reassurance to them?

Nick Gibb: I can give the hon. Gentleman, the Muslim community and other communities who share those concerns outside this House the assurance that schools will be required, for example, to consult with parents on their relationships education, and on relationships and sex education policies. One key purpose is to help to minimise any misconception about the subjects and what might be taught, and to enable parents to decide

whether to request, for example, that their child is withdrawn from sex education. We encourage schools to engage proactively with parents to set out how and when they plan to cover topics included in relationships education and RSE, so that parents can understand what is going to be taught. This means ensuring that parents know what they can and cannot withdraw their children from, that they can have an input into policies, and have sufficient time and notice to make an informed decision about whether to withdraw their children from sex education.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Traditionally, Conservative Governments have held the line that parents have an unfettered right to withdraw their children from sex education. Under the proposals, it will for the first time be possible at certain ages for that parental veto to be overridden. What I want from the Minister, if I may ask for this, is a commitment that it will be used very rarely, that the headteacher will have to justify his actions, that it will only be used in certain circumstances where it is definitely in the interests of the child, perhaps because of some behavioural issue, and that it will not be taken as a matter of course that the veto of parents is being overridden.

Nick Gibb: I will come on to that specific point later in my opening remarks, but I can give my right hon. Friend the reassurance that only in exceptional circumstances will the school not respect parents' request to withdraw their child from sex education in secondary school. There is an absolute right for parents to withdraw their child from sex education in primary school.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): This is always a sensitive subject, but we are talking about giving information to children about the daily reality of some of their contemporaries. Does the Minister not agree that we are talking about doing this in an atmosphere where we have seen what happens when being LGBT is somehow hidden and ashamed? It leads to bullying, high levels of self-hatred and mental health issues, self-harm and sometimes even suicide. Will he not just listen to those who wish completely to separate their children from basic human knowledge about the reality for LGBT pupils in schools?

Nick Gibb: That is, of course, one of the purposes of introducing the regulations today and the guidance is very clear about the importance of LGBT issues. However, we also want to make sure that we have a wide consensus on these issues. They are ultimately a matter for teachers in schools to decide. I will come on to that point in a little more detail.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Minister, like others in this Chamber I have a real concern over the rights of parents. I hope the right hon. Gentleman will be able to help me on a specific point relating to the regulations that I know many others cannot understand. Given that RSE is to be taught in secondary school, how will it be possible to withdraw a child from sex education but not relationships education? Logically, a withdrawal from sex education must surely also be a withdrawal from relationship education unless the two subjects are taught separately. What is it to be: teaching RSE as an integrated subject with the right of withdrawal from RSE as a

whole; or splitting the subjects in two, so that one can apply the right of withdrawal to just sex education? It is either one or the other.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before the Minister replies, I remind the Chamber that a lot of hon. Members wish to speak, so interventions need to be brief.

Nick Gibb: The right is for parents to withdraw their child from the sex education element of relationships and sex education. When it passed the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the House made it very clear that there would be no right for parents to seek their children's withdrawal from the relationships element of this new compulsory part of the curriculum, either at primary or secondary level.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The Minister will be aware—not only from comments made in this Chamber, but from his mailbag—of the very considerable concerns of many people in the community. He said that teachers will decide; does that not sum up one of the fundamental issues? There seems to be no external reference mechanism able to arbitrate if discussions break down between the parents and the heads and teachers. How will we resolve that? We need to resolve it before we impose the policy on schools, do we not?

Nick Gibb: The purpose of requiring consultation between the school and parental groups is to dispel the myths that build up about the content. If parents have concerns about the content that is being taught, schools should take them very seriously. We worked very carefully on the wording of the draft guidance, to bring as many people as possible on board, and we are giving schools discretion over when to teach some of the more sensitive subjects. The compulsion is to ensure that those issues are covered at some point during the children's education, but when that happens will be a matter for the schools to decide. Schools also have to take into account the faith backgrounds of the pupils and their parents.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab) rose—

Nick Gibb: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman and then make some progress.

Liam Byrne: I am grateful. As the Minister knows, I have worked with his officials every day for the past month on one of the issues in one of my schools. The parents at that school believe that the Equality Act 2010 and every single protected characteristic in it should be taught, but as a result of the breakdown in consultation, the regional schools commissioner, an independent arbitrator appointed by the Department and I have had to come in and spend a month on the matter. Surely that situation cannot be replicated in thousands of primary schools if there is a breakdown of trust, so we need more prescriptive guidance to ensure that there is no retreat from the aims of this proposal.

Nick Gibb: The policy makes it very clear that there should be consultation between the schools and parents; that the schools should publish on their websites the details of what is to be taught; and that parents should be given plenty of notice, so that there is time for their input into the development of that policy. They need to

know that if the school takes a different decision, they can, ultimately, withdraw their child from the sex element of RSE in secondary schools.

The new subjects will put in place the building blocks that children need to develop healthy, positive, respectful and safe relationships of all kinds, starting with lessons at primary school about family and friends. At secondary school, what is taught in relationships and sex education will expand to reflect the person as a potential partner and parent; for example, teaching will include the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy intimate relationships, the roles and responsibilities of parents with respect to raising children, and the positive effect that good relationships can have on mental wellbeing. These subjects give us the opportunity to help to protect children and promote personal development and positive character attributes such as honesty, integrity, kindness, resilience and courtesy.

All children will be taught about online relationships and about how behaviour should be the same online as in other contexts. At age-appropriate points, they will be taught about specific online issues, such as who and what to trust, or sharing information. In secondary schools, they will be taught about the dangers and the potential impact of sexually explicit content.

Health education will give us the opportunity to drive up the consistency and quality of pupils' knowledge about physical and mental health. Physical health and mental wellbeing are interlinked. It is important that pupils understand that good physical health contributes to good mental wellbeing, and this starts with pupils being taught about the benefits of daily exercise, good nutrition and sufficient sleep, and about the positive impact that self-care techniques can have on their health and wellbeing.

Effective teaching will give children the knowledge to recognise and seek help for poor mental and physical health and support them to promote positive mental and physical wellbeing and to thrive both at and beyond school.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I welcome the inclusion of mental health and wellbeing in the compulsory curriculum, but how it is taught—ensuring that teachers are properly trained and that the training is sufficiently resourced—will be critical. Does the Minister have an expectation of how many staff will be trained to teach mental health and wellbeing in schools?

Nick Gibb: The right hon. Gentleman, a former Health Minister, raises an important point. We want to make sure that the training material is available—we are allocating £6 million in the relevant financial year to prepare and produce essential resources—and that training, both online and face to face, is available so that our teachers are well equipped to teach this subject properly.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Minister may be aware that on Monday the all-party group on social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing, which I co-chair, published its report, “#NewFilters: to manage the impact of social media on young people's mental health and wellbeing”. The report makes recommendations on improving digital education. Will he consider looking at the report and meeting me and the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), the co-chair, to discuss the recommendations and see if

[Chris Elmore]

they could be implemented across the English education system? I will be doing the same with Welsh and Scottish Education Ministers.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just told me that he and I would be keen to meet the hon. Gentleman and the other members of the all-party group to discuss these really important issues. The guidance refers to the importance of teaching children about the importance of rationing time spent online, given that it detracts from other aspects of life, such as sleeping, friends, talking to parents and doing homework.

I acknowledge the significant input we had from external organisations and educational professionals, from the tens of thousands of individuals who contributed to the call for evidence and public consultation, and indeed from right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who contributed constructively.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): One reason I support the Government's move is that all the evidence shows that good sex and relationships education enables youngsters to delay their first experience of sex, make healthier decisions about their sexual relationships and to enter into healthier sexual relationships throughout their whole lives. Does the Minister not find it utterly depressing that the one bit that people seem to object to is that pupils might be "exposed"—not my word, but other people's—to the fact that there are homosexuals in society, and is that not deeply painful to gay parents, to children who might be gay or have gay uncles, aunts or other family members and to gay teachers?

Nick Gibb: One of the key elements of relationships education is ensuring that children are aware, including in primary schools, that loving families can be made up of two mothers, two fathers or one mother and one father. Children are being taught that other family structures are just as loving and caring as their own. There is a consensus on that among all right hon. and hon. Members.

The responses and submissions have helped to finalise the statutory guidance and regulations. It is clear, as was reflected in the Government consultation response, that there are understandable and legitimate areas of contention, but it is also clear that for many people the subjects and their content are important to help equip children and young people to manage the challenges they face. It is important to provide clear and concise guidance for schools. In reviewing responses and determining the final content, we have retained a focus on the core principles for the new subjects that Parliament endorsed through the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Those principles are that the subjects should help to keep children safe, help to prepare them for the world in which they are growing up, including its laws, and help to foster respect for others and for difference. The content included must be developmentally and age-appropriate, and it must be taught in a sensitive and inclusive way that respects the backgrounds and beliefs of pupils. We believe that in developing the accompanying statutory guidance and required content for these subjects, we have struck the right balance between prescribing

the core knowledge that all pupils should be taught and allowing flexibility for schools to design a curriculum that is relevant to their pupils.

Parents and carers are the prime teachers for children, and schools complement and reinforce that role by building on what pupils learn at home. That is why we decided to strengthen the requirement for schools to consult parents on their relationships and relationships and sex education policy by enshrining it in the regulations as well as the guidance.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Nick Gibb: I will not, if the hon. Lady will forgive me.

Schools must consult parents on their proposed policy and any subsequent reviews; giving them the time and the opportunity to influence the curriculum and discuss their views on age-appropriate content. We have also retained the long-standing ability for parents to request that their children be withdrawn from sex education. When a primary school chooses to teach sex education, parents will have the right to request that their children be withdrawn, and that must be granted by the headteacher. At secondary schools, in the case of sex education within RSE, the school should respect the parents' request to withdraw the child, unless there are very exceptional circumstances, up to and until three terms before the child turns 16. At that point, if the child wishes to take part in sex education, the headteacher should ensure that they receive it in one of those terms.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I welcome the intention behind this move. As a parent, I see the pressure to which our children are subjected today and the extraordinary anxiety that is caused by many of the influences that they are under. It must be right to help them, particularly in relation to health. However, may I ask my right hon. Friend a question about parental opt-out? It has always been our party's view, and the view of the House, that we should tread very gently when we step, as a state, between parent and child. Will he reassure me that there is some protection when it comes to the basis on which the state will decide that there are exceptional circumstances in which a parent can be overruled?

Nick Gibb: My hon. Friend should be reassured that they will be very exceptional circumstances. For example, if a child has experienced a sexual incident, perhaps with another child, or inappropriate touching, a headteacher may decide not to grant the request. The key point is, however, that it will be the circumstances of the child and not the views of the headteacher that will lead to that decision.

We could not have retained the right to withdraw as it currently stands, because an absolute parental right up to the point when the child is 18 years old is no longer compatible with English case law and the European convention on human rights. However, we have delivered on our commitment to maintain a right for parents to withdraw their children from sex education that is also compatible with the law.

We are committed to ensuring that every school will have the support that it needs to deliver these subjects to a high and consistent quality. We will therefore be

investing in tools that will improve schools' practice, such as a supplementary guide to support the delivery of the content set out in the guidance, targeted support on materials and training. As I said to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), we have up to £6 million to invest in the development of those tools this year. We are also encouraging as many schools as possible to start teaching the subjects from September 2019, so that we can learn lessons and share good practice ahead of compulsory teaching.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Nick Gibb: I will not, because I am about to finish my speech.

We believe that our proposals are a landmark step. They will bring existing guidance into the 21st century, and will introduce new content that will help to equip children and young people with the knowledge that they need to form healthy relationships, lead healthy lives and be happy and safe in the world. I commend them to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before I call the shadow Secretary of State, colleagues will I hope be aware that this debate finishes at seven minutes past 8, so after the shadow Secretary of State has spoken, I will impose an immediate five-minute time limit, and it will come down after that. If any colleagues feel that their interventions mean they do not need to make further contributions, I am sure other colleagues would appreciate that, and they can let me know and withdraw their names if they wish to.

7 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): First, may I thank the Minister for his opening remarks and the tone in which he made them and for the interventions he took and ask Members to be respectful of others who want to contribute to the debate by not intervening too much?

The issue we are speaking about today is a fundamental human right, and it is absolutely right that we discuss it on the Floor of the House. The world that our children face has changed beyond recognition since our own childhoods, and it is already far too long since we last updated the guidance on sex and relationship education. The use and reach of technology has grown at an unprecedented pace and our society has changed, too, in many ways for the better, and I welcome the Minister's opening remarks in particular around online safety and mental health and wellbeing.

The Equality Act 2010 and equal marriage have both been passed by this House under Governments of different parties, and I hope we have led as well as reflected the changes that have happened in social attitudes. Today, we have the chance to do so again, and I am glad that this has been taken forward over many years on a cross-party basis, reflecting a consensus that cannot simply be thrown away when Governments change.

I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) as well as many others, and I must also pay tribute to my

hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) who I was sad to lose from our Front Bench and who made a positive impact not least on shaping the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which legislated for universal SRE. There are many Government Members, too, who have made these reforms possible. In particular, let me acknowledge the roles played by the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee and the former Secretary of State the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening), who was instrumental in bringing these changes forward.

Reform is necessary and I hope that the cross-party agreement will be reflected by all Members of this House, because it is clear this week that we must send an unequivocal message. There is a moral obligation on us to show political leadership in updating these regulations. We must ensure that every child in England today learns about healthy relationships when growing up, but it is absolutely essential that they learn about their own identities. On this point, I hope that the Minister will explain what the guidance means when it says that it "expects" all children to be taught about LGBT issues.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a very strong speech, and she rightly mentioned mental health and the wellbeing of young people. Does she agree that all the more reason why we need LGBT+ inclusive education and SRE is because the mental health particularly of young LGBT people and especially trans young people is often at great risk?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend is right, and the statistics lay bare the devastating lifelong impacts if we cannot ensure every child is celebrated for who they are, which I am sure is what we all want across the House.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): One of the most moving days of my life was when my youngest son George told me, his father and his brother that he was gay. I will never forget the look of relief on George's face when he told us, and we had a family hug. Today, I would like us to think about all those LGBT children and young people out there who do not have a family to hug them. So I ask that there is a guaranteed requirement that every child will be taught about LGBT issues—or is there a risk that some LGBT children in particular, like my George, will miss out on this part of their education?

Angela Rayner: I welcome my hon. Friend's powerful intervention, which shows the whole House that there is an obligation on us all to ensure that support is available. I also pay tribute to the Government for bringing forward these regulations. There is no opt-out from the Equality Act 2010, and we have to ensure that all schools understand the obligations and that we work with society and do not push back from the gains that we have made over the years and decades. We must support society and our young people, who actually lead the way a lot of the time on these issues. We must listen to them and show them that we love and respect them for who they are and that we will help them to grow.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is often not the wider society but young people who lead the way and that this

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

House can help to frame the discussion that will take place in the wider communities? These regulations are really important in ensuring that we frame the debate in a positive way rather than in a negative one, which is in danger of happening in some corners of this country.

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Far be it from me to say that this House can sometimes be prehistoric when it comes to moving forward, but I do believe that young people challenge us, as we saw with the recent climate change strikes. We have to listen to young people, as they often show us that we can be a more tolerant, more equal, more loving and more respectful society.

LGBT issues are not something that can be detached from the society in which our young people are growing up and to which they are exposed. LGBT people will be their friends, their families, their teachers and of course some of the children being taught. They must know that, throughout their education, they will get the support that they need. Teaching LGBT awareness does not make someone any more or less LGBT, but it does teach people the facts and dispel the myths, to ensure that our young people feel loved and valued for who they are. For all the positive social change that has been achieved, nearly half of all LGBT young people are bullied in school for their sexuality, and half of them do not tell anyone about it. More than three in five lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have self-harmed, and the figure rises to more than four in five among trans students. Perhaps most devastating of all is the fact that one in five lesbian, gay and bisexual students have tried to take their own lives, as have more than two in five trans people.

We agree on the need for these reforms, but we must ensure that they are properly implemented. The Minister has said that there will be a £6 million budget for school support, training and resources, but if that were to be spread across all of England's 23,000-plus schools, it would amount to about £254 per school. Does he really believe that schools will have the resources they need to deliver this curriculum? Perhaps he will tell us later how this funding will be distributed, and how many schools can expect to get it in the first year. Also, will every teacher who requests training in the new subject be able to access it? If not, how many does he believe will have received such training by September 2019 and 2020? Does he believe that this funding is enough to ensure that the new curriculum is available to all pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, in all mainstream and special schools?

Will the Minister tell the House what steps he will be taking to monitor the implementation of the new curriculum, and in particular, how he will ensure that every child gets the education that they are entitled to? Will he also tell us what support will be given to the teachers who are delivering it? We have already seen the challenges now facing some schools in delivering similar subjects. What action will he take to monitor how the new curriculum is being implemented? What action will be taken if schools are not delivering it?

Stella Creasy: I am a member of the generation that had to deal with section 28, and we do not want to go back to that. What words of reassurance does my

hon. Friend think we need to hear from the Government tonight for those parents who are concerned about sending their child to school and finding that their child and their family relationship, because they have two mums or two dads, is suddenly being judged or excluded from the curriculum?

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend makes an important point but, without putting words in his mouth, some of the Minister's opening remarks were absolutely right. Most people would support relationships education when they understand what it is about. We have made great progress, and I honestly think this is a tolerant, supportive and loving society. Some would not accept it, but we cannot row back from the advances we have collectively made together. I hope that the whole House will send that message across all our communities and say that this is what we want: healthy, resilient young people who will be happy into adulthood.

The regulations require the Secretary of State to review the guidance from time to time, but I am sure the Minister agrees that, with the pace of change in modern society, we will need to do so regularly. Will he confirm that he will look again at the guidance at least every few years? The option for young people to opt back in to SRE is an important one, and it is right that the guidance acknowledges the voice of young people in such decisions about their education, but can the Minister explain why the opt-in begins only from three terms before turning 16? As it stands, even in secondary schools, children will not have the right to opt in. Given that the curriculum will always be age appropriate, does he believe this age cut-off and the opt-out are genuinely necessary? Will he look again at these issues once the new guidance has bedded in?

The guidance has specific provisions requiring schools to take the religious background of all their pupils into account in teaching SRE. This flexibility can be useful, although we must be clear that there can be no opting out of the Equality Act 2010 and that all schools must teach the law on these issues so their pupils understand it. I hope that the Minister will echo that point.

As the Minister said, schools, particularly faith schools, remain able to teach distinctive faith perspectives on these issues. However, I know there are still concerns in some faith communities and, of course, we want to ensure our education system is inclusive in the widest possible sense. For example, I recently met representatives of the orthodox Jewish community, which has particular concerns not just about the curriculum but about Ofsted that I hope can be addressed.

For this to succeed, we must take parents from all our communities and all backgrounds with us. As the Minister stated, concerns that arise are often based on misunderstandings of what is being taught, and good parental engagement can avoid that. I hope that the Government will support schools on that, but I also hope that the Government are prepared to investigate and intervene, where necessary, to ensure that schools are following the Equality Act and that the Minister will come back to update the House.

We are concerned that the Government's structural reforms to the school system have made it more difficult for parents to have their concerns heard at a school level. The shift to academies and the removal of parent governors can lead to the perception that decisions are

made by managers in academy trusts that are remote from local schools and communities. That damages the relationship between parents and schools, and it works against early and effective engagement.

The new guidance requires schools to discuss the new curriculum with parents, and it suggests an open dialogue on this subject. I believe that it is best left to schools to work in their own communities, but there must be support from the Government. If this House passes the guidance today, as I hope it will, we are asking teachers and schools to deliver that curriculum. We must give them political leadership and support in doing so. I hope that the message will be made loud and clear, not just by the Minister today, but by the Secretary of State as well.

It is rare, at a time when we are so divided, to see those on this side of the House in agreement with the Government, but that is the case today. I hope that we can agree this measure without dissent and make it clear to the whole country that it represents the will of the whole House. Of course, as shadow Education Secretary, I believe that there is room to improve the guidance and that a Labour Government will do so, but we can take a giant step forward today by passing these regulations. They are badly needed to ensure that every child grows up safe and happy. It is our absolute duty as Members of this House to make that happen. This may be the only time that I say this from this Despatch Box, but I, too, commend this motion to the House.

7.15 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I, too, rise to support these regulations and guidance, and I thank Ministers for the constructive engagement with Members from across the House that they have exhibited in preparation for these regulations. Through engaging, they have struck a right but difficult balance, so I am pleased to broadly support these regulations, particularly given their emphasis on teaching about relationships; the sex element is compulsory only in secondary schools.

Young people are being taught to develop healthy relationships, both physical and mental, and about maintaining relationships so that their relationships can endure, which is what they aspire to. They are being taught about the nature of marriage, and its importance for family life and the bringing up of children. The fact that schools can choose the resources they use to teach RSE is very important, particularly for faith schools, which will be able to have regard to the religious background of pupils, as is the fact that materials should be age appropriate.

I know that some colleagues have reservations about the qualified right of parental withdrawal, but I am pleased that the Schools Minister has said that this will be used in very exceptional circumstances. I ask him to reflect on the following words of the then Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families during the passage of the Children and Social Work Act 2017:

“We have committed to retain a right to withdraw from sex education in RSE, because parents should have the right, if they wish, to teach sex education themselves in a way that is consistent with their values.”—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2017; Vol. 622, c. 705.]

In other words, where a parent withdraws their child from sex education for reasons of religious belief up to the age of 15, that right of withdrawal should normally

be respected. The exceptional circumstances we are speaking of would be there to deal with exceptional safeguarding issues, such as those involving children with special educational needs or other vulnerable needs. I would be grateful if the Minister could clarify that. He has referred to the anticipated supplemental guidance about the implementation of this curriculum, and it would be helpful if further information could be given about the right of withdrawal. Could the Minister clarify that the focus of these exceptional circumstances is to be safeguarding issues?

On working with parents and the wider community, I very much welcome paragraphs 40 to 44 of the guidance, which set out that schools should work closely with parents when planning and delivering the subjects. Good engagement is essential, but it does not always happen enough between schools and parents, and between children and parents. Anything Ministers can do to encourage this would be welcome. For example, parental involvement could be enhanced if some of the curriculum is digital and online. Some very good materials are available on the digital platform provided by OnePlusOne, such as those on how to communicate better with a partner, on conflict resolution and on how to see the best in one's partner. It would be very helpful if parents could be given access to such modules, in order to learn what their children will be taught and, if necessary, then to be able to communicate with the school

The other key issue has been touched on already: how the new curriculum requirements will be applied by Ofsted when the inspector calls. I raised this issue in the Westminster Hall debate in February, and it is crucial to the implementation of these regulations. The draft inspection framework for Ofsted inspectors is out for consultation until 5 April, for a roll-out in September, ahead of the implementation of the RSE and health education curriculum requirements we are discussing today. Will the Minister assure me that the new guidance and regulations, and good practice, that we are discussing today will be embedded in the new Ofsted framework? I say that because my reading of that framework is that the primary legislative requirement for the new curriculum to have regard both to age appropriateness and pupils' religious background is not reflected in the inspection framework. We very much welcome the fact that that is reflected in the guidance. I welcome in particular paragraphs 19 to 22 of the guidance, and particularly the confirmation that schools can

“reflect on faith teachings about certain topics”,

but it would be helpful if the Ofsted inspection framework also referred to the new curriculum and how it will apply to inspectors' judgments. As we have heard, concerns have been expressed, and I have received concerns from parents of children at Jewish schools who feel that Ofsted inspectors' questions were not age-appropriate and did not reflect the religious principles regarding their relationships.

7.20 pm

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I spoke about RSE and the issues relating to it most recently in a Westminster Hall debate. It is fair to say that that speech gained quite a social media reaction, and the past couple of weeks have been a difficult and challenging experience: difficult because I have been forced to confront head-on the appalling reality that my

[*Shabana Mahmood*]

comments and, in a number of instances, the reporting on my comments has led some to think me a homophobe; and challenging because I have felt that my intentions, which were to get a fair hearing for everyone and give voice to people who have felt excluded from a process, have been both lost and misunderstood.

Let me be clear: I think RSE should be taught in schools; that the curriculum should be inclusive of all, and that includes the LGBT community; and that all of it should be taught at the right age and in the right way. I continue to call out in the strongest terms the homophobic banners, chanting and hostile protests at Parkfield School in Birmingham, because they are wrong and feed the very prejudices that I want to help to eradicate. I am happy to discuss, debate and listen to all communities, but I have been a little taken aback by some of the comments made about my position, some of which have been quite simply untrue.

My involvement first came about when a large number of parents turned up at my weekly advice surgery in January. They had come to share with me their concerns about a lack of proper engagement ahead of changes to RSE at the schools their kids attend and the delivery of education under the purview of the Equality Act. They were measured and respectful, but also genuinely angry and frustrated. Why? Because there had been a breakdown of trust between the school leadership and the parent body. It was, and is, my hope to restore that bond of trust, but we must all reflect on and learn from how it came to pass. It is not a breakdown born of bigotry or hate; it is one born, for the most part, of a failure of process, policy and oversight.

Under the new guidelines, schools will make choices about what they think the best approach is; indeed, a variety of approaches will be developed, all achieving the same end but in different ways. It is imperative that there is honesty and trust between schools and parents. If a school leadership team oversells and overstates, or undersells and understates, what is required, in order to duck challenging conversations about the choices and discretion that the law allows them, we will have conflict where there need be none.

We need to bottom-out what good consultation looks like, because in my part of Birmingham there are many examples of bad consultation. I have been heartbroken to see the contempt with which some parents in my constituency have been treated. Some deeply troubling and discriminatory assumptions—that because these people look a certain way, they will think a certain way—lie at the heart of that treatment.

So, where is the dispute resolution process to fix this mess? Any sensible person would say that we must either construct a system designed to stop disputes occurring in the first place, or have a system to deal with them once they have occurred. What we actually have is a system that assumes there will not be any disputes at all. That does a disservice to everyone, not least of all the children. Where they still exert control, local education authorities can respond and move quickly to ensure that everyone is represented within a structure that is designed to stop disputes and foster a sense of shared mission between different minority communities, but academies are not designed in that way, and that is a real problem.

It is a matter of profound regret to me that the clash between rights and the role of the state, and the issue of whether all our protected characteristics are protected equally, have found themselves played out in our classrooms. The question of what happens when there is a clash remains. If others, like me, happen to think it is not possible to Twitter-storm out of existence everyone with a view different from their own, a different approach is required—one that is focused on dispute resolution, negotiation, compromise and reconciliation.

It is terrible to see communities pitted against one another. We cannot allow hard-won advances for the LGBT community to be quietly rolled back, but nor can we allow faith to be re-badged as bigotry or shout down those with sincere questions or concerns. Hard conversations cannot be avoided forever. This very institution must ultimately be the one that reconciles the competing rights and needs of different groups, which is what the guidance clearly seeks to achieve. My fear, though, is that without more, it will fall short.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I will now impose a four-minute time limit, and I have informed the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) of that.

7.25 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I rise to speak in support of the statutory instrument before us today, and to congratulate my right hon. Friends sitting on the Front Bench on doing what no other Ministers have been able to do for almost two decades. That deserves fulsome congratulations from every Member of this House. As has been said, the world has changed for our children—changed beyond all recognition. This SI rewrites the statutory guidance for schools to deliver relationships and sex education that is actually relevant for our children and not of a bygone age, and it is long overdue.

The internet proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. An issue around which we can all unite is the appalling impact of the social media and the online world on our children's lives. After years of campaigning for change by numerous organisations outside of here and by many, many individuals inside this House, it was the impact of the internet that proved to be the uniting factor—the factor that meant we could no longer ignore the need for change. It is important to recognise that that is what happened. It was the House of Commons making its voice heard.

Two years ago, on 27 February 2017, my then colleague David Burrowes and I tabled new clause 5 to the Children and Social Work Bill with the support of 46 cross-party MPs, including the hon. Members for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), the hon. Members for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan)—the list goes on. The fact

that they all wanted to make a change followed research from Barnardo's that showed that seven out of 10 secondary school children wanted relationships and sex education to be compulsory. It also followed an important report of the Women and Equalities Committee that exposed the scale of sexual harassment and sexual violence in our schools. Our new clause was supported by Barnardo's, the National Children's Bureau, Plan International UK, the Terrence Higgins Trust, the Children's Society, Girlguiding—the list goes on.

I think it was putting those party political differences aside on this issue that enabled Ministers to act; otherwise, we would not be here today. Credit goes to those individuals—they know who they are—who made it happen. On 1 March 2017, the Government tabled their own amendment to make RSE compulsory for all children. That is the power of Members working together; we should not forget it.

David Burrowes and I were united in the need for change because of the way in which the internet was changing our own children's lives: the fact that children now routinely see pornography at the age of eight; the fact that pornography is now the way that most children learn about sex; the impact on children of websites showing self-harm; and the never-ending bullying through social media websites. As somebody said to me yesterday—it might have been the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley—the internet does not know the religion of the children who watch it. It does not know whether they are Christian or Muslim or have no faith at all. There is no filter. All our children need to know how to use the internet safely.

Those of us who came together can be proud of what is happening today, but only if schools take seriously the important role that they now have. They must make sure that parents do not see this as an opportunity to opt out of the system. Instead, schools must see it as an opportunity to explain to parents why it is more important than ever that their children get the sort of education that they are now obliged to give them in terms of relationships and sex education.

7.29 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): This instrument is a modest measure. If anything, it does not go far enough, but I warmly support the Government's proposals. The regulations ensure that every child receives inclusive and age-appropriate relationships education, including on the full diversity of family life—from the same-sex parents dropping their children off at school, to the lesbian teacher at the front of the class, through to the young people understanding and reconciling themselves to their own identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans.

Under the regulations, parents retain the option to withdraw their children from sex education—in my view, at considerable risk. If I may say so, too much of this debate is focused on LGBT education. What about safeguarding children from abuse and harm, which more often than not takes place in the home? It is vital that children are taught about what is and is not acceptable by trained professionals in a safe environment. In the context of child sexual exploitation up and down the country, we lose sight of that at our peril.

I want to focus on the opposition to this modest measure, because it speaks directly to the country that we are and demands an answer as to the kind of country

that we want to be. Much of the opposition that has found its way into my inbox has been motivated by religious objections. As a Christian, I understand theological debates about human sexuality. But I should also say, particularly to those who have stood at school gates with homophobic placards and leaflets, and those who have bombarded my inbox warning about LGBT lobbies, clearly not knowing their audience: you should know better. When schools are talking about the importance of having no outsiders, and celebrating diversity and difference, who do you think they are talking about? It is not just the gay child at the front of the classroom. It is the Muslim children in the classroom, the Christians who are still persecuted—in north Africa, across the middle east and sometimes in this country—and the Jewish people who are subjected to a rising tide of antisemitism. Those of us who are different know exactly what it feels like to be an outsider. How dare people, in defence of their own difference, seek to stifle the freedoms and equality of others? If someone has a problem with gay people, bisexual people or lesbian people existing, I suggest they take it up not with their Member of Parliament but with God, because we are all created in God's image.

It has been said, quite rightly, that we need to take people with us, and I warmly welcome the advice and encouragement of the Catholic Education Service, the Church of England and the Office of the Chief Rabbi. Religious leaders understand the kind of society we are and the kind of society we want to live in. They understand that the central tenet at the heart of so many faiths—in fact, all faiths—is to love your neighbour as yourself. Ultimately we will face judgment from one, and it will not be us.

In conclusion, I want to say to LGBT children up and down the country: in the light of the kind of world we live in—the kind of direction that we see in this country and across democracies—I cannot promise you that the world will be a better place than the one we have now. But I can promise you that I and other people in this place have got your back, and we will fight for the kind of a world that genuinely values equality, freedom and human rights. To my Muslim, Christian and Jewish constituents and friends who have written to me: I've got your back too. Anyone who is coming for you, your religious freedom and your place in the community will have to come through me first. I just ask—for the sake of our country, the democracy we live in and the kind of society that we want to build—that you have my back too. If we build that kind of society, whatever our background and wherever we come from, we will all live in harmony together. That is the kind of society we need to build.

7.33 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Although I have some reservations, which I will discuss, I warmly welcome the new guidance for the introduction of compulsory health, sex and relationships education. Of course, many schools already deliver the full suite of guidance to their pupils. These regulations will ensure that all do so.

Growing up is hard. The internet and social media can make it a cruel place. In my time at school, bullying was rife and the home was a place of refuge. With the online and social media world, there is no escape.

[*Huw Merriman*]

We have to reinforce to young people that online activity can be a weapon. Knives cause physical violence; cyber-abuse causes mental violence. The results can be equally devastating. Lives are destroyed, and lives have been lost. We must ensure that our schools are getting the message across. I therefore welcome the focus on mental health and wellbeing, relationships and sex education, and the need to think of the feelings and sensitivities of others. I welcome the coverage afforded to issues such as discrimination, forced marriage, domestic and sexual violence, and addictions, and the emphasis on the need to have respect for oneself and every other person in class and celebrate differences.

There are a few areas on which I seek reassurance from the Front Bench. First, I disagree that parents of secondary school age children should be able to take pupils out of sex education classes. Quite frankly, young people who fall into that category probably need even more attention, because they are unlikely to be discussing these issues at home. I am pleased that the new curriculum will give a 15-year-old the right to opt in, thus taking the matter from the parent, but it concerns me that by this time there may not be time to get sufficient sex education classes, particularly with GCSEs being taken. I would like some reassurance that the entire sex education component will be covered in that shortened window.

Secondly, teacher workloads are increasing. When speaking on this matter before, I called for room to be found for a sex education and relationships curriculum, in preference to adding to existing workloads. I would like an assurance from the Minister as to how this education will occur. If the answer is that a large amount of time will not be taken, that in itself would be of concern to me, because I believe that the wellbeing of our young people requires that investment in time.

Thirdly, I understand the need to allow schools themselves to develop content, and I believe that it is often best when teachers use their own authentic approach and style to communicate these messages. However, I am concerned that schools will be put under pressure from parents to tone down the content or eradicate parts altogether. We have witnessed scenes where some in the Muslim community have put pressure on schools. Parkfield Community School has been the scene of weekly protests over lessons covering LGBT issues. The school is rated “outstanding” by Ofsted, which praises its record of promoting tolerance, acceptance and mutual respect. The school has now said that it will cease to teach its course until a resolution has been reached. That is absolutely appalling.

Liam Byrne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Huw Merriman: No, I will not.

The resolution should have been a public spaces order ban on the protesters and fines for the parents who withdrew their children from school.

Liam Byrne: I am the local Member.

Huw Merriman: I will give way on that basis. I beg the right hon. Gentleman’s pardon.

Liam Byrne: That is not what Parkfield School has done. It has agreed to go into dialogue with parents to ensure that the Equality Act is taught. That is the fact of the position.

Huw Merriman: I am happy to take that correction, but as I looked through the reports, I saw that the content on that specific area had been taken down, and I felt that that was absolutely appalling. I will correct that if it turns out not to be the case, but the reality is that we have seen those weekly protests of people carrying—

Liam Byrne *rose*—

Huw Merriman: Please let me continue. We have seen those weekly protests of people carrying placards, which has been a disgrace. I have a right to call that out, just as the right hon. Gentleman obviously has a right to comment as the local Member.

Liam Byrne: Let me correct the hon. Gentleman on a point of substance. The long-term curriculum plan of the school was set at the beginning of the year, and that is what the school continues to deliver. Of course the protests are unacceptable in terms of some of the abuse that has been hurled, and he is right to call that out, but I ask him please not to muddy this sensitive issue with facts that are incorrect.

Huw Merriman: I stand corrected, but I also stand by the point that content in a particular course had been taken down—I mentioned the reports—until this had been resolved, and I find that absolutely appalling.

Liam Byrne *indicated dissent*.

Huw Merriman: Obviously the right hon. Gentleman is entitled to his opinion, but I ask him please to accept that in Parliament I am entitled to one, too.

This issue demonstrates to me that it is vital that schools feel supported by Government and MPs. We need to send a message out today that while schools have the choice on content, every school must deliver it, without exception. I would like a reassurance that we will ensure that there cannot be another Parkfield, and that the Government will insert their own content should it be found wanting.

These reservations should be put into context. Overall, this step forward is absolutely superb. We have moved on. I am really proud to be standing here and helping to deliver this initiative.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am afraid that I am going to reduce the time limit to three minutes.

7.38 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I really welcome these regulations, and I am incredibly proud of the cross-party manner in which we brought them in. I also want to make it very clear that the fact that the charities, survivors, teachers and parents have been lobbying for over 20 years to get to this point should be recognised and celebrated.

The last guidance was in 2000, before the internet and before social media, so this is well overdue. I came to this issue a mere five years ago, and my main driver was preventing child abuse by empowering children to spot inappropriate behaviour. How else is a six-year-old

meant to know that the uncle abusing them is acting inappropriately and they have a right to say something about that? Education, not ignorance, is the only way that children will be able to recognise abusive behaviour and know how to seek help.

The scale of this problem is enormous. One in 20 children are sexually abused, one in eight experiences inappropriate sexual behaviour towards them, and one in three has never told an adult. Sexual abuse can happen to any child.

My concern is that, in this vacuum, a generation of children have gone unprotected—a generation who most recently have gone to online pornography, which is a very gendered form of violence, to find out about sex and relationships. The Government's age verification measure is welcome, but it does not cover social media, and the main place that children, or anyone, access porn on social media is Twitter. Will the Minister liaise with colleagues to see whether that massive gap in protection can be covered?

In the absence of teaching, we have seen the LGBT community, and particularly young people, suffer enormously. Nearly half of LGBT children have been bullied at school. One in five lesbian, gay and bi children and two in five trans children have attempted suicide. That is shocking. I hope the Minister will ensure that that gap is bridged. It concerns me that the guidance says that schools are "expected" to have taught about LGBT relationships by the time children leave school. Can the Minister confirm whether that is a requirement or a recommendation? Will there be sanctions if it is not carried out?

Like others, I have been lobbied about the rights of parents. It is not an either/or situation. We need to recognise that 90% of child abuse is carried out within the extended family or by a family friend. Teachers know their stuff. We need to give them the resources and support to provide this education in a sensitive way. Some 80% of parents want teachers to be properly resourced, so I ask the Minister to focus on why he is allocating £250 per school. Our children deserve better.

7.41 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): These are laudable regulations, and strong arguments have been set out in support of them, but as we have been reminded by a number of speakers, there are concerns among faith groups. I want to touch on those and to pick up in particular the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) made about concerns in the orthodox Jewish community.

For 70 years, state-funded Jewish schools have helped to make Britain safe and welcoming for the Jewish community. I understand that over the last eight or nine months, 10 orthodox Jewish schools that were previously rated good or outstanding have been downgraded to "requires improvement" or "inadequate"—a downgrading that threatens their survival—because Ofsted is unhappy with them in the area covered by this guidance. Voices in the community say that if this continues, orthodox Jewish families will either home-school en masse, which they are fully entitled to do, or conclude that the UK is no longer a country where they are welcome. Haredi schools—the fastest growing—will not breach deeply held religious convictions, and they should not have to, because religion or belief is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

With rising antisemitism, which we all know about, state schools where the Jewish faith is observed are more important than ever. Nobody wants orthodox Jewish families to feel that they have to leave the country, but something has to give. I chair the all-party parliamentary group on faith and society, and we want to have a meeting on this issue after Easter. Will the Minister commit to his Department and Ofsted being represented at that?

7.43 pm

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): It feels good to be here agreeing on such an important issue. Thousands of children from all backgrounds and faiths walk into schools across the country every day who already know that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans or just feel different but do not know it yet. They will get into school and face homophobic or transphobic bullying from other pupils—45% of primary school teachers have observed such bullying, and nearly half of all LGBT pupils are bullied for being LGBT in our secondary schools.

The Government risk undermining their efforts with the opt-outs. What are the Government saying to these children when they say that schools are not required to teach about LGBT inclusivity and diversity—that learning about heterosexual relationships is age-appropriate, but learning about LGBT families requires a PG rating? The introduction of statutory RSE was the chance to right this wrong, but the Government's guidance must be beefed up.

New statutory relationships education at primary level is a unique chance to ensure that all young people develop inclusive attitudes to LGBT people from a young age. Inclusion from primary can prevent the development of prejudice and wipe out the bullying that leads to so many of our young people developing higher rates of mental health problems and that leads more LGBT young people to attempt suicide. Teaching about LGBT families as part of teaching about different families at primary age is vital to ensure that young people with LGBT parents see their families reflected in teaching.

I was disappointed to see the Education Secretary say in a piece for *The Times* today that it will be up to primary schools to decide whether or not to teach in an LGBT inclusive way. This felt too much like a disclaimer, and too much like a trailer for the guidance by way of assuring those objecting to it. Along with 58 of my colleagues from the Opposition, we wrote to the Education Secretary this week to ask that he take a look at the guidance and ensure that LGBT inclusivity in RSE teaching is a requirement, not just a recommendation with opt-outs. This has my full support, but I do think we need to go further.

At this point, I want to highlight that there are many gay men and women with deeply held religious views as well; they are not exclusive of each other. We need to concentrate far more on examples that highlight the cause and prove the argument on which we are joining together in unison this evening.

7.46 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I rise to speak as the ambassador for youth drug charity Mentor UK. One of the most important steps we have not talked

[Melanie Onn]

about so far today is the regulations that will make drugs education mandatory in all primary and secondary schools.

Drug usage permeates society, and it can have a devastating effect on our communities and young people. Children can be exposed to parents' drug usage, be exploited by criminal gangs through county lines and, ultimately, end up developing life-ruining habits. It is critical that young people know the effects of drugs so that they can rationalise and understand abnormal behaviours related to drug usage and be aware of all the risks, such as addiction and long-term health effects, before they end up taking drugs themselves. Unfortunately, the effect of cuts has been to limit our schools' ability to train teachers to deliver comprehensive drugs education, and to drive them away from these added-value lessons in favour of core performance-targeted subjects, so there has been a lack of the frequent, high-quality, early drugs education that is sorely needed.

According to charities such as VolteFace, there are a few steps the Government could take to improve the guidance further and make drugs education better across the whole country. Schools should start to build and develop drug programmes—with pupils, parents and local partners such as the police, substance misuse services and youth community hubs—that take local and personal vulnerabilities into account. These sessions should not be one-offs, but the guidance does not stipulate how often these lessons should be delivered, which means that schools could still provide basic lessons as long as they tick the boxes relating to what children should be taught by the end of primary and secondary school. This should be clarified in the guidance to mandate for yearly comprehensive drugs education, with an expansion of what is expected of this education. For example, the current guidance does not stipulate the need to teach awareness of child criminal exploitation, which could be vital in preventing children from falling into extremely dangerous situations.

7.48 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I also rise to welcome today's regulations, and I want to speak specifically on the issue of age-appropriate relationship education. I have been very alarmed by the debate we have seen outside this House, and to see that some schools are considering dropping LGBT lessons in the light of a backlash from parents. I find this deeply worrying and astonishing, because our schools have a vital role to play in preparing our young people for their life. That includes helping them to understand tolerance, love, respect and self-determination. Children are not possessions of their parents; they have their own rights, and they are entitled to their own learning and to find their own way in the world.

Schools must help equip children for that. Schools must allow them self-expression, and give them confidence, resilience and self-belief. What is more, schools have to teach British values as a compulsory part of the curriculum. These values are defined as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs and those without faith. I am afraid I have not seen enough tolerance and respect in some of the debate and action we have seen outside this place, and that concerns me deeply.

As for that British value of the rule of law, I am very proud of the laws in this land, which so many have fought for so valiantly over many years. I am proud of the law of this land that recognises equal marriage and I am proud of the law of this land that does not allow discrimination against LGBT people under the Equality Act 2010, including discrimination against pupils who are LGBT, pupils who are perceived to be LGBT and pupils with LGBT parents and family members. This must be upheld, and children are never too young to learn about the values behind those laws.

It is right that, at primary level, relationships education includes the full diversity of family life that exists in Britain. That includes families with different-sex parents, same-sex parents, single parents, adoptive parents and surrogate parents. Doing that ensures that all children are aware of those families and that they are included in the teaching. There are 18,000 same-sex parents in the UK—a figure that is rising and that we should welcome.

Early education can ensure that young people develop inclusive attitudes to LGBT people from an early age, helping to prepare them for their life in 21st-century Britain. We have already heard today the troubling statistics that 45% of primary teachers observe homophobic bullying in their schools and that one in five lesbian, gay and bi students have attempted to take their own life. Those statistics are deeply concerning.

At a time when the far right is rising across the world and intolerance and hatred are on the march, when people take up arms against communities for their faith, their race and their sexuality, as we saw in Orlando where 49 people were gunned down in a gay nightclub, we need more tolerance and love, not less. Children are never too young to learn about love, kindness, tolerance, difference, compassion and empathy.

I wholeheartedly support the regulations and pledge my solidarity with and support for the LGBT community today.

7.50 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I am proud to back the regulations today. I am also proud to be gay. I say that not to fly a flag but because I was not always proud to be gay. When I was growing up, I felt dirty and alone. I felt that people like me did not exist because I did not see them and I was not told about them. We were hidden away. People in this place at that time made rules that made people like me hidden. They failed to give the support and recognition we needed and failed to value the place of LGBT people in our society. That is why I want every child in our country to have age-appropriate, healthy sex and relationships education.

Love is love. Different families all love the same. That is a message that we should be proud to send out. Our young people—gay, straight, lesbian, trans or bi—all deserve to know that they are valued and loved. We need not only LGBT education, but LGBT materials in our schools. I want "And Tango Makes Three"—a beautiful book about two gay penguins who adopt a baby penguin—to be in our schools. Such books help show our young people that it is not just in an occasional lesson that we say that being LGBT is part of our community and valued, but in the libraries and everyday conversations. That matters.

I am Plymouth's first gay MP. That matters to me because I know that there are little versions of me, be they straight, gay, bi—[AN HON. MEMBER: "Mini Lukes!"] Those mini Lukes—and mini Lucys—are in every school in my city and in this country and they deserve to know that they are not alone, and that they are valued and loved. They deserve to know what they can do with their bodies, why it matters, what those feelings are, what is appropriate and what is not. If we can do that, we show every one of those people that, whether they are straight, gay or bi, they can stand up proudly and say, "This is me. This is who I am." That will make this a place that we can all be proud of.

7.53 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): On my hand today, it says, "Call Sam". Sam is a woman in my constituency who has just had to be rehoused again because of domestic abuse. I write "Call Sam" on my hand because I have promised to ring her every day, because I want to try to make sure she gets to the next day. If we do not talk about those issues—about how toxic relationships end up and how certain people and power structures should be challenged—we will always have to have "Call Sam" written on the back of our hands.

Cross-party, we have tried to do this brilliant thing, which I hope will be passed today without question, because there is an epidemic in our country of violence against women, children and LGBT people and a rising tide of racial hatred. Our children are already talking about it. For those who seek opt-outs and exceptions, and worry that people will not be able to be taken out, it is my experience that children who are taken out of these subjects or whose families might not want to talk about these things, may very well have a desperate need for someone to talk to them at school, and to feel that they have somewhere to go when they feel they are in a safe place with their teachers. We should trust our teachers. No one spoke to Sam about it at school. Maybe she would not have avoided the situation she is in, but maybe we could at least have given her hope that there would be somewhere to turn.

On the subject of the conversations about Birmingham that have now become whole-House-worthy, I recently went to Joseph Chamberlain College, which is on the border of three constituencies represented by Members sitting in this room. A young African woman wearing a niqab stood in front of the classroom and said, "I've invited Jess Phillips because I want to prove that anyone"—I could take this as an insult—"can become a Member of Parliament." [*Laughter.*] She went on to say, "As a gay African Muslim, it is really important that we make sure people can see that anyone can do anything." I felt that my city had leapt forward and I wish for my city to keep on leaping forward. That is the face that I want people to take away when they think about Birmingham tonight, and to remember that it is for Sams, as well as Lukes, that we need to do this.

7.56 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): These are important new rules and I am glad that my Front Bench is giving them our wholehearted support. On the Labour Benches, we are very proud of our role in repealing section 28, not just in law but in spirit. We are

very proud of the role we played in getting the Equality Acts on to the statute book. I never come into the Chamber without looking at the words on the wall behind me. "More in common" is at the heart of the Equality Act 2010. That Act and inclusive education are the most important ways in which we deliver that message on the wall behind me, through inclusive education to the children and the future of this country. It reminds us that we cannot and will not pick and choose the equalities that we champion and therefore teach our young people.

The Minister will know that in Parkfield School in my constituency, we have outstanding educators and pioneers such as Andrew Moffat, who is now up for global teacher of the year. We wish him all the luck in the world in securing that prize. However, Parkfield is a good illustration of the challenges that we all have in navigating this agenda not on paper but in the real world. That is where we saw the risks of what happens when consultation just comes to a halt for years on end. We saw what happens when parents become concerned that protected characteristics are not taught in full or in a balanced way. We saw, lit up in lights, the concern when there was a hint that this was a programme that was linked to the de-radicalisation programme, Prevent. That is still something that requires an apology.

Disputes will arise as we translate this agenda into action. As the Minister knows, I feel the Government were much too slow to get a grip on their academy in Parkfield. That delay allowed those with intolerant and extreme views to hijack what was a group of parents simply wanting their voice to be heard and their role to be respected. I hope that we will send out a clear message from this Chamber to those who have been circulating that intolerant hatred aimed at the LGBT community that we will never see it go unchallenged. We stand united—united against that hatred in our city and in our schools. Parkfield parents want the Equality Act to be taught in full. They want every protected characteristic to be taught. They ask nothing more than for their voice to be heard and their role to be respected.

The challenge for the Minister, as he knows, is that he is asking academies to take full school autonomy without the kind of accountability that delivers the dialogue that he says is at the heart of this guidance. He needs to put more guidance on the table, because inclusive education is too precious to risk in disputes like those we have had over the past month.

7.59 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): This is a moment to celebrate. Many immensely powerful speeches have been made; I very much welcomed the speech of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard). This is a really important moment for our whole Parliament to unite and say, "You can love whoever you want and be whoever you want, and that will be respected."

On the question of withdrawal of children, in my book the child's right must always dominate over the parents' right. Surely children have the right to be informed about all the challenges that they will face as they grow up.

I applaud the Government for including mental health in the sex and relationships education curriculum—the culmination of years of campaigning by so many people.

[Norman Lamb]

How it is taught will be incredibly important: teachers need to understand the sometimes complex causes of mental ill health and distress, including trauma and child sexual abuse or other violence in the home, and teach those issues sensitively. It is also important that they be given the resources, training and support to do so; I share the shadow Minister's concern about whether the resources that the Government have allocated for that purpose will be sufficient.

I join the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) in highlighting the importance of drug education. The organisation VolteFace has raised concerns that certain key things have not been included in the curriculum, including

“awareness of child criminal exploitation; harm reduction advice; understanding of hidden harm; where parental substance misuse can impact on a child; advice on decision-making during pressured situations”.

It also notes that the curriculum does not include education for sixth-formers, who are under particular pressure with respect to drugs, and that because there is no guidance about sustained, continued education, the requirement could be met by a one-off tick-box exercise that did not meet young people's needs. I urge the Government to keep the policy closely under review and listen to the concerns of organisations such as VolteFace, so that we get it right for young people.

8.2 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am very happy to contribute to this debate. I would like to focus on the distinction between relationships education and sex education in relation to the right of withdrawal. Earlier, when I intervened on the Minister, I asked him to address the lack of clarity on how a right of withdrawal from sex education, but not relationships education, will work in practice when relationships and sex education is taught in an integrated manner.

The truth, of course, is that relationships education has been a part of sex education since the Education Act 1996, which requires that sex education be

“given in such a manner as to encourage those pupils to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life”, and that pupils

“learn the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and the bringing up of children”.

In that context, parents have been able to withdraw their children from sex education, which includes relationships education, since 1996. I suggest that the Government now propose to change the scope of that right of withdrawal by renaming sex education as “relationships and sex education” and applying the right of withdrawal only to sex education, not to relationships education.

If relationships and sex education is taught as an integrated subject, how can one withdraw a child from sex education but not from relationships education? The Government's proposed changes will put parents and teachers in an impossible situation; in some cases, I suspect that it will put them on a collision course. Teachers are being told that they must teach relationships and sex education in an integrated way and that, if necessary, they should be able to remove young people from some parts of their lessons, but not others.

As I see it, the Government could address the problem by amending the regulations, either to mandate that sex education and relationship education be taught as two separate subjects or to ensure that the right of withdrawal continues to cover both sex education and relationships education. The latter decision seems to me more sensible and would be very easy to make. I expect the Minister will reiterate the position the Secretary of State took on 25 February, when they took a slightly different view. There is, however, no such restriction in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which states that regulations “must include provision...about the circumstances in which a pupil (or pupil below a specified age) is to be excused from receiving relationships and sex education or specified elements of that education”.

Ministers could decide, on the basis of the 2017 Act, to allow a parent to withdraw a child from all elements of the curriculum. I have received considerable correspondence on this matter, and others in the House have the same concerns as me about the rights of the parent, so I suggest that he withdraw the regulations or make it clear where we stand and bring them back to the House in much better shape.

8.5 pm

Nick Gibb: With the leave of the House, I will conclude this debate.

We have listened to some superb and heartfelt speeches right across the House, from my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), the hon. Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), my hon. Friends the Members for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms)—yes to his invitation; officials would be pleased to attend the roundtable he is holding in his role as the chair of the all-party group—the hon. Members for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood), for Bury North (James Frith), for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) and for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and the right hon. Members for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) and for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). I am grateful for the support that hon. Members right across the House have given to the regulations.

The regulations have also had support from beyond the House, from the Catholic Education Service, the Church of England, the PSHE Association, the National Children's Bureau, Mencap, the End Violence Against Women Coalition and the Board of Deputies. The director of the Catholic Education Service has said:

“We welcome this commitment by the Government to improve relationships and sex education”.

I apologise that in the two minutes left I cannot respond to the many important issues raised by right hon. and hon. Members, but I will write to them with my comments.

I believe that we all share the ambition to ensure that children and young people have the knowledge to help keep themselves safe, to be prepared for the world in which they are growing up and to respect others and to respect difference. The regulations give us the opportunity to build a consistent foundation across all schools, and I commend them to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): The question is that motion 3 as on the Order Paper be agreed to. As many of that opinion say Aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Of the contrary No.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): No.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think the Ayes have it. *[Interruption.]* I think it was quite overwhelming. I will try once more. As many of that opinion say Aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Of the contrary No.

Philip Davies: No. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is allowed to come—*[Interruption.]* Mr Frith, you know very well that a Member can come in at any time to vote. Members vote all the time without having been in the Chamber, so that is not the best point to make in this case. I would say that there was a singular voice that was continuous, in which case the Division will have to be deferred.

Question put.

The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 March (Standing Order No. 41A).

Exiting the European Union (Armorial Bearings, Ensigns and Flags)

[Relevant document: First Report of the European Statutory Instruments Committee, HC 1532.]

8.8 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (John Penrose): I beg to move,

That the draft Flags (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 25 February, be approved.

I am delighted to move the motion, which deals with a narrow but important issue surrounding the flag-flying regulations in Northern Ireland. For most of the rest of the UK, vexillology—a new word I have learned today—which is the study of and interest in flag flying, is a relatively light-hearted affair and something that many people have as a hobby, but in Northern Ireland, for understandable and important reasons, it is a far more important and sensitive issue that we need to address with great care and consideration.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Minister has stolen my thunder. I was going to commend him for becoming an expert vexillologist. He has put us all to shame by saying he is only learning the trade. In Northern Ireland, it is something one has to learn incredibly quickly. He knows that we have supported this statutory instrument from its conception and that we understand the rationale behind it, but he also knows of our concerns about the continual deletion of flag-flying designated days under the Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000. Will he commit to engaging with us and others so that in future we get a replication of the decision taken by Belfast City Council and by the Assembly Commission itself to follow the guidelines from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and to make sure that there is a uniformity of approach when it comes to flying our national flag across our nation?

John Penrose: May I ask the hon. Gentleman to hold fire for a second? I will deal with his question and endeavour to ensure that I have answered it, but I am sure that if I do not, he will come back and pin me down.

Let me briefly explain what the statutory instrument will do. In most of the rest of the United Kingdom, the decision on what flags should fly on Government buildings is based on a relatively straightforward list issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Changing that and ensuring that when we have left the European Union Government buildings will no longer have to fly flags on Europe Day, 9 May, will also be relatively straightforward. However, in Northern Ireland, because of the sensitivities and because of the importance of flag flying and the symbolic issues surrounding it, it is an altogether more complicated matter.

Flag-flying regulations are baked into legislation that is ultimately the preserve of the Stormont Assembly. The SI therefore amends those regulations, using the order-making powers in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to delete the requirement to fly flags in Northern Ireland on Europe Day. If we do not pass it, we shall be left in a rather incongruous and, I am sure, unwanted position. The only place in the United Kingdom that

[John Penrose]

would still have to fly flags officially on Europe Day would be Northern Ireland, and I am sure that none of us want that, for a variety of reasons.

Let me now deal with the point raised by the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson). He is right to suggest that the situation in Northern Ireland is much more complicated. Under the current regulations, Northern Ireland Government buildings follow the list of designated days in the regulations that we are, I hope, amending today, whereas UK Government buildings follow the list issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Local authorities are responsible for flag flying according to their own policies: some fly the Union flag throughout the year, while others do not fly it all. I believe that Belfast City Council follows the DCMS list of designated days. The flag-flying days for Parliament buildings, which the hon. Gentleman also mentioned—that is, the Stormont buildings themselves—are decided by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, not by our Parliament. As it happens, the commission has chosen to follow the DCMS list of designated flag-flying days.

Let me now provide an important piece of trivia for the benefit of anyone who is caught up in a pub quiz at any point over the next few weeks. Under the Police Emblems and Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2002, police stations in Northern Ireland may not fly either the Union flag or any other national flag. They can only fly the Police Service of Northern Ireland service flag, except in the event of a visit by Her Majesty the Queen, when the royal standard may be flown in place of the service flag.

Gavin Robinson: I said earlier, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the Minister was quickly becoming a considered vexillologist, and you will have understood from what he has been saying that he is gaining a good understanding of the changes and the unique differences in Northern Ireland. I remind him, however, that some of the reasons for those differences relate to our history and to political will in different parts of our local government.

I was Lord Mayor of Belfast at the time of the decision to limit flag flying in Belfast City Hall, and I remember how vexed that situation was. I remember the strife and the division to which the decision led, the difficulties caused to community relations and the emotion that is always associated with the flying of flags. There is one arrangement when City Hall and Parliament buildings fly a flag, but the flying of flags on a Government building or the Royal Courts of Justice, for example, is governed by another provision which draws on the flags order but is contained in a justice order. Does the Minister accept that that leads to concerns and queries about why a flag is flying on two buildings but not on another, which is why we need a uniform approach?

John Penrose: The hon. Gentleman is right that it causes concerns and I doubt that many people will automatically and instinctively know or understand the various different lists of regulations that I have just explained to the House, and therefore why should anybody have anything like the level of expertise of the hon. Gentleman, who served as mayor of Belfast during a time when a very contentious issue had to be dealt with

and debated? It was handled very carefully and resolved in the end, but he will know better than perhaps anybody how difficult that path was to tread.

The difficulty we have with the regulations we are debating and I hope amending today is that, other than the one we are able to amend today because we are amending it through the leaving the EU Act itself, they can only be amended through a very particular process that requires the Stormont Assembly to be in operation and sitting. In fact, to be precise, it requires the Secretary of State to refer to the Assembly any amendments to these regulations. The Assembly then has to report to the Secretary of State the views expressed on the proposed amendments and the Secretary of State has to have considered the Assembly's report.

I therefore completely take the hon. Gentleman's point that it would be hugely desirable to be able to address any upcoming changes and proposals that might stem from any sides of the different communities in Northern Ireland, but that would have to be done with great care in the same way as he has described happened in Belfast. That cannot only best be done but probably only properly be done with a functioning Assembly in Stormont, to make sure all sides of the community have their views represented and that difficult and sometimes painful path can be trodden as it was in Belfast when the hon. Gentleman was there.

Gavin Robinson: This is my final intervention. Does the Minister understand that tonight he is proposing a change to the flags order without going through that process?

John Penrose: Yes I do, and we are only able to do this without going through that process because it is just a change to the Europe Day regulations. It is a change that is consequent on us leaving the EU and therefore there is a different power in a different Act that allows us to change this in this way for this one purpose, but it does not, I am afraid, go any wider or allow us to make any other changes to any of the rest of those regulations, much though the hon. Gentleman might want me to.

I am conscious of the hour and do not want to take up anyone's time, but I will make one final point: obviously, because we are proposing to make this change through the operation of the Act for leaving the EU, it cannot take effect until we have left the EU, so depending on the decisions made at the European Council over the next couple of days, it is possible that we will have approved this and then we will not actually have left the EU legally by the time the next Europe Day comes up. In that case, legally, I will have no option or legal powers to do anything other than delay signing this order to bring it into force until the day after we have finally left the EU. I can promise the House, however, that we will do so as promptly as possible once we have finally Brexited, to make sure this thing takes effect as quickly as possible.

8.18 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): May I possibly trespass on the good nature of the House? There has not been an opportunity since St Patrick's Day for us to mention in the House our sympathy for the three 17-year-olds who died in the Greendale hotel in Cookstown

on Sunday. I am sure I speak for the whole House in saying that our thoughts, prayers and sympathies are with them, their families and their friends.

May I also pay tribute to the Minister's predecessor, the hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara) who last raised this subject on the Floor of the House and spoke with great knowledge? Vexillology is the order of the day now and has become a compulsory requirement for ministerial appointment.

There are few things that fill the House with greater dread, fear and an awful sense of foreboding than someone—even someone as modest, quiet and shy as myself—saying, “I will not detain the House for long.” If those words are enunciated in a Strangford accent, that normally means that *Hansard* will send out for pizzas and everyone else will cancel their late-night taxis. However, on this occasion, the Opposition will support the Government.

The Minister made an important point about the solemnity and seriousness of this issue, and this is something that we ignore at our peril. We have a totally different template here in Great Britain. For example, on 21 October we fly the Union flag in recognition of Trafalgar Day at the Royal British Legion in Greenford, and in Northolt library they are virtually vexillomaniacs in that they scarcely miss an opportunity to fly the flag, on anything from International Women's Day to Commonwealth Day, or when the local team makes it through to the cup final, although that does not happen very often.

What we are doing here is, hopefully, tidying up the legislation. The Minister is absolutely correct to say that this will not take effect until, sadly, we leave the European Union. Flags are important. Flags matter. They are more than just symbols. Sadly, I know that I do not speak for everyone in the House when I say that when the European flag, that noble oriflamme, is no longer displayed proudly from City Hall, I hope that that flag of idealism and unity will still flutter proudly in our hearts. Let the European flag flutter within us even if it cannot flutter without us in Northern Ireland. I am glad to support the motion.

8.21 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I am not quite sure that I can follow that speech either in substance or in sentiment, but I shall do my best.

On the face of it, this is a minor, unobjectionable, technical measure. However, I commend the European Statutory Instrument Committee for being canny enough to spot the fact that the words “flag” and “Northern Ireland” appearing in the same sentence probably mean that we should exercise caution and be careful. Presumably that is why the Committee referred this measure for affirmative resolution.

I recall that shortly after the referendum in 2016, people were getting terribly excited about hauling down the European Union flag. I thought that that was rather sad and unnecessary, but of course when we come to leave the European Union, the big picture in the newspapers the following day will be the European Union flag being hauled down from overseas embassies, for example.

Europe Day is clearly important for a lot of people. It is important for the European Union itself, for our neighbours and for European Union citizens here. I think

we need to be little relaxed about this particular flag in the United Kingdom. I note that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport issues guidance and advice in GB, although it is clearly more prescriptive for Northern Ireland for the obvious reasons that were touched upon by the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) when he outlined his long-standing personal experience of this matter, particularly in relation to Belfast City Hall.

I think that this country as a whole needs to be just a little bit relaxed about the flying of this flag on Europe Day, although I have no idea what guidance DCMS will subsequently offer on the subject of flying flags. It would seem to be a reasonable expression of our amity and concord with other European Union states, and indeed European Union citizens, if we could perhaps be a little laid back about the flying of this flag on public buildings, given that we are in the habit of flying various flags and banners from such buildings on the appropriate days, either formally or informally, from time to time. Given the importance of flags as an expression of goodwill, it would not be inappropriate for DCMS to ponder that fact as it issues and updates its guidance.

8.24 pm

John Penrose: I am delighted that both sides of the House are willing to support this motion, which is very helpful. It is always better for things that tread on contentious ground to be broadly and widely supported, so I thank everyone for that.

I join the shadow Minister, and I am sure everyone, in expressing sympathy for the victims in Cookstown—he is right to raise it. I welcome him back to the Dispatch Box. With his crutch, he turned up limping but determined to make sure he is here representing his party's viewpoint, which is always good to see. He also gets points for a neologism, at least I think it is a neologism. I have certainly never heard of vexillomaniacs, which is a brand-new word for me at least.

I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), the Chair of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, is right to make a plea for tolerance and being laid back, if we possibly can, both on flag flying and on symbols more generally.

There is a second Europe Day that is not 9 May but 5 May, which is the Council of Europe's Europe Day rather than the EU's Europe Day. It is quite possible that some people might decide to fly a European flag on those days, and I am sure in many cases others will be entirely tolerant, but it is outwith the scope of this measure. I am delighted to record that everyone seems to be in agreement and onside.

Question put and agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): With the leave of the House, I will put motions 5 to 12 together. I will then put motion 13 before putting motions 14 to 17 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (TRANSPORT)

That the draft Railway (Licensing of Railway Undertakings) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 25 February, be approved.

That the draft Train Driving Licences and Certificates (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 11 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (COMPETITION)

That the draft State Aid (Agriculture and Fisheries) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 11 March, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (PLANT HEALTH)

That the draft Plant Health (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 19 December 2018, be approved.

That the draft Plant Health (Amendment) (England) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 28 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION
(ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION)

That the draft Chemicals (Health and Safety) and Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 18 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (EUROPEAN UNION)

That the draft Challenges to Validity of EU Instruments (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 12 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (IMMIGRATION)

That the draft Immigration, Nationality and Asylum (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 13 February, be approved.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (ANIMALS)

That the draft Animal Welfare (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 27 March (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CIVIL AVIATION)

That the draft Aviation Noise (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 11 February, be approved.

That the draft Aviation Statistics (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 11 February, be approved.

That the draft Aviation Safety (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 11 February, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCIAL SERVICES)

That the draft Financial Services (Miscellaneous) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 25 February, be approved.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

**Maintenance of stroke services at Queen Elizabeth,
The Queen Mother Hospital Margate**

8.27 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): Petitions get varying amounts of interest, and this one had phenomenal interest among 3,243 residents.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of South Thanet.

Declares that the Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother Hospital (QEQM) in Margate is much valued by local residents and is the only regional general hospital servicing the population of Thanet and the north and east Kent coastal communities; further that the Joint Committee of Clinical Commissioning Groups for the Kent and Medway Stroke Review have concluded that stroke services at the QEQM will be closed in favour of three Hyper-acute Stroke Units to serve Kent and Medway with Darent Valley, Maidstone and Ashford hospitals being the preferred future sites, this will leave local residents with a journey time of an hour to the nearest hospital to receive stroke care.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to reference back to the Secretary of State the conclusions of the Joint Committee of Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee in Kent to ensure that the outcome thus far presented is credible and soundly based and whether the maintenance of stroke services at QEQM would not be the better option for local clinical care.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002442]

Small Business Exports

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

8.29 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What I want to explore in this debate is how, where and with what resources the Department for International Trade is taking action to connect businesses, especially small businesses, with the Government's export strategy. Small businesses account for more than 99% of UK private sector businesses; there are some 5.6 million of them. These are the innovators, and they have huge potential to export more, but not enough of them export outside the UK. The Federation of Small Businesses reckons that only about a fifth of its members are exporters, despite the expertise on offer from the FSB itself. One thing that has struck me is that a great deal of information, advice and assistance is available to potential exporters but the question remains: how can we ensure it is hitting home? How can we persuade and facilitate more small businesses to become exporters?

I welcome the announcement in last week's spring statement that UK Export Finance will introduce a new general export facility and launch a consultation on UK Export Finance's foreign content policy. It will be encouraging to small business that the proposed changes will recognise the full contribution of the UK supply chain and that a wider range of exporters will gain access to UK Export Finance support, but I hope the Treasury will look even more favourably on the Department for International Trade at the next spending review. It is vital that the resources are there to engage the local businesses of global Britain in the dynamic potential of the United Kingdom to be a great trading nation of the 21st century outside the EU.

The rewards from increasing our export success are such that a bit more spending—rigorously targeted, of course—will soon more than pay for itself through duties if more firms become confident exporters.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I spoke to the hon. Gentleman beforehand to clarify the matter that I have a deep concern about—indeed, the Minister is probably aware of it as well. I have major issues with the changes for those exporting their goods to Europe and globally, because of the lack of clarity over food stamping and packaging and whether things can be accepted with dual stamps. That affects not only the export businesses but the packaging companies in my constituency, which have not received orders from local businesses and will not be able to process the huge order that will be coming when clarity eventually arrives. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs do not seem to have got their act together on this yet. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this lack of clarity affects not simply export businesses, but the subsidiary businesses, such as the packaging firm in my constituency that depends on them? This must be seen as a departmental priority.

Jack Brereton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the points he has made, and I know the Department will be looking into these issues.

It is essential that we seek to open markets up, and the ambitious free trade agreements that the Department for International Trade will deliver are a key part of that. Indeed, what would be the point of delivering those free trade agreements if we did not have exporters eager to target and take advantage of them? I have read the Government's export strategy, which is an excellent and comprehensive document—one that I am sure will be drawn on in the Minister's reply, to the benefit of the House. It would be helpful for there to be an MP's guide to signposting business to export support programmes, because that is certainly an issue that all colleagues will be keen to engage with at a constituency level.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. Like him, I understand the nature of exports, particularly in respect of cities such as Stoke-on-Trent. On the point about MPs' support, will he join me in congratulating the Staffordshire chamber of commerce on the work it does through its export surgeries, where it helps businesses with the import and export paperwork and walks them through, step by step, with a hand-holding exercise that allows them to open up their own domestic products to the global market?

Jack Brereton: I thank my parliamentary neighbour for making that point. He is absolutely right about Staffordshire chamber of commerce, which offers some incredible, fantastic services for local businesses in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire more widely. Many businesses would not be able to go without those services.

The strategy to which I just referred is subtitled "supporting and connecting businesses to grow on the world stage". I am confident that that is the right ambition, and one challenge for us all in this House will be to ensure that our local businesses are connected to it. The Government promise that they will

"encourage and inspire businesses that can export but have not started or are just beginning; placing a particular focus on peer-to-peer learning...inform businesses by providing information, advice and practical assistance on exporting...connect UK businesses to overseas buyers, markets and each other, using our sector expertise and our networks in the UK and overseas"

and, finally,

"place finance at the heart of our offer".

That is a positive statement to read, and it is in that spirit of positive engagement that I want to raise generally the remaining barriers to small-business exports.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): My hon. Friend talks about a spirit of working together; has he considered whether the good plan for the future that the Department for International Trade is pursuing should include the opportunity for increased exports to our close Commonwealth friends and neighbours? That trade can work both ways. Those countries are growing markets with a third of the world's population, and they are where Britain should be looking for reciprocal trade.

Jack Brereton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to strengthen those links with Commonwealth countries around the world. It is important that we support those strong growing markets, in which we can trade more of the fantastic products that we make right up and down this country, especially those products made in cities like Stoke-on-Trent.

[Jack Brereton]

As a city we are proud of the world-class goods that we make, most famously in the ceramics industry, of course, but also in many other areas of contemporary manufacturing, from the traditional toffees of Walker's Nonsuch in my constituency, to the cutting-edge technology of Goodwin International. They are UK export success stories. I know from Walker's that the increase in the capital allowance to £1 million has been vital to the affordability of investment in its factory and in the latest industrial capital goods that it wants to produce.

Let me turn to the small businesses that are not engaged either in exporting or in the programmes available to encourage and help them. The Federation of Small Businesses has on its website an eye-opening article, "Breaking New Ground", which explores what is holding back potential exporters and, crucially, what they are missing out on. It quotes a report by WorldFirst that found that the typical UK small business exporter generates more than £287,000 per year from exports. It further notes research by the Chartered Institute of Marketing and PricewaterhouseCoopers that found that of those small firms currently exporting, 70% expect to increase exports over the next three years.

Despite the evident value in exporting, less than a fifth of British small firms export anything. Why? According to the CIM and PWC study, 33% lack the confidence to approach new markets, while many see it as too great a challenge. Sixty-nine per cent. of small companies reported significant hurdles to exporting in the 2017 Hitachi Capital British business barometer. The key barriers identified in the FSB article are: insufficient resources, whether staff, time, cash or product; unfamiliar local customs, culture and language; shipping issues; handling, clearing and agency charges; exchange rate fluctuations; legislative difficulties overseas; opaque international tax rules; uncertain immigration employment laws; certificates of origin; and other red-tape issues. As Peter Sewell, regional director at Crown World Mobility, puts it:

"Understanding it all takes more than a Google search."

It is easy to see how, for sole traders and small partnerships, exporting might be daunting even to consider. Larger companies have the capacity to employ staff in export markets, and if based in the region, they can better overcome many of the challenges I have listed. For smaller companies, though, that is often just not possible and would amount to a significant proportion of their revenues.

I wish to highlight some specific issues that were raised with me on visits to local businesses in Stoke-on-Trent. I have already mentioned Staffordshire chamber of commerce, the local exports team of which, under Rob Lawley, does a great job, and Stoke-on-Trent is one of the cities that is on the up. When it comes to exports, however, the city continues to underperform against midlands cities of comparable size, such as Coventry. That is, I think, a product of Stoke-on-Trent's business base being far more reliant on small enterprises, and it means that the local team needs more resources to keep the momentum up and fully realise our potential.

We also have unique and specialist sectors, most importantly our ceramics industry. The British Ceramic Confederation is very keen to see a Department for International Trade ceramics expert based in Stoke-on-Trent to meet the very specific needs of the industry. Preferably, they would be based at the new ceramic research park

that we hope to see developed as part of the sector deal that the ceramics industry is pursuing with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

I know that the Department is well versed in the issues facing the ceramics industry after Brexit and the need to continue combating unfair trade practices from countries that do not respect the rules-based international trade system. Indeed, the Minister of State for Trade Policy was a very welcome guest to a roundtable that I hosted recently with local ceramics firms at Valentine Clays in Stoke-on-Trent South. I am also pleased to report that Heraldic Pottery, which he also visited on his trip to Stoke-on-Trent, has expanded further by buying the significant and historic Duchess China Works in Longton in a supply-chain takeover.

Ceramics is undergoing a hugely welcome renaissance in its authentic home of the Potteries, and the export success for businesses large and small will add to the mood of economic optimism in the city. The touring exports hub that joined the Minister on his visit to Valentine Clays is an important part of the engagement that business needs.

I am delighted that the Department has listened to the concerns that I and others have raised about the need to continue anti-dumping measures post Brexit. Most recently, the Secretary of State confirmed that measures to prevent unfair dumping practices that threaten our ceramics industry from artificially cheap imports would be rolled over when we leave the EU. It is also incredibly reassuring for the industry that, under a no-deal Brexit, tariffs would continue to apply to certain ceramic products.

It is essential that, as a Government, we continue to champion measures that support smaller businesses to create more job opportunities, particularly more skilled jobs, which attract a higher salary. In January, the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), joined me on a visit to Park Hall Business Village. The village, which has expanded in phases, currently now houses more than 100 small businesses, employs more than 1,000 people and occupies over 250,000 square feet of commercial space. It verifies the growing economic success that has been seen and has increased the demand for additional commercial space. There we met: Deck Joint Ltd, which engineers and manufactures "leave in place" formwork for the construction industry; Eden Holistic Pet Foods, a rapidly growing business that supplies grain and gluten-free pet foods; and Fifteen Group, which provides IT services. We have many other smaller businesses that are expanding and have huge potential to export more of their products and services.

One of the issues that is raised most often with me locally is the need to widen awareness of the export finance that is available. Far too few have a good awareness of the support available to finance growing exports or enter new markets. It can sometimes come as a pleasant surprise to small businesses when they find out quite how supportive the Government are in de-risking the considerable financial outlay for first-time exporters—though, of course, more resources, more reliefs and so on will always be welcome in persuading small businesses to take that final step into being an export supplier, especially of goods and services, which are more complicated in their logistics than putting a parcel in the mail after an order on the internet.

Plenty of advice and information is available to small businesses that are looking to export. A great deal of it is free of charge or comes in premium form with membership of one of the trade groups or small business forums that do such excellent work. What I ask of the Government is that the exports strategy be fully resourced to maximise its positive effect. Global Britain's success will be built on the success of local businesses, many of which have never exported before. Crucially, we need to have increased expert support in export markets to allow small businesses to penetrate those markets. I hope that those small businesses in particular will be the focus of the Government's efforts to support and connect businesses to grow on the world stage.

8.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate on how, where and with what resources the Department for International Trade is supporting exports from small and medium-sized businesses. My hon. Friend is a remarkably energetic, knowledgeable, relentless and effective MP in championing the economic interests of his constituents. No one does more than he does to promote Stoke, and the jobs and businesses on which its prosperity depends. Like my hon. Friend, I have read the Federation of Small Businesses' paper, "Breaking New Ground". The FSB plays an important role in encouraging more SMEs to export, and its analysis identifies the barriers that we, in conjunction with trade bodies, are seeking to help SMEs overcome.

My hon. Friend asks how we can persuade and facilitate more small businesses to export. That is a great question, but before I attempt to answer it, let me update the House on this country's export performance. The Government believe in the benefits of business, trade and exports. Exporting builds economic resilience and provides higher-skilled, higher-paid jobs, as my hon. Friend rightly says. It raises the average profitability, productivity and tax contributions of companies that do it. Exporting is at the heart of this Government's mission to build a more prosperous, stronger, fairer and truly global Britain. Exports underpin the UK's economic transformation since 2010, and account for a major part of the UK's productivity growth.

In the year to January 2019, exports grew to £636 billion—up 42% since the Labour party were sitting on the Government side of the House, although the Opposition Benches are empty tonight. The record employment statistics of the last few days show how potters in Stoke and residents everywhere have benefited from a Government who put wealth creation, not class warfare, at the heart of their policies. My Department has only existed since 2016, but it has played its part in that success story—not least, I am pleased to say, in the midlands. For instance, DIT's global growth service is working with Stoke-based wholesaler Nemesis Now, and UK Export Finance is seeking to reinforce the success of Ceramic Drying Systems. Another example is that of Mantec Technical Ceramics, which the Department has helped on its journey to understand opportunities in Vietnam, including taking the company on a group market visit. The Department has assisted tens of thousands of companies like these to fulfil their global exporting ambitions across the country.

We do not just support exports from Stoke; we also support foreign direct investment into Stoke and the rest of the UK. This has included involvement with the

majority of foreign direct investment projects, which in total created 76,000 jobs in 2017-18, amounting to nearly 1,500 new jobs per week across the country. But we need to go further. The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics show that 232,400 SMEs exported in 2017, which is an increase of 6.7% over the previous year. It is progress, but this represented just 9.8%—less than a tenth—of all SMEs. In fact, a DIT survey in 2017 found that 19% of all registered businesses—516,000—could be exporting, but are not. In other words, there are more companies that think that they could be exporting than there are that currently can and do.

The International Trade Centre has estimated that the UK has an untapped potential of £124 billion in the export of goods alone. As my hon. Friend has so rightly said, this means that we need to help businesses to export more, whatever their size—from the largest multinational to the small and medium-sized enterprises that are the backbone of our economy. It also means protecting businesses from injury caused by unfair trading practices such as the dumping of goods, and setting tariffs at a rate that balances their exposure to foreign competition with a need to access affordable supplies. I again congratulate my hon. Friend on championing the ceramics industry so effectively ahead of the announcement of what no-deal tariffs would look like.

We also need to improve our export support. Last August, we launched our export strategy. This set a national goal of raising exports from 30% of GDP to 35%, moving us towards the top of the G7 and thus realising our aim of being a trading superpower. This builds on the UK's industrial strategy, with the ambition of making exporting the norm, not the exception, for our businesses, working with firms of every size to unlock their exporting potential.

The export strategy sets out a step change in the Government's support offer based on four main types of barrier that are stopping businesses reach their exporting potential: first, a lack of access to financing; secondly, a lack of connections or an "in" into local markets; thirdly, a lack of information or knowledge about exporting, or the ability to easily acquire it; and fourthly, the need to encourage firms to begin their exporting journey. I will make a few remarks about each of these.

First, financing of trade, I am pleased to say, is an area where we have been a pioneer. The UK's award-winning credit export credit agency, UK Export Finance, was the world's first export credit agency, and it has been found, in each of the past two years, to be the best export credit agency in the world. It provides businesses of all sizes with export finance so that they can win contracts in the first place, trade finance to give them the cashflow to fulfil them, and insurance to make sure they get paid at the end. We know that 77% of the businesses it helped last year were SMEs. We have partnered with five of the UK's biggest banks to make it easier for SMEs to access UKEF support. Since introducing its trade finance products in 2011, designed around the needs of smaller businesses, UKEF has helped to enable more than £4.1 billion-worth of UK exports. This Government have already increased UKEF's capacity to over 100 markets and the number of currencies to more than 60. That means that companies that buy British goods in a foreign jurisdiction can buy using currency and borrow in a local currency, thanks to the sovereign guarantee provided by UKEF.

[Graham Stuart]

The 2018 Budget increased UKEF's direct lending support by £2 billion over the financial years 2020-21 and 2021-22, as we leave the European Union. As my hon. Friend remarked, the spring statement, only last week, announced a new general export facility. This will enable exporters to access a UKEF-backed loan to support their cashflow for a much wider variety of uses—instead of just to fulfil a specific contract, to access the sovereign guarantee. This support will take the form of a guarantee on 80% of the value of a loan—or, as I understand it, an overdraft—from a bank, and will be available from UKEF's partner banks and non-bank financial institutions. In addition, UKEF is holding a consultation on creating a more flexible content policy. At the moment, the content has to be at least 20% from the UK supply chain. We are looking to see whether we can make that more flexible so that we can support exports all over the world and, by doing so, show maximum flexibility and maximise the economic benefits to the UK.

Secondly, on connecting businesses into local markets, to do this we have a network of DIT staff in 108 countries across the world. They provide businesses, both large and small, with practical advice on local regulations, business practices or consumer preferences. They point those businesses towards specific opportunities, help them make local connections, and lobby directly on their behalf. Again, this is especially helpful for small businesses that are entering these markets for the first time. I am pleased to say that they are reinforced by Her Majesty's newly appointed nine trade commissioners—senior leaders with strategic expertise who have been given the authority, autonomy and resources to drive our trade performance in key priority markets around the world, as well as being supported by more than 240 DIT ministerial visits.

Thirdly, we have taken steps to help better inform businesses about the opportunities to export. This includes a network of sector-specific and region-specific advisers. My hon. Friend referenced this, and put in a bid for a ceramics specialist based in his area. As well as having specific advisers—we will consider his bid today carefully—there are 17,000 specific opportunities listed on our great.gov.uk website from markets around the world for UK businesses to express an interest in and apply for.

Finally, we have also taken measures to encourage businesses to export. Our research told us that small businesses that are new to exporting often overestimate the difficulties. In fact, many businesses told us that once they had started exporting, they wished they had done it sooner. As I said, we estimate that there are hundreds of thousands of small businesses that could be exporting but do not. A key part of tackling that issue is not the Government urging and persuading particularly, but getting successful exporters to share their experience with others. That is why we are rolling out our successful northern powerhouse export champions scheme to the entire country, which we committed to in the export strategy. There will be a network of 1,000 exporters who can act as advisers and critical friends to

SMEs that are beginning to export. Only yesterday we launched the scheme in London, and tomorrow we will launch it for the east of England region.

Those four areas are the heart of our export strategy. It is a strategy that has been designed from the ground up, with implementation in mind. That is why we developed it with business, from roundtables and meetings to workshops and user surveys, and why we have focused Government support on what Government do best, rather than duplicating our excellent private sector market in export support and financing. It is also why we agree that this support must be properly resourced. It is why we have the UK's first ever Department of State solely dedicated to international trade. If we are to compete, particularly as we leave the European Union, we need to ensure that we are able to support and project the UK offer all around the world, as other countries and rival suppliers seek to do so.

A variety of points have been made in the debate, including on the need to ensure that certification of food exports is facilitated. We take that extremely seriously and are doing everything we can to plan ahead for it, particularly if we end up leaving without a deal. My hon. Friend suggested an MPs' guide to export services. I pledge to take that away and look at it. It sounds like an extremely good idea and something that we should follow up. We heard praise from his neighbour, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), for the Staffordshire chamber of commerce. I would like to praise not only that chamber of commerce but the others around the country, which provide that close link and encourage people on the exporting journey.

My hon. Friend made a point about Stoke's reliance on smaller businesses. We have to get our strategies right to help smaller businesses. Often we can do that by improving our digital offer. It is much improved, but we have further to go in making it better still. Focusing on exports and trade and opening up markets around the world—my Department's brief—is fundamental to delivering the prosperity that our constituents want for their lives. It is also fundamental to generating the tax receipts that will pay for the public services on which they rely.

This Government have joined up the drive and focus on economics, linking it through to the wider social policies that we all want to see delivered. One of the great failings of the Labour party was that it neglected that. That is why we have painstakingly built a business-friendly environment, and by doing so, we have got record numbers of people in work. We have been able to put record amounts of funding into the NHS and see breakthroughs—for instance, in breast cancer this week. It is all thanks to joining up, all the way through from the smallest business in my hon. Friend's constituency going on the exporting journey, to the tax receipts that then pay for the public services on which we all depend.

Question put and agreed to.

8.58 pm

House adjourned.

Deferred Divisions

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CONSUMER PROTECTION)

That the draft Product Safety and Metrology etc. (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 7 February, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 313, Noes 267.

Division No. 367]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey

Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Frank
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene

Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, rh Damian
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote cast by Tracey Crouch*)
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston

Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David

Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Gapes, Mike
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glendon, Mary
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Haigh, Louise
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast
 by Mark Tami*)
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon

Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast
 by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Owen
 Snell, Gareth

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Heidi
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Chris Leslie*)
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette

Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crausby, Sir David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Nic
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh

Sobel, Alex
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Swinson, Jo
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Derek

Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Goodman, Helen
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Grogan, John
 Haigh, Louise
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Lee, Karen
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly (*Proxy vote cast by Mark Tami*)
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward

Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Nandy, Lisa
 Norris, Alex
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pidcock, Laura
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sherriff, Paula
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Proxy vote cast by Vicky Foxcroft*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Owen
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitfield, Martin
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Wilson, Phil
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Question accordingly agreed to.

AMENDMENTS RELATING TO THE PROVISION OF
 INTEGRATED CARE REGULATIONS 2019 (S.I., 2019,
 No. 248)

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Amendments Relating to the Provision of Integrated Care Regulations 2019 (S.I., 2019, No. 248), dated 13 February 2019, a copy of which was laid before this House on 13 February, be annulled.

The House divided: Ayes 216, Noes 317.

Division No. 368]

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Crausby, Sir David
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon

Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Nic
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Austin, Ian
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conon
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle

Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Frank
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Howell, John

Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kendall, Liz
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Law, Chris
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McInnes, Liz
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll

Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote
 cast by Tracey Crouch*)
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross

Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben

Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Woodcock, John
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Frank
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justice
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, rh Damian
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard

Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew

Question accordingly negated.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

That the draft Organic Production (Control of Imports) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 13 February, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 39.

Division No. 369]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory

Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain

Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote
 cast by Tracey Crouch*)
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline

Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

NOES

Bardell, Hannah
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Brock, Deidre
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Fellows, Marion
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Gyimah, Mr Sam

Hendry, Drew
 Hollern, Kate
 Lake, Ben
 Law, Chris
 Linden, David
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Mc Nally, John
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 Monaghan, Carol
 Newlands, Gavin
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Stephens, Chris
 Thewliss, Alison
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Wishart, Pete

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (AGRICULTURE)

That the draft Organic Production and Control (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, which were laid before this House on 13 February, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 38.

Division No. 370]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Austin, Ian
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Choqe, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, rh Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Frank
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen

Question accordingly agreed to.

Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hermon, Lady
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig

Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence

Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas (*Proxy vote
 cast by Tracey Crouch*)
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

NOES

Bardell, Hannah
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Chalk, Alex
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Fellows, Marion
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Hendry, Drew
 Hollern, Kate
 Lake, Ben
 Linden, David
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Mc Nally, John
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 Monaghan, Carol
 Newlands, Gavin
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Stephens, Chris
 Thewliss, Alison
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Wishart, Pete

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 20 March 2019

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

Special Educational Needs

9.30 am

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): A large number of Members wish to speak, so after the main speech I will straightaway impose a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. People may take their clothes off—within reason.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered SEN support in schools.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, I think for the first time. Before discussing the policy that I wish to address, I will take a moment to emphasise why special educational needs support in schools is such an important topic. I secured the debate because of a number of constituency cases that have come through my surgery. Constituents raised the issue with me and brought me to the point at which I felt the need to discuss it in Westminster Hall. I will not talk specifically about constituency cases, because I want to speak to the wider issue, which affects not just cities such as York but the whole country. That is reflected in the number of Members attending the debate this morning.

I will touch on the importance of SEN and why it is worth taking the time to ensure that the system of support works for all children with SEN. Our starting point should therefore be to see SEN as something that informs mainstream education policy, rather than a specialist area relating to a minority of pupils. More than 1.2 million pupils in England—that is 14.6%—have an identified special educational need, of whom 250,000, or one in five, have either a statement of SEN or an education, health and care plan in place. We should also be conscious of the fact that the SEN of many more students are likely to remain unidentified. For me, that is the wider issue of real concern.

New research by Professor Lucinda Platt at the London School of Economics and Dr Sam Parsons of University College London has helped to inform us about the short, medium and long-term effects on people's lives of being identified with SEN at school. While the findings are alarming, they serve to underline the obligation on us all to ensure that the next generation of children do not experience their special educational needs as something that impacts negatively on their prospects at school and future life chances.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this incredibly important debate. SEN support has an impact on children throughout my constituency. I am outraged on their behalf and that of their parents when I hear that some students who have an EHCP are left without any education, some for up to a year, or just having it for an hour a week. He mentioned the long-term impact of an SEN diagnosis

and schools that cannot cope with the needs of those children, and that is incredibly important. I look forward to hearing him expand a little on that.

Julian Sturdy: The hon. Lady makes a good point. Members will mention different examples of constituency cases in the debate, which shows that this is a wide issue. However, I completely accept the point that it is about not just diagnosis but the next steps. I will come on to that, and I will put a few questions to the Minister. I hope that she will be able to respond to them accordingly.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for leading this incredibly important debate. Does he agree that mainstream schools must be supported as much as possible to educate SEN children in that setting? If they cannot and they exclude children, that in turn puts huge pressure on special schools, which cannot then cope, increasing the risk of exclusion into incredibly expensive independent provision, which drains the budget.

Julian Sturdy: I entirely agree. There is also a wider issue: it is important for children to be taught together with their peers—I want to come on to this, and the study I mentioned talks about it—because of the potential stigmatisation of being taken out of mainstream education and the consequences that can have for all the students. I completely accept the importance of that.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I am listening with interest to his analysis, and I look forward to his further comments. I welcome the extra resources that the Government have given, but real issues and concerns remain. Is he aware that in my borough the high needs in Bexley meant a 14% increase in the number of education, health and care plans during the 2017-18 academic year, but with only a 1.9% increase in the high needs block allocation this year? Bexley works hard to ensure that needs are met, and has agreed a contribution with the schools forum given the schools' own high needs funding cost pressures, but the increase in demand is letting down our children.

Julian Sturdy: I was not aware of the specific percentages and increases in my right hon. Friend's local borough, but I accept them completely—I think they mirror what we see across the country, and certainly in my region. He makes the point very well, and I am sure that his council is working hard with the resources available to it to ensure that those children get the best education possible.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way. I want to develop the point a little. The reports that I get back from schools in my constituency indicate that the knock-on effect of pressures on local authority funding for such children is on mainstream school budgets. Increasingly, schools have to fund special educational needs from their mainstream budgets to make up for the local authority shortfall. That therefore impacts on the wider educational opportunity, not just that of those who need the specific funding.

Julian Sturdy: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, which I accept, and it is certainly what I have seen in the evidence before me. I will develop this further, but the wider point is about schools and local authorities actually identifying all children with SEN—if they identified them all, there might be a financial impact on those specific schools. For me, that is the wider concern in the process.

The study by LSE and UCL found that children with SEN at school are three times more likely than their peers to lack a close friend and to experience bullying most days. Sadly, problems experienced at school have long-term consequences, and the study found that by the time those children are young adults, those with SEN are nearly twice as likely to see friends only once or twice a year and to feel that they have no one to listen to their problems. There is also an impact on relationships and family life in middle age. Adults who had SEN at school are four times as likely to be single and twice as likely not to have children.

The report also suggests that the pressure that children with SEN face at school to perform socially and academically is having a detrimental impact on their long-term mental health and wellbeing. They are twice as likely as their non-SEN peers to feel that life's problems are too much. There is also a significant concern that a disproportionate number of those caught up in the criminal justice system have a special educational need—the relevant studies find that they represent between 25% and 50% of offenders. All that is extremely alarming.

Addressing the disparity in outcomes for SEN children has been a priority of successive Governments of all political persuasions and colours. There is evidence that policy changes have made a positive impact on the lives of a new generation of SEN children. The reforms brought in by the Children and Families Act 2014, and the introduction of education, health and care plans—touched on already by hon. Members—were welcomed as positive step towards providing more reliable and individually tailored support for those with the greatest needs.

Last week the Government talked about creating 37 new SEN schools. Although I welcome the 3,400 extra high-quality school places that could be created, I am not convinced that will address the need for early intervention in mainstream schools, as other hon. Members have mentioned. It is possible that will further contribute to the social marginalisation of SEN children.

Melanie Onn: What does the hon. Gentleman think about the role of teaching assistants in schools? For children with SEN or EHCPs, one of the fundamental support mechanisms in school is teaching assistants, but their numbers have been drastically reduced; they are often the first to lose their jobs when there is restructuring and school budget cuts.

Julian Sturdy: The hon. Lady makes an important intervention. Teaching assistants and teachers have a huge role to play—I will touch on that later in my speech—because it is about spotting SEN at an early age. If we can tackle it at the beginning, it will be easier to tailor support for those children. The first port of call has to be teachers and teaching assistants at school.

The Government's announcement last year that they would invest an additional £365 million from 2018 to 2021 is to be welcomed. However, I am not convinced

that funding alone can address the disparities that children with SEN face. Far-reaching policy changes are required. The first of those that I want to touch on is exams. By far the largest query that I receive from constituents in relation to SEN is about assessment concessions—extra time in exams. Although I understand that the recent move towards an exam-based system in schools, from the perspective of academic rigour, is probably the right way to go, I am concerned that has had the undesirable side effect of limiting the potential of SEN students.

Constituents tell me time and again that their children's two biggest problems in exams are the anxiety that they inevitably generate and the unfair concentration on one small aspect of that child's ability: namely, the ability to memorise facts. The GCSE religious studies exam includes a requirement to learn 64 quotations. I do not think I could do that; perhaps a number of Members could, but it would be beyond my ability. The GCSE physics exam requires the ability to memorise 24 formulae—I might find that slightly easier.

The default response to the disadvantages that SEN students face in exams is to offer extra time, but no amount of extra time will address the fact that exams as a means of assessment are intrinsically unsuitable for some types of students and learners. The solution has to be to revisit the place of coursework, which once made up 40% to 50% of GCSE assessment. Coursework does not discriminate against SEN children with high cognitive ability but for whom memorising facts does not come that easily. Coursework has the additional benefit of alleviating the anxiety of one assessment and spreading the pressure throughout the year, rather than concentrating on the examination period.

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): The traditional argument has been that we need coursework for people who cannot do exams, and that those who can do exams are fine, but that binary choice is unhelpful. The parent of a child with autism in Bury spoke to me about his daughter's ability to take the new times tables test that has been introduced. In fact, she is really good at maths; what she struggles with is the speed at which an immovable testing mechanism is applied. Although her ability to calculate is not a problem, she is expected to answer questions that move on at a fast rate. We must not fall into the trap of suggesting that those with special educational needs are somehow non-academic or unable to perform in mainstream education, because all they need is a better, more dynamic service.

Julian Sturdy: I entirely agree; the hon. Gentleman makes the point very well. Many of those children have really high ability, but their ability needs to be managed so that they can get through the system. The point I want to make, as he mentioned, is that ultimately we need a balance to be struck. It is not all about the individual exam, and it is not all about a shift to coursework. When major changes such as moving from coursework back to exams are made, there will be consequences. The system has to recognise that a balance has to be struck.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that regarding the education of those with special educational needs, we need to look longer term to career prospects? I find it fascinating that some

employers specifically look for those with autism because they are better at dealing with computer challenges than others. Those with special educational needs have some strengths that those without them do not. Surely, the education system should recognise that and take it into account when developing programmes, so those children can take advantage of their employability when they leave school.

Julian Sturdy: That is a fair point, but I reiterate that this is not about compartmentalising individuals; it is about making sure they are kept in mainstream education and have the ability to thrive and prosper, as everyone should have. The system has to allow that.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I agree with the hon. Gentleman about spreading the pressure throughout the course, but he mentioned children being included in school. Does he agree that we really need the Government to look at the exclusion policies adopted of late by academies? Many children are excluded just before the exam and never get the opportunity to sit it.

Julian Sturdy: Is the hon. Gentleman's point about exclusions that are to do with targets?

Alex Cunningham: That is very much the case in some instances, but there are also children who misbehave or get into trouble towards the end of their academic course and find themselves excluded from the exam altogether.

Julian Sturdy: That is a really important point. Where that happens—I know it does in certain circumstances—it hugely impacts the life prospects of the student involved. Ultimately, this is about ensuring that young people have the best opportunities in life, and that we harness their individual skills—they all have them—and maximise their life prospects. We must ensure that we do not in any way damage them or, ultimately, exclude them from the system or from society as a whole.

This point has already been raised in interventions, but another thing I believe can make a real difference is the professional development of teachers. Research by the Children's Commissioner in 2013, and the Salt review in 2010, found that training does not always adequately prepare teachers to teach pupils with SEN. That has contributed to pupils with SEN not being identified and supported sufficiently early in their education, which can have huge implications later on. Catching children at an early age can make a real difference. Such awareness is vital if we are to increase early intervention for students with SEN. That is important for literacy skills, which are more challenging for older children and adults to acquire. If children with SEN are not identified early enough, the problem gets worse.

Mainstream schools have taken to relying exclusively on SEN co-ordinators, or SENCOs. Valuable though they are, SENCOs are often overstretched, as demands on their time and resources increase. The British Dyslexia Association recommends that the Government should consider an integrated approach instead. Training existing teachers would result in more responsive early interventions and allow SEN support to be conducted without compromising course delivery. That has the potential to reduce costs and, really importantly, to ensure that

those children do not feel marginalised from mainstream education. I have already touched on some of the hidden consequences of that; we must not forget that really important point.

Teachers need to be trained to an appropriate level to teach children with the full range of SEN that they may encounter. I am not a professional in this, but I am told that three levels of SEN professional development are available to teachers: accredited learning support assistant; approved teacher/tutor status; and associate membership of the BDA. The first qualification entails 24 hours of contact time and 20 hours of monitored support, all integrated within the teacher's work in school. I suggest that directing money to such professional development may result in significant savings and improve the prospects of children with complex needs. Fundamentally, though, my constituents tell me that the way we approach SEN funding for schools has to be reconsidered.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): The contributions we have heard will make a real difference, but on the hon. Gentleman's point about somebody being responsible, our constituents often tell us that they always seem to have to fight the system, which never delivers for them just as a matter of public policy. That is not out of any lack of desire in the system; it just seems that everybody is responsible but nobody is. Parent after parent tells me, "This is what I'm entitled to; I can't get it," or, "This is what I need; I can't get it." Their child's plan says they should have it, but it just does not happen. It just seems that the system does not work, even though everyone is trying to make it work. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with that, and does he find that the fact that parents have to fight the system is one of the frustrations we all share?

Julian Sturdy: I entirely agree. That is what drove me to introduce this debate. Constituents come to me to say exactly those things. I will touch on this in my conclusion, but we have to remember that there are parents out there—I do not blame parents—who are prepared to go out and fight for their children, get them in where they need to be and get the right support, but there are also disadvantaged children who may not have parents who are prepared to go and fight for them. They are the ones who fall through the gaps.

James Frith: This is about parents' ability to go out and fight, not their preparedness to do so. Again, please let us not fall into thinking that the parents who reach our door are those who are prepared to. They are simply the ones who are able to. Someone who faces changing shift patterns and has to use public transport, for example, may be prevented from reaching our door. The fact that we hear so much about these issues from parents who are able to reach us shows that there are great swathes of parents who do not speak to us directly about them but very much face the same, if not worse, issues.

Julian Sturdy: I accept that. That is a very important point. The point I was making is that there are parents from all backgrounds who, if I am brutally honest, will not know that their children might need support. As I said, it is those children with unidentified needs who fall through the gaps and do not get that support. That goes back to what I said about the whole system and the need for early identification. Schools and teachers need

[Julian Sturdy]

to be able to work with parents so they get that support. We should not have the problem, which the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) identified—I entirely agree with him—of parents having to go to their local MP or their local councillor, or to the different voluntary associations that work with parents, to try to break down barriers or get through doors to get that support for their children. That is the wider problem. I think everyone present would agree that parents should not have to do that.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): The Education Committee is conducting an inquiry into this hugely important subject. The Committee heard that most people accept the positive intention of the policy introduced in 2014—the education, health and care plans and so on, which my hon. Friend has covered. In theory, that policy puts more power and control in the hands of parents, but does he agree that it is impossible to deliver what is supposed to be a needs-based system with a finite budget? Problems are created because the things pupils need are not deliverable on the budget available.

Julian Sturdy: Absolutely—that is a very important point. I will touch on some of the Select Committee’s findings, but I entirely agree.

Alex Chalk: My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) makes a really important point about the extent of the budget. Do we as a community not have to recognise that needs are much higher than they were even 20 years ago? The special schools in my constituency—whether it is Belmont, Bettridge or Ridge—increasingly deal with medical issues that impact some of these children’s ability to learn, yet those medical needs have to be funded from the education budget. That simply adds to the strain on that budget.

Julian Sturdy: That is a good point and I am glad I took the intervention, to which I hope the Minister will respond. I did not want the debate to turn into one about child adolescent mental health services referrals but I am sure all Members have experienced frustration over the referral time lag. I have raised questions in the House and it is immensely frustrating—and part of the reason is that it is a cross-departmental matter, between education and health. However, as my hon. Friend pointed out, a lot of the money comes from the schools budget.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way. Does he agree, on the issue of school budgets, that there is an inequality between schools? The fact that schools are forced to pay for the first 11 hours of meeting an EHCP from their own budgets disadvantages those that do the right thing and take significant numbers of children with special educational needs, and inadvertently helps those that do not. Would it not then be wiser for the Government to agree that EHCPs should be directly funded so that the money followed the pupil entirely, instead of penalising schools that do the right thing?

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Order. Before you respond, Mr Sturdy, may I just say that if your speech ended now I would, given the number of Members wanting to speak, have to impose a three-minute limit? Perhaps you would bear that in mind.

Julian Sturdy: Thank you, Mr Davies. I will try not to take any more interventions, and to bring my remarks to a conclusion, but the point that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) made was the one I wanted to go on to. There is genuine concern that the system provides a perverse incentive to schools not to rigorously identify and protect children with special educational needs. Schools are not provided with straightforward per pupil funding. Rather, a notional proportion of their overall budget is earmarked as SEN funding. Crucially, however, that is not ring-fenced, which means that by identifying more children with SEN, and funding them, schools will allocate up to £6,000 per pupil that they could have spent on other areas. That is exactly the point that the hon. Gentleman made.

Schools have access to additional funding from local authorities for children with especially complex needs, but my concern is the effect that that has on children whose SEN provision schools have to fund in its entirety. Alarming, the percentage of pupils with identified SEN but whose needs are not complex enough to qualify for a statement or EHCP reduced from 18.3% in 2010 to 11.7% in 2018, while the proportion with complex needs remained static. I do not want to prejudge the reason for the reduction, but it is certainly dramatic. Surely it reflects not an actual reduction in the number of children with SEN, but rather a reduction in the number who have been identified. In the absence of a proactive approach from schools, parents tell me they have to fund diagnoses for their children privately and are becoming frustrated with schools that are failing to investigate their concerns properly. As we have heard, Members across the House face the issue regularly in their surgeries.

On the other side of the matter are local authorities, which have also complained about pressures on the high needs funding block. The National Autistic Society has raised concerns about the wait that children face to be provided with appropriate support, and a worrying increase in the number of requests for EHCP assessments that are refused by local authorities. In November, Mr Dave Hill, the executive director for children, families and learning at Surrey County Council, told the Education Committee that SEN funding was approaching a “national crisis” because of

“all the money being spent on firefighting and no money being spent on prevention.”

Indeed, North Yorkshire County Council’s high needs funding has increased by only 0.75% at the same time as demand has risen by 10%. Councils are now liable to fund children with complex needs from the ages of nought to 25 under an EHCP.

As I mentioned earlier, the introduction of EHCPs is to be welcomed and indeed they have proved popular with parents, providing both certainty and individual flexibility. However, councils have expressed concerns that their high needs budgets are becoming increasingly committed to the funding of the 20% of SEN pupils who qualify through having an EHCP, leaving little to spare for the remaining 80% of SEN students who do not qualify. That is an important point. It is particularly frustrating for the parents of children with complex needs who just fail to meet the threshold for EHCP qualification. The concern is that that is creating an

all-or-nothing system, where a dramatic difference in support results from the fine margin on which someone does or does not qualify for an EHCP.

I want to draw my remarks to a conclusion because I know a number of Members want to speak. We need to look at the exam assessment concession system and whether it adequately addresses the disadvantages that SEN children face.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Order. Perhaps you can try to bring your remarks to a close in a moment. I am already down to two and a half minutes each for other speakers. Carry on—you are entitled to speak as long as you like, but be aware that there are eight speakers, plus the Front Benchers.

Julian Sturdy: I will take 30 seconds, Mr Davies. I have obviously taken a lot of interventions, which have affected what I wanted to say.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I am just advising you.

Julian Sturdy: I appreciate that advice, Mr Davies.

We need to review the perverse incentives that result in schools failing to identify children as SEN, and the controversy between parents and local authorities over EHCP qualification. We need to prioritise teacher training, so that all teachers have basic skills for working with children with SEN, creating a more integrated approach. I have questions whether the policy of new SEN free schools is the right way of addressing the underlying issues, as I have mentioned.

Finally, we need to look at the effectiveness of education, health and care plans, especially in regard to the proportion of local government higher needs SEN funding spent on those plans at the expense of the 80% of SEN children and students who are not on the plans or who just miss out on qualifying for an EHCP. Ultimately those children are falling through the gaps, and the consequences for their future development and potential opportunities are huge. We Westminster politicians must not forget that, and must face up to it and react. I hope that the debate, given the number of colleagues present from across the House, will mean that we can try to move things on. I look forward to hearing what the Minister and other Front-Bench speakers have to say.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I was going to call the Front Benchers at 10.25 but I will now call them at 10.30, and give them eight, eight and 12 minutes. Other Members will have two and a half minutes.

10.8 am

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I want to start by mentioning two incredible young people whom the Education Committee met yesterday. One young man called Ben said

“we are not...SEND. We are human beings, the same as the rest of you...remember that fact...We are...not a problem...Work with us”.

Another wonderful young woman called Eva said SEN children have dreams and ambitions too.

That should be at the core of everything we talk about and what makes and shapes our policy decisions—the children at the heart of it.

I agree with many things that the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) said, including about the tension—I say conflict of interest, but other people say tension—between a needs-based system and a finite budget. If we truly wanted all our young people to have those dreams and ambitions, to be seen as capable individuals who are able to achieve and just need that extra support to get there, we would not have a finite budget. We would genuinely match the needs of every individual child.

There are many problems on the way, and in the few moments I have I want to mention some of them. There is currently no audit of the notional SEN budget. There is the £6,000 that schools are supposed to spend, but there is no audit of how they spend it or what they spend it on. There is a lack of consistency in SEN support, including for pre-EHCP children, where there is no consistency in what the support should look like, what they should have and what the standard should be. There are issues with teacher training, in that not enough time is spent on SEN. That has been an issue since time began and a conversation that schools have been having ever since.

The therapy services that should be offered to support children are missing from local government, particularly those relating to speech and language provision. As the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) pointed out, that is an issue for schools because teaching assistants have to deliver it and so it comes out of the education, not the health, budget.

I would like to say one final thing: our SEN children are fundamentally underfunded and there is a fundamental lack of recognition of the issue's importance and of what these children can achieve. I plead with the Government to change the accountability system and give our schools the money they need.

10.11 am

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) on securing this debate on a hugely important issue. Special educational needs and disabilities provision touches on every part of education, from early years all the way through to further education and higher education—not just for the vulnerable children who need the support, but for everyone else, as it has an increasing impact on schools' core budgets and spending.

In the very limited time available, I will touch on one specific issue; I will use my own council in Nottinghamshire as an example, but it is a wider issue. Nottinghamshire County Council has a good reputation for SEND support, but there are growing problems and it loses out on funding compared with the national average, making it impossible to sustain that support.

Compared with its statistical neighbours, the council receives £7 million less for providing the same services. It is punished for having historically been inclusive, keeping children with SEND in mainstream schools as far as possible and pushing the money down from its own budgets into those of individual schools. That means that the council has historically spent less, which works against it in the funding formula—having taken the right educational decisions for pupils, it now receives less funding. That is not right and it is not sustainable.

SEND funding has an impact on all areas of education. There has been a lot of talk about school funding, but of course increasing proportions of those budgets are

[Ben Bradley]

spent on topping up gaps in SEND support. I welcomed the announcement at the end of last year that there would be more money over the next two financial years, but we need to do more. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister knows that and that she is making that case. Everyone in this Chamber has a duty to ensure that the Chancellor understands the storm brewing in SEND funding.

Nottinghamshire County Council has taken the right approach: it aims to be inclusive and to give the funding and autonomy to schools wherever possible, because they are best placed to understand their pupils and to give them a voice and a say in the care and support they receive, as well as to reduce costs and bureaucracy. It is therefore all the more frustrating that it and many other councils like it around the country are now being hit financially for taking the right educational decisions.

I urge the Government to ensure that this issue is treated as a priority. The Minister will be aware of stats showing that SEND spending, particularly in post-16 education—which is her own area of responsibility—is growing in huge numbers that will simply not be sustainable without more help. The spending review is hugely important, and I urge her and everybody in this Chamber to make the case to the Treasury. Over the coming months we must ensure funding for the long term and that we invest properly in SEND provision.

10.13 am

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) for covering so many points in his introductory remarks.

I have just two simple requests for the Minister, which I have raised with the Minister for School Standards and with the Prime Minister a couple of weeks ago. The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) will not be surprised to hear what I have to say. My first request relates to the point made by the hon. Members for York Outer and for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron): the £6,000 is a completely perverse incentive. It is unfair. It is effectively a tax on inclusive schools: they are trying to take pupils and help them, yet they are being hammered by that £6,000. If the Government could do something about that by losing that £6,000, that would be the fairest thing of all.

My other point is that much of the deficit for schools in Gloucestershire is now due to the fact that the additional needs element is not reaching those schools but getting stuck somewhere in the system. If the Government could ensure that the additional needs element reached the schools so that they were able to defray the expenditure in the most appropriate way, it would make a dramatic difference and stop some of the deficits that are beginning to rise.

10.14 am

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) on securing this fantastic debate.

The Children and Families Act 2014 refers to identifying children and young people with SEN, assessing their needs and making provision for them, but if that were

happening, we would not be here today. We are asking schools—we are talking about mainstream schools here, not special schools—to provide special learning programmes; extra help from a teacher or teaching assistant to work in smaller groups for the children concerned; observation both in class and at break time; help with class activities; encouragement to participate in questions and other activities; and help with their communication and physical and personal care.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Derek Thomas: I will not, because we are really short of time. There is no getting away from it: this is about funding. My hon. Friend the Member for York Outer was right to talk about policy change, and I agree with that, but right now this is about the urgent need for funding. The support required cannot be achieved unless we provide that money.

The truth is that, if we do not get this right, the outcome will be a breakdown in the relationship between parents and teachers—we never want that; that is not the best way to support a child in education—and a number of children will leave school altogether. The Ofsted report shows that they simply disappear. We do not know where they are. These are children with vulnerable lives ahead of them. We have situations where the education of the whole class is unfortunately compromised, because teachers, however hard they try, cannot give their full attention to the whole group.

Thelma Walker *rose*—

Derek Thomas: No, honestly, I am not going to give way. I have seen difficult situations and the real challenges that children, parents and teachers face. We have a decision to make, as a Government and as hon. Members. I believe we are failing children with special educational needs. We have a cohort of people who have their whole life ahead of them, and it is for us to ensure that they have a full life. If we get SEND provision wrong, they will have a lifetime of missed opportunities. If we get it right, they will have life chances and opportunity. It is urgent that we get the money where it is needed, right now.

10.17 am

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies.

It is no coincidence that I also speak on behalf of the city of York. The council's estimated spend on the high needs budget is £1.15 million, yet the Government's high needs funding is just £393,000, leaving a shortfall of £760,000. However, we know the need is much greater, as many children do not get diagnosed early enough and often wait years for diagnosis, and many children do not reach the levels for which funding is awarded.

Those shortfalls are experienced throughout the education system, from nursery school—nurseries now have to subsidise childcare costs—to primary and secondary school. I know, from a visit I made to a secondary school in York, that children are sometimes placed in isolation. That causes some of them emotional harm, but the school does not have the capacity to support them. Often, the stigma stays with them all their lives.

Some children are moved to other schools, but that does not address their special educational needs. I am sure if research was undertaken on off-rolling children, it would show that a high proportion have neurodiversity-related needs. Those children become more vulnerable, more at risk of exploitation and more likely to end up in the criminal justice system. Those children are failed.

If I may say it again in this debate, York schools are the worst funded in the country. We have the worst attainment gap in the country. We have the highest rise in class sizes. SEND is seriously underfunded. Children with SEND in York experience among the longest waiting times for diagnosis, and our SEND budget deficit is three quarters of a million pounds. I ask the Minister to pause for a moment to make the correlation between those statistics.

Next year, the overspend on the budget will be £1.3 million, and the following year it will be £1.9 million. Although the education, health and care plans have been extended to the age of 25, no additional funding has been put into the budget and there are no additional resources to support the 51% increase in demand. I ask the Minister to review the budget and ensure that schools are adequately supported to provide vital support for those young people right through their schooling and also in early years, through children's centres and Sure Start schemes.

10.19 am

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) on securing the debate. I declare an interest: my wife is the Cheshire West and Chester Council cabinet member for children and young people.

As we have heard, all hon. Members hear from families who have great anxiety about what is going on. Too often there are delays in agreeing that an education, health and care plan is needed at all, and when those plans are finally put in place, they are too often not delivered in full because schools face funding pressures elsewhere. If a child is in only their fourth or fifth year of education and waits a year for a plan to be put in place, that means that 20% or 25% of their entire education up to that date is put on hold at an absolutely critical period of their development. All the while, parents try their hardest to resolve things, but because overstretched schools and councils can only do so much with the resources they have, no matter how hard they try, things cannot move any faster.

A year's delay might not actually be the worst of it. A 15-year-old boy with autism was featured in *The Observer* last Sunday because he has had to fight for six years—more than half his educational life—to get his education properly funded. However, getting a plan is not necessarily the end of it. The Government's own figures show that, last year, 2,060 children with EHCPs were found to have received no educational provision at all. That is more than 2,000 children getting no education. Is it any wonder that pupils are unnecessarily admitted to special schools or excluded when mainstream schools no longer have the capacity to meet their needs?

Exclusions among children with SEN continue to rise, with Department for Education figures showing that they are up to six times more likely to be excluded,

accounting for half of all permanent exclusions. Is that why home schooling figures have gone up by 40%? Are schools perhaps suggesting that particular children might be better off at home in order to avoid an exclusion? In short, the system hopes to absolve itself of any responsibility by ignoring this rise in home schooling.

Home schooling is not the only issue; the courts are also involved. Many parents of children with SEN feel that the only way to ensure that their child receives the specialist education to which they are entitled is through legal action, with a staggering 89% of cases successful. Such a high appeal success rate across the whole country says to me that the system is broken and needs an overhaul, but the Government seem unwilling to even question why this is happening.

Education is a fundamental right for every child. Every day lost because of a failure to support a child with SEN is another day where that child loses the chance to fulfil their potential. They deserve better, and they deserve action.

10.22 am

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Last Friday, I had the pleasure of speaking with a group of primary school headteachers in Stockton. We talked about the challenges they face and how school is about not only learning but supporting young people through their challenges and their opportunities.

We also discussed how schools deliver quality SEN support. Those headteachers are finding it tough. They lament that 14.6% of the school population have special educational needs—a number that is often higher in areas like mine. We agreed that such support should be provided within a mainstream setting, so that all children can be educated together. However, instead of addressing problems that make integration difficult in mainstream schools, such as funding issues, the Government have announced plans to open 37 new special free schools. That goes directly against efforts to promote and encourage integration among children, casting some as different and moving them away from their peers, as the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) spoke about.

Teachers want integration, and those headteachers in Stockton want more than that. They want the Government to do more to encourage parents to play a full and proper role in the general and even special needs education of their children. I promised those headteachers on Friday that I would raise this issue in the House in my next speech on education, and I am pleased to fulfil that promise today.

Some of the children who those headteachers receive into their schools do not have the most basic of skills, including being able to get dressed or go to the toilet, or simple language and numeracy skills. These children will probably need special educational needs support throughout their schooling, although the heads were at pains to tell me that some of these children come from more privileged backgrounds.

Teachers feel that the responsibility for picking up this personal and special education is being dumped on them—parents just pass it on and expect schools to pick up the pieces. I know that it would not be easy to implement, but those Stockton headteachers like the idea of a parents charter outlining their role in working with the school in the best interests of their children. I am interested in the Minister's views on that.

[Alex Cunningham]

Another area I have been involved in recently is kinship care—family members taking responsibility for children who are not their own, almost all of whom need special educational needs support in school. However, support for kinship carers is not sufficient, with many left isolated and knowing that the children in their care need extra support but not knowing how to get it.

I am pleased to serve on the cross-party kinship care taskforce set up by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). I have heard many horror stories about the problems that children and their kinship carers face. When Ministers get the report—they might not include this particular Minister—I hope they will act on it.

10.24 am

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. As has been mentioned by my colleagues on the Select Committee on Education, we spent yesterday morning in the presence of the RIP:STARS, who describe themselves as children with disabilities for children with disabilities. Ben, who has also been quoted by my Committee colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), told us that he is not a “jigsaw” or “puzzle” to be solved—all they want is an education. In fact, their report concludes with a series of recommendations for schools, including that they should focus on inclusion; involve the child in the provision, not just the co-production of providers; meet holistic needs; personalise provision; and that provision should bear a resemblance to the world and life after school. The list goes on, but surely those are exactly the same principles that we should want to apply to mainstream education, for all our children.

It is becoming clear, however, that parents and children with SEND are being pushed out of mainstream schools, too often because there has not been an increase in personalised, inclusive, contextual learning that gives second chances—because that comes at a price. The Government’s response to date does not go far enough. Independent research commissioned by the Local Government Association predicts a £1.6 billion black hole in high needs funding for councils.

I say to the Minister this is not just about getting more money but about moving money. Tribunals find in favour of the parent and child nearly 90% of the time, costing authorities hundreds of thousands of pounds—wasted money that could have been moved upstream and spent earlier. Some 70% of all exclusions involve a child with SEND.

Schools that I spoke to in my survey last year came back to me yesterday with a series of comments, including:

“We can no longer afford to purchase necessary resources”.

Thelma Walker: I thank my hon. Friend and Committee colleague. The capacity of professionals to support SEND pupils in schools is at its absolute limit. A special educational needs co-ordinator may also be a class teacher and in charge of inclusion and, perhaps, safeguarding. Does he agree that that is too big a role to be able deliver full provision and support for SEND children?

James Frith: My colleague makes an excellent point. I enjoy serving alongside her on the Committee. Punishing school budget cuts have resulted in the loss of teaching assistants, removing capacity from the classroom. In every other walk of life, specialist provision is viewed as additional support that is scalpel-like in its focus, or as enhanced provision, but SEND provision in school classrooms is viewed as low-hanging fruit to be cut, owing to the increasing demand on budgets. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Teaching assistants have gone. One school I represent has lost six and another has lost four. One of my schools told me:

“We can no longer afford to provide additional elements not covered by the statement...with the result that our more vulnerable pupils find it really difficult to cope at lunchtimes. My High Needs budget is actually ALL spent supporting pupils in my school with EHC plans and SEN hours as school has to provide the first £6,000 from its own budget.”

That needs to be looked at. Another school said:

“The numbers of SEND cohort have increased significantly in terms of social, emotional and mental health”,

which has been touched on. Health absolutely needs to be at the table; it too frequently is not. I urge the Minister to look at the issue and to work cross party and on the findings of the Committee’s ongoing SEND inquiry when we report in the summer.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I call Marion Fellows. It would be helpful if you keep your remarks to about eight minutes.

10.29 am

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I will make every effort to go faster, Mr Davies. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) on securing the debate.

It was a real privilege to listen to the powerful evidence of the young people who spoke to the Education Committee yesterday morning. They forcefully and movingly shared their experiences of school, college and university. Representatives from RIP:STARS talked about the research they had carried out with Coventry University on EHCPs and their experiences of them. Young people who are supported by my AFK and who have experience of accessing further education and employment focused on their experiences of post-16 provision. And young people who are supported by the National Deaf Children’s Society and who have current and recent experience of secondary school spoke about their experiences of school.

I ask the Minister to view the footage of yesterday’s evidence gathering session and not to wait for our report, which is due to be published just before the summer recess. The footage is moving and could be fundamentally life changing if we addressed the issues those young people raised in telling us about their experiences.

In Scotland, the Scottish National party believes that all young people and children are entitled to the support they need to reach their full learning potential—education to go out and lead forth. Scotland has a system that focuses on overcoming barriers to learning and getting it right for every child. About 16,000 school-aged children in Scotland have learning disabilities. Education authorities have statutory duties to ensure that pupils with additional

support needs who are due to leave secondary school are supported in making that transition. I am not going to pretend that everything in Scotland is perfect—it is not—but we have the advantage of a Government who promote collaborative working among all those supporting children and young people at the heart of the system, and an Act that sets out the rights of young children and parents.

In addition, through the national implementation of their action plans, “Getting it right for every child” and “Delivering excellence and equity in Scottish education”, the Scottish Government are working to improve outcomes for children and young people with special needs. The Scottish Government have published an implementation framework for the delivery of the Scotland learning disability strategy, which outlines the vision for children who have learning disabilities. The Scottish Government also work closely with Dyslexia Scotland and others to produce resources for schools and to ensure that children and young people with dyslexia are able to realise their potential. Similarly, they support pupils with autism, and, working with Autism Network Scotland, have produced an autism toolbox that provides information to help the identification, support and planning of learning for pupils with autism, as well as helping teachers with their professional development.

The Scottish Government are investing to ensure that the resources are in place to deliver on their commitments to all pupils, including those with special educational needs. One of the challenges we face in Scotland is that a no-deal Brexit would have a catastrophic effect on staffing levels and EU grants, which are vital to our education system and help children and young adults.

I hope the Minister will look at the recent footage of every evidence gathering session held by the Education Committee. I think we can all agree that all children should receive the best possible education that not only prepares them for academic success but fits them to be the citizens of the future. No matter what our Government or party allegiance, we should all seek to give our children the best education we can.

10.33 am

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and I congratulate the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) on securing this important debate. Today we have here both the hon. Member for York Outer and my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), or inner York—their constituency names reflect their Brexit politics, in a way. Who says nominative determinism is dead?

York has lost £9.9 million of education funding since 2015-16. Such losses are one reason MPs across the country are seeing their Friday surgeries full of parents who are stressed and worried about their children not getting adequate SEND—special educational needs and disabilities—provision. We have heard some great speeches today, from my hon. Friends the Members for Stroud (Dr Drew), for York Central, for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) and for Bury North (James Frith).

Interestingly, the Minister has already talked about this subject in the House, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull

West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) in an Opposition day debate. This is what the Minister said at the time, in relation to evidence on children getting SEN provision in our schools: “In some special schools 100% of the children attending are there only because their parents were able to fight through tribunal. She said”—she continued—“that is actually a class issue, because it is white, middle-class parents who are able to go to a tribunal and know how to work the system and where to get support.” She herself said: “What about all those children whose parents do not have the same cultural capital and do not know how to go out there and fight for them? They are not in these residential special schools, so where are they and what is happening to them?” That is the state of this Government and of our SEN provision, with the Minister herself admitting that the system is absolutely broken.

Children with special educational needs or disabilities are bearing the brunt of the Government’s continued cuts to our schools and our local government budgets. This Tory Government have cut more than £1.7 billion from school budgets since 2015. We recently had a three-hour Westminster Hall debate on a petition—I think you were in the Chair, Mr Davies—during which dozens of Members highlighted the cuts to their local schools. Local government is warning of a shortfall in SEND support of over half a billion pounds this year. These punishing cuts have consequences.

In 2017, over 4,000 children with SEND were left without a school place. In 2016, for the first time in 25 years, more children with SEND were educated outside the mainstream, some because they were subject to informal exclusions and some because they were being home-schooled. The stark fact is that this Government have not bothered to keep track of these children, so we do not know where they are or what support they are getting. Over 9,000 children were off-rolled from our school system last year, many of whom had disabilities and special educational needs.

We have a Prime Minister—this makes me angry—who has said that there is no link between police cuts and the rise in knife crime on our streets, and that there is no link between off-rolling in our schools, so not knowing where our children are, and the rise of knife crime in our society. Most people with common sense will think that is ridiculous. Our police forces are talking to MPs not about child sexual exploitation, but about child criminal exploitation. When we do not know where these children are, that provides a fertile breeding ground. The Government will not match Labour’s commitment to make sure that children have to stay on the school roll, so that we know where those children are. No wonder we have the problem of county lines, drug mules and all the other things that go with that.

The crisis in our education system, in recruitment and retention, and in funding cuts across the board has led to a situation in which the number of SEND children facing fixed, permanent or even illegal exclusions remains totally disproportionate compared with their peers, with three quarters of the pupils in pupil referral units having special educational needs, and children with SEND accounting for around half of all permanent exclusions in 2016.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I have a number of pupils in my constituency with SEN who have EHCPs. The schools are not sticking to those

[Alex Sobel]

plans, making it dangerous for those pupils to be in school and making parents feel that they have to withdraw them. The schools do not have the resources and cannot follow the plans.

Mike Kane: I taught in a school and I know that the plans cost money, but that money is not there. Schools are worried about employing cleaners and, according to *The Times* last weekend, we have headteachers cleaning the loos. I had a delegation from a special school for children with autism in Sheffield yesterday, and they are having to reduce the number of assistants and the ratios of children to people providing support are getting bigger. There is very little they can do.

At one point in their lives, more than 2 million children in England will have some kind of SEND, but shockingly only 3% of children in England have SEND statements or education and health care plans.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): In Plymouth and across the country, schools are closing early on Fridays. I have heard parents of kids with SEND saying that the disruption to schedules for kids who require structure and support during school hours is especially hurtful. Does my hon. Friend agree that this type of funding cut is really affecting some kids and that we need to ensure that schools are funded properly to give SEND kids, especially those who value structure and support during school hours, the support they need?

Mike Kane: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. Our hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle referred to a finite budget. There are limits to resources, but what are we doing? We are creating a lost generation. In 20 or 30 years' time, we will say that this is the generation that went through the school system on this Government's watch. It will be the lost generation: 10,000 children a year are off-rolled, and kids with special educational needs are not getting the assistance they need.

Local authorities have overspent their budgets over the past four years and, as has been highlighted, there is a catastrophic shortfall of more than half a billion pounds this year. The mantra from Ministers that more money than ever before—record investment—is going into education not only rings hollow, but shows a total disconnect between reality and rhetoric. As a further shocking indictment of the Government's complete failure to provide adequate SEND support in schools, a UN report in 2016 concluded that the UK was guilty of “grave or systematic violations of the rights of persons with disabilities”.

I came into politics because I was inspired by my MP, Alfred Morris, who introduced the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 as a private Member's Bill. That was the first legislation recognising the human rights of disabled people in any legislature on the planet, and Alf Morris became the world's first Minister for the Disabled. He would be spinning in his grave if he could see what state we have come to in this country and how we are now treating pupils with SEN and disabilities.

The Government must get a grip and fully fund and implement suitable SEND support in schools. Labour would do things differently. We have already said that

we would give—[*Interruption.*] I am hearing muttering from the Government Benches, but the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) needs to hear this message, because things do not have to be like this. We would fund local government services adequately. We pointed that out in our manifesto. We would also replace what has been taken in cuts to our schools. [*Interruption.*]

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Order.

Mike Kane: Ten years of this Government has completely overturned the investment that we saw in schools in the 1990s in particular. Our national education service—[*Interruption.*] Does the hon. Member for Cheltenham want to intervene?

Alex Chalk: I am really disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's speech, because normally he makes such helpful contributions and this one is not that. The fact is that we now spend, as a nation, £50 billion a year on debt interest, which is more than the £43 billion schools budget, and that is in no small part because of the historic failings of the Labour Government.

Mike Kane: Oh my word. Ten years of this Government, and they are about to drive us off a cliff with Brexit, and that is the best the hon. Gentleman can come up with.

Emma Hardy: I am sorry, but the argument made by the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), for whom I normally have a lot of respect, would feel a little more truthful were it not for the fact that the Department for Education spends an awful lot of money on its own ideological pet projects. An example is the £4.6 million spent on Troops to Teachers, which has resulted in only 69 teachers.

Mike Kane: We also have to say that there was not austerity up to 2015, because the education budget was protected. What is happening is actually ideological, because the Government do not want to see that amount of GDP spent on schools in our country. We are going back to the 1980s—we all see it.

The national education service that Labour proposes has at its heart the guiding principle that access to education should be a fundamental right for all, no matter who they are, where they are from or what their circumstances are, because a good education can make a difference. The hon. Member for York Outer pointed this out most eloquently. For too long, SEND provision has been seen as an add-on, as an extra. We are committed to a truly inclusive education system, based on choice, where children, parents and adult learners with SEND alike can attend mainstream or specialist provision and achieve their goals. It is simply not right that a child should lose out because of the circumstances into which they were born or because they have special needs. I and my party are determined to change that for good.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): We have caught up on time, so the Minister has almost 15 minutes.

10.44 am

The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton): It is a pleasure to serve under you, Mr Davies. I will not rise to the speech by the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane). I am disappointed. He is a good man, but it is a shame that

he said what he did, because this had been a good debate. We know that there are problems in the system, and we can argue about budgets, but I say to him that a lot of the problems that we face in the House today are due to party political posturing. We can have arguments about money and budgets, but today was not the time to have that argument. What we wanted to do today and what right hon. and hon. Members did do was raise real concerns about provision for children with special educational needs.

I could easily respond to what the hon. Gentleman said. I could give him back a party political rant if that is what he wants, but I do not believe that my job as a Minister and as a Member of Parliament is to do that. I am going to make some progress, but let me say that when I came into the House in 2005, the very first thing I did was to set up a drop-in day for parents of children with special needs, because under every Government, we never quite get things right. Humility is not in ample—

Thelma Walker: Will the Minister give way?

Anne Milton: I will not for the moment; sorry. Humility is not in ample supply in this place, but we on the Front Benches on both sides should have some humility and accept the fact that Governments—Labour, Conservative and coalition Governments—do not always get it right. What we need to do, in a cross-party—

Thelma Walker: On that point, will the Minister give way?

Alex Cunningham *rose*—

Anne Milton: I will not give way for the moment, because I have not yet even thanked my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) for securing the debate. What is important is that we try to get the system to work. I thank my hon. Friend and congratulate him on securing the debate. He knows that we have made significant reforms to the special educational needs system in recent years. There are real pressures on the budget—I accept that—and there always have been, but much can be done within the current budgets to make the system work better.

Alex Cunningham: I agree with the Minister that this has been a good debate. At the time of Tony Blair's Government, I was a council cabinet member for children and young people, and I saw the massive investment. I acknowledge that the three Governments since the Labour Government left office have built on that, but there remain major issues in relation to special educational needs. I think that the Minister is acknowledging that, and Tory Members are telling her that, so we now need some real action, not just talk.

Anne Milton: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We need to work together on this. In a previous debate that I covered for the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), I said that the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) was very welcome to work across the House to ensure that the system works.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Outer referred to a mental health crisis. This did not get much attention, but the number of pupils with SEN is rising quite

rapidly. We did not get many contributions on the number of offenders who have dyslexic difficulties; a lot of people in prison have such problems. Another issue is the bullying of children with SEN. Coursework was also mentioned. My hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) referred to employers valuing the skills of people with special educational needs, and she was right. I have seen absolutely excellent work by employers in my role as the Minister with responsibility for apprenticeships.

The hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith) made a very good point about flexibility. That is the trouble, is it not? We swing from one side right over to the other. Particularly for children with special educational needs, we need to be flexible in the way we assess them in schools. Additional flexibility, adequate adjustments—

Emma Hardy: On the issue of flexibility, will the Minister encourage the Minister for School Standards to reconsider insisting that 95% of children sit the EBacc, because it is not really suitable for 95% of children?

Anne Milton: I am sure that the Minister for School Standards will take that up. We continue to have discussions about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Outer talked about parents having to privately fund the diagnosis of children. We have talked about the battles that parents face. I repeat what I said in a previous debate on that matter: parents with sharp elbows battle through the system better, but even those with sharp elbows have a difficult fight. The hon. Member for Bury North raised the fact that that money is wasted, and it should be on the frontline. We still have a lot to do.

I will come on to the issue of teacher training. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) raised the important issue of the need to help mainstream schools include children with SEN, and I will say a bit more about that in a minute. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) mentioned FE briefly, but, as the Minister for FE, it caught my ear. Further education colleges do a fantastic job with young people with special educational needs, who often have not succeeded at school or had their needs met. I was recently at a college where they have 400 children with special educational needs, one of whom would not come into the college at all, but stood outside. That child is now thriving, doing well in his qualifications and is about to go on an apprenticeship—absolutely brilliant work.

Derek Thomas: The Minister is absolutely right about FE colleges, but in Cornwall we have found that they have had to reduce the days for young people with special educational needs from five to three, which has not only caused real difficulties for the families, but created discrimination and division between children who are fully able and those with special educational needs. Will she look at that issue in her role as Minister for FE?

Anne Milton: I am happy to look at that. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) talked about the evidence given by one person who said, "I am not a person with special educational needs; I am a normal person." It has to be normal, and we have to adapt the system to make every child and young person in an FE college feel normal.

Sir David Evennett: The Minister is making a constructive and excellent speech. Will she praise the teachers in the colleges and schools for their work in SEN, because they have a difficult job, and I think they are working really hard and well?

Anne Milton: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: the teachers do a fantastic job, in circumstances which are—certainly in further education—quite difficult. He also mentioned funding. He never hesitates to mention the particular issues facing Bexleyheath and Crayford. Through the Children and Families Act 2014—I sat on the Committee considering the Bill—we made big changes to strengthen SEND, including £391 million given to local areas to support implementation, £252 million of which was provided directly to local authorities.

We have approved 125 new special schools spread across the country, including 37 extra ones. A number of hon. Members have also raised the need to have inclusion, as well, so we have provided an extra £100 million of capital funding to create more places in mainstream schools, colleges and special schools for children with SEN, bringing the total capital investment since 2018 to £365 million. The line between inclusion and special schools is very wavy. We must be guided by which setting best suits the needs of the child, though there is sometimes a discrepancy with parents, who want one or the other.

Emma Hardy: I have two quick points. One issue with the changes in the 2014 Act was that they raised the expectation of parents about raising the funding that went with it, and it continued provision through to the age of 25, without providing that additional funding for 18 to 25-year-olds. That has caused some difficulties. As some of my hon. Friends have mentioned, we cannot talk about inclusion without talking about the need to change the accountability measures and the ways that schools are judged, because I think that drives some of the off-rolling and exclusions that we see.

Anne Milton: I will say a little more about that. There are perverse incentives. The hon. Lady talked about an audit of the spend, which I think is an important issue. I should also mention—I think it was mentioned earlier—the £4.6 million that is going into parent-carer forums and the £20 million going into advice, information and support for children and young people with SEND, and their parents, which lasts until 2020.

We are aware of those incentives in the current system—that £6,000—as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew). We intend to gather more information about the way the funding system operates in a call for evidence that we will launch shortly. I am sure that the Education Committee will be involved in that.

I must not forget that my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer secured this debate, so I will mention funding in York. We have announced £250 million additional funding for higher needs across England over the next financial year. Yorkshire will receive £785,000 on top of the increases already promised, bringing City of York Council's higher needs funding to over £90 million next year. However, we recognise that budgets are facing pressures. The Secretary of State is very aware of that.

On educational psychologists, our plans include ensuring a sufficient supply of educational psychologists, trained and working within the system. We said that we would train more to meet increasing demand. Today I am pleased to announce funding of over £30 million to make that happen.

On teachers, briefly, we talked about the need for teachers to be able to recognise and help children with special educational needs. We have developed a range of specialist resources for initial teacher training, including on autism and dyslexia. We are reviewing SEN provision in initial teacher training to inform case studies of good practice. We are taking a range of measures to make that better, which I would go through, but time does not allow.

James Frith: Will the Minister indicate when we can expect the Timpson review? It is now a year since it began. In February, we heard mood music on what it is likely to say, but when will the Timpson review conclude and report?

Anne Milton: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise date. As a Minister, I could just say, "Shortly", which is what Ministers say, but I know that right hon. and hon. Members are keen to see that review—so, soon.

The Government are doing much work, but we know that there are gaps in provision. Needs are not met and families are having battles—those that can—that they should not have to fight. Everyone in this debate wants to make education work for those very special children and their quite extraordinary parents, so that every child gets the opportunities that I have seen some get. I mentioned apprenticeships, and through the apprenticeship diversity champions network I see employers recognise the amazing skills that young people have even without qualifications. That must be no longer be an exception but the normal course of events.

We need a seamless education and training system which is what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is determined to achieve. The debate has raised exactly the issues that need to be resolved in order to meet the needs of those children and young people with special educational needs.

10.59 am

Julian Sturdy: I thank the Minister for her response and Members in all parts of the Chamber for their contributions. It has been a very good debate, especially among Back Benchers. I have a huge amount of respect for the Minister, and I hope that she has listened to the contributions from across the Chamber, because very little disagreement has been expressed in speeches and interventions across the parties. As has been said, ultimately the issue is a ticking time bomb, and of real concern to many constituents who knock on our doors and come to our surgeries. We cannot allow the life chances of some of those children and students to be detrimentally affected by it because, ultimately, we are failing them.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered SEN support in schools.

Insect Population

11 am

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the reduced insect population.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Davies. I am glad to see so many hon. Members present. I will give them plenty of time to intervene, but I hope that they will let me make a bit of progress first. I secured this important debate because the declining insect population is one of the lesser-known tragedies of the human effect on our environment. I wanted to call the debate “Insect Armageddon” or “Insectageddon”, but unfortunately I am little ahead of the House authorities on such matters. That is what we are experiencing, however, and we should be under no illusion about that. Insects are the canary in the coalmine of animal life on the planet: if insects go, all other species will follow.

If we are fighting a war against climate change—we should be under no illusion that we are experiencing a climate emergency—insects are on the frontline of the battlefield and humans are just another species in the war. We are the most intelligent soldiers fighting the war, however, and we cannot expect insects to know that their fields are being built on or that their farmer is using nitrates. We know that our actions are causing the disruption to their ecosystem.

I secured the debate due to the absolutely shocking evidence I heard in the Environmental Audit Committee evidence session on 12 February. I want to put on the record my thanks to Professor Georgina Mace, Dr Mark Mulligan, Professor Peter Cox and Matt Shardlow, who gave the evidence that inspired this debate. I also thank the National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection & Birds, Friends of the Earth and Buglife, which have informed what I will say.

There is a massive depletion of insects, in relation to biomass and abundance. Some studies also show a loss of variety. Most people born by 1980 will perceive that, because 25 or 30 years ago, on a long summer car journey, the windscreen would be full of winged insects. That is now minimal. Why do we need abundance, biomass and a variety of insects to ensure a healthy planet? We need abundance and biomass to support the production of food and water, and to support nutrient cycles and oxygen production. We need variety because that ensures that if a single insect species becomes extinct, we will retain sufficient diversity. New varieties may be able to cope with climate change and other challenges that humans and the planet provide. Studies have most clearly documented the loss of abundance and biomass, which has mostly been caused by land use change for agriculture, the intensification of agriculture, and the application of pesticides, herbicides and novel chemicals in the environment.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I am delighted that my hon. Friend has secured the debate. Does he agree that one way to encourage greater insect populations is to have living streets, such as the one that we are talking about in Whitefriargate in Hull? That whole street will be turned into a living street full of plants and, hopefully, insects.

Alex Sobel: Absolutely. Urbanisation is a big challenge. If we do not create green corridors in our cities, insect biomass, variety and abundance will surely perish.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): This is such an important issue. My hon. Friend talked about agriculture, and the growth of the agrochemicals industry is obviously a main cause. Does he agree that integrated pest management and a more agro-ecological approach to farming is the way we need to go if we are to protect our pollinators and other insects?

Alex Sobel: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who is an expert on the subject in this place. She is absolutely right. We and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs need to do more work on that.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this hugely important debate on one of the biggest issues we face. The Agriculture Bill, which is going through the House, provides an opportunity to take some action on the issue. Will he join me in urging all hon. Members to support new clauses 10 and 11, which would begin to address it by limiting the application of pesticides in agriculture and beyond?

Alex Sobel: That is a timely intervention, because later I will certainly be looking at, and potentially signing, those two new clauses, which stand in the hon. Gentleman's name.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I echo other hon. Members in saying how important the debate is and in congratulating the hon. Gentleman on securing it. He has indicated that the crisis we face is not happening by accident; it is being caused by policies that we can change. Does he therefore share my concern that the UK missed its deadline for submitting its sixth national report for the convention on biological diversity conference, which suggests that it is not terribly serious about it? The UK is also on track to miss 14 of the 19 targets in the convention, which suggests that the Government have a lot to do.

Alex Sobel: It is great that so many colleagues from the Environmental Audit Committee are present. These are exactly the issues that the Committee takes up with Ministers, and it is good that they are getting an airing in the debate. I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady.

I will move on to pollination. The biggest impact of the loss is that we will lose pollinators, and if we cannot sustain natural pollination, there will be a loss of crops. Our world is heading towards a population of 9 billion people. If that rising population is set against the impact of insect loss—let us not mince our words—it puts us on a road to cyclical starvation. We will lose the production of some crops, particularly those that are best for people's health and wellbeing. Crops pollinated by insects are mainly fruit and vegetables; crops such as wheat and maize do not need insect pollinators, so they are not affected as much. It is fruit and vegetables—the fresh food that people need to be eating—that will be lost due to lack of pollination.

We will have to find a way to compensate for the loss of natural pollinators. We already have commercial honey bee colonies, which are produced especially to provide that pollination service, but even those could be affected.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The debate is incredibly timely. In Plymouth we have planted wildflower meadows and bee corridors across the city. They save money, because there is no need to cut back grass, and provide an essential habitat for pollinators, spiders and ground-based insects. Does my hon. Friend support that model being rolled out across the country?

Alex Sobel: Absolutely, and that is a brilliant segue into my next point about ecosystem services.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This is a crucial debate. Is my hon. Friend aware of the work of Professor Jane Hill, who has been mapping the northward progress of butterflies as the climate changes? They are such a sensitive indicator of the pace of climate change in our country.

Alex Sobel: I have seen Professor Hill's work. She is a credit to this country. Our UK academic research community is brilliant, and the Government need to take more notice of its work.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): On the point about pollinator corridors, I withdrew my private Member's Bill on pollinators last year, because the Government agreed to fund Buglife and Matt Shardlow—the hon. Gentleman has mentioned them already—to complete their mapping of those corridors across the country, with a view to using the environment Bill to look at planning regulations to force local authorities to plan for them in new developments, which would be welcome. Does he agree that the charities already doing that work have a huge role to play, and that the Government should support them with funding to continue? There does not need to be a massive revolution in policy.

Alex Sobel: The hon. Gentleman will be unsurprised to hear that I absolutely agree, and I would like that to be legislated for in the environment Bill, particularly as he lost his piece of legislation on that proviso.

I will move on to ecosystem services. On top of the loss of invertebrates, the loss of species generally means that we do not have a lot of other services, such as natural pest control, natural decomposition of pollutants and natural nutrient cycling. Without those, we will increasingly have to intervene in ecosystems to provide them. A good example is that trees draw carbon down from the atmosphere really well, and have done forever, but because we have lost the part of the ecosystem that does that, we are now talking about engineering artificial means of carbon drawdown.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I am of an age to remember the windshield being covered in insects, and the number plate, which was particularly hard to clean. Does the hon. Gentleman think that initiatives such as the healthy bees plan and the National Bee Unit should be extended to protect other species of insects—or, as we say in Scotland, beasties?

Alex Sobel: It is always good to have an intervention about beasties. I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. That harks back to my point about abundance and

variety. We cannot protect only the bees, because they will not survive on their own without the abundance and variety of insects.

If we projected existing trends downwards, we would end up solving problems caused by the loss of natural systems one by one, which would be a much less efficient way to solve the problems of ecosystems than treating the root cause of the problems. If we look at the trends over the past 30 years, we see that that means not solving the problems but exacerbating them. The most shocking evidence that the Environmental Audit Committee heard came from Matt Shardlow, who said:

“In Germany, what they are looking at is nature reserves and a long-term decline, a 76% decline in the abundance of flying things on those nature reserves”.

Let that just sink in—a 76% decline in flying insects in nature reserves, not urban environments.

There is so much that English research does not yet know, but researchers looking at the swallowtail butterfly—again, this is the work of Professor Hill—found that as fenland habitats decreased in size, slowly the swallowtail became extinct, but before it became extinct it shrunk in size, because there was no point in it flying away from where it was as it would die anyway, because of urban encroachment. Our habitats are becoming fragile and we need to reverse that trend.

The UK does not have the sort of resilience that is needed to assist insects in weathering the storm of climate change. In a global assessment, the UK came 189th out of 218 countries for “biodiversity intactness”.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this absolutely essential debate. As a fellow member of the Environmental Audit Committee, does he agree that the reduction of insect numbers is especially worrying for the economy, that the impact on the economy will lead to a lack of wild pollinators, and that there will be a knock-on effect from that?

Alex Sobel: If we need to intervene and if we have to replace the natural pollinators with artificial pollinators, there will be a huge cost to the economy.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): I praise my hon. Friend to the rafters for securing this debate, because it is quite clear to many people that it would be entirely possible for this country and this planet to save ourselves from climate change, yet destroy ourselves in myriad other ways that breach the other eight planetary boundaries. Picking up on that, does he agree that it is the world's poorest—both internationally and domestically—who will be disproportionately impacted by the systemic climate shocks that these breakdowns in biodiversity will have on our economies?

Alex Sobel: Absolutely. The majority of the world's poor live towards the middle of the planet, and with climate change those populations will have to move north and south to get further away from the equator, which will mean huge shocks to countries if we do nothing or if we do not do enough. That will have the biggest impact on the world's poor and will increase desertification of the planet.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this matter to Westminster Hall. I declare an interest, as a farmer, landowner and member of the Ulster Farmers Union. I will make the very clear point that we, as farmers and landowners, have a critical role to play in this process, because on the land that we control, farm and look after as stewards we can improve the habitat, which we do, for example with more hedgerows. On my farm, for instance, I have seen an increase in the number of insects, including butterflies, and small birds, and that has happened because I have retained the habitat, including the hedgerows. Does the hon. Gentleman therefore feel that farmers, landowners and others who steward the land have a great responsibility, and that it is time for the Government to work alongside the Ulster Farmers Union, the National Farmers Union and landowners to make the land suitable for insects?

Alex Sobel: Absolutely. The majority of the UK's land area is still rural, and farmers will have a huge role in this process. We need to see quite a radical change in farming, one that moves away from artificial pesticides and towards natural land management.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this really important debate. There is one thing that I want to raise with him. Does he accept that there is a balance—this is the real problem here—between feeding a growing global population and protecting and enhancing the environment and biodiversity, which is also so important? If so, does he agree that the way to bridge that gap will be through new technology?

Alex Sobel: Technology certainly has a place and we need more resilient crops, so we need to move away from the use of chemicals and actually breed that resilience into the crops, which is where technology and research come in. I think there would be a race to the bottom if we said that we could produce enough food only if we increased the chemicalisation of farming.

I will now move on to my recommendations for the Minister—I am sure that she is waiting with bated breath to hear my ideas on how to improve insect populations. I have to say that the Government have belatedly acknowledged the issue and taken some action. I commend the Minister for the following four actions—I am sure that she will be pleased to hear me say that. The Government are developing a national B-Lines pollinator network to reconnect wildlife and they have announced £60,000 of funding for England. They have also introduced a national pollinator monitoring scheme and are moving towards paying land managers for providing public goods, such as biodiversity and pollination services. They are also banning three bee-harming and water-polluting insecticides.

However, the forthcoming environment Bill and the remaining stages of the Agriculture Bill provide unparalleled opportunities to start taking action on preventing the insect Armageddon. Today, as the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) mentioned, the Minister could commit to accepting new clause 11, tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), which would reduce pesticide use. The Agriculture Bill also provides an opportunity for farmers to be incentivised to deliver nature-friendly farming that will increase

insect and wildlife populations, such as providing food for farmland birds and planting wildflower margins. These incentives should be delivered as part of the “public money for public goods” section of the Bill.

The Environmental Audit Committee is still undertaking pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft environment Bill, but it would be fair to say that the proposals for the new watchdog are weak. There must be a higher level of independence for the new watchdog and stronger powers, including the ability to impose heavy fines. We need to enshrine environmental principles in UK law, to make sure that when we make new laws we consider the impact they will have on nature. The Bill should set in stone ambitious and measurable targets for nature's recovery, which are not just laid out in plans but enshrined in law.

Anna McMorris: Does my hon. Friend agree that to stop this reduction in insect numbers and stop the loss of wild pollinators, which is so important, we need to make use of EU funding streams, and that a bad-deal or no-deal Brexit, which we are at risk of, could have a huge impact on this issue, affecting the future for insects?

Alex Sobel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is no guarantee that the EU funding will be replaced, particularly as we have this current uncertainty, and the best deal with the EU is the one that we currently have, which is a point I know she agrees with.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, and I congratulate him on securing this important debate. He referred earlier to natural habitats and trees, so does he agree that, with habitat fragmentation posing such a long-term threat to our wildlife, including our insect population, it has never been more essential that we support the work of organisations such as the Woodland Trust and the Community Forest Trust, particularly as they continue to plan and grow the new northern forest?

Alex Sobel: As my hon. Friend knows, I am a great supporter of the new northern forest. We need to commend the work of the Woodland Trust, and the work of wildlife trusts and other organisations that are protecting our natural ecosystems.

I will talk briefly about climate more generally. As well as an insect Armageddon, we have a climate emergency, although the Government have not yet acknowledged that. Government decisions on spending and taxation would be exempted from environmental principles, while Ministers are required only to “have regard” to them elsewhere. Legally binding, time-bound targets are also missing from the draft legislation. Our future is tied to the future of the planet and economic policies are not independent of the future survival of life on the planet. The environment Bill must acknowledge and enshrine that, and I hope to see that happen in Committee.

There is also more detailed work that the Government could lead to support insect life. They could establish statutory nature recovery network maps with local authority sign-off, which would support the B-Lines network that they have already announced; introduce legally binding targets for biodiversity recovery, including, as separate measures, targets for pollinators and freshwater invertebrate life; design new agri-environment schemes that would deliver safe pollinator habitats and a national network

[Alex Sobel]

of flower-rich habitats; legislate to reduce the pollution of water courses with insecticides, flea treatments and pharmaceuticals that are toxic for insects; improve the protection of rare and endangered species in the planning system; introduce measures to reduce light pollution; find ways of directing significant new funds, for instance through the environment Bill, to save biodiversity, such as reinstating the aggregates levy sustainability fund, or introducing payments for ecosystem services, which should be a central feature of thinking by the Treasury and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; increase investment in the science and research that is needed to develop sustainable agriculture; reduce pesticide dependence; and halt and reverse the decline of species. I also believe that it is time to tweak the Natural Environment Research Council's responsibilities, to ensure that research supports either the climate or biodiversity.

Anna McMorris: My hon. Friend is making an absolutely excellent speech on this important matter. Does he agree that restoring peat bogs is another way to ensure that ecosystem services work and to restore biodiversity?

Alex Sobel: Absolutely, and that is something else we could include in the environment Bill.

Zac Goldsmith: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the importance of the environment—both the opportunities we have to get it right and the risks of getting it wrong. However, does he agree that the opportunity inherent in replacing the disastrous common agricultural policy—it effectively pays £1 billion to people simply for owning land, no matter what they do with it—with a system in which that money is conditional upon delivering public goods is even bigger? That is a massive part of the solution, because all the initiatives that the hon. Gentleman has described and some of those that other Members have described, would be rewarded through that new system of payments. Of all the things that have been discussed today, that is potentially the biggest boon for our biodiversity. Does he agree?

Alex Sobel: I have supported CAP reform ever since Michael Foster resigned from the Labour Government about 15 years ago, and I still support it. However, we need to be mindful of the fact that it is not just the UK that needs to reform those practices: reform is needed across Europe, and more broadly.

After today, the Government cannot say that they were not warned about the insect Armageddon, or did not have the legislative opportunity to help ensure that the UK is not on the back foot when it comes to avoiding this potential disaster for our country.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I have never seen such a dense swarm of interventions in such a short debate. I call the Minister.

11.20 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Thank you, Mr Davies; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate the hon. Member for

Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) on having secured this debate, in which we have heard a number of interventions from other hon. Members. One might muse that time is running out for insects, but I assure Members that the Government understand that insects are crucial to our prosperity and wellbeing. The Royal Entomological Society estimates that there are over 24,000 species of insect—classified as six-legged animals with segmented bodies—in Britain. We know that they are vital to the food chain; they support many of our mammals and birds; and they play a fundamental role in much pollination, nutrient cycling, pest control and decomposition. The value of insect pollination to UK agriculture is estimated at more than £500 million a year.

As many hon. Members have observed, recent scientific papers and media reports have highlighted declines in insect populations and projected extinctions across the globe. We acknowledge that there have been long-term declines in the UK and globally, and there is no dispute about the seriousness of the issue, nor the need to take action. That is why, in the 25-year environment plan, we committed to improving the status of insects. I was also struck by Professor Sir Bob Watson's comments in the media last week. He made it clear that we need concerted global action, but that extinction of insects within decades is probably unlikely, so we sometimes need to be mindful of the language we use to describe the evidence.

The Government report annually on how well different groups of insect species are doing, in partnership with academics and volunteer recording societies. That includes the UK-wide Pollinator Monitoring and Research Partnership, which is partly funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Government's indicators of the abundance of UK butterflies show long-term decline since 1976, but no significant change since 2012, and our indicator of pollinating insects in the UK tells a similar story. Overall distribution has declined since 1980, but has stabilised in recent years, although some individual species continue to decline. We are keeping those trends under review as encouraging, but not yet definitive, signs of progress.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: I have so little time to respond to all the questions that I have already been asked, so I will do my best to answer the points that were made.

Our academic partnerships are helping us to deliver the most appropriate approaches to key factors affecting insect populations, such as habitat loss and fragmentation, invasive species, pests and disease, climate change and pesticide use; to understand the importance of other emerging potential threats, such as light or radiation; and to better define and predict the impact of climate change. I am conscious of hon. Members' comments about how tackling climate change will also help biodiversity in insects.

We know that where we put habitat back, insects respond positively. For that reason, we are taking action to improve, extend and connect insect habitats. Over 1 million hectares of our best habitats for wildlife are protected as sites of special scientific interest, and we spend more than £50 million through agri-environment schemes to help bring more of those sites into favourable condition. Natural England reports that since 2011, over 130,000 hectares of land have been set aside to

create new wildlife-rich habitats, largely through agri-environment schemes. In 2015, the Government introduced wildlife packages to those schemes, to make it easier for farmers to provide flowers to support pollinating insects and other insects on farms. There has been real progress for some species that landowners, NGOs and Government have collaborated to conserve, including supporting the re-introduction of lost species such as the short-haired bumblebee and chequered skipper butterfly. The environmental land management system that we are introducing, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) referred, will build on that by rewarding farmers and land managers for delivering environmental outcomes, such as protection of insect habitats.

In 2014, the Government published the national pollinator strategy, following a scientific review of the status of pollinating insects. That 10-year strategy sets out how Government, conservation groups, farmers, beekeepers and researchers can work together to improve the status of our pollinating insect species. Last week, we published an update to that review of the evidence base, which will inform our planned refresh of the pollinator strategy and, in turn, much of our action for other insect species.

In our 25-year environment plan, we committed to producing a new strategy for nature. That will take forward any new post-2020 global agreements on biodiversity, and bring together our biodiversity and pollinator strategies. I am conscious of the report to which the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) referred, but the Aichi 2020 targets are quite nebulous, and a lot comes down to judgment. I hope that when we come to the Conference of the Parties for the convention on biological diversity in Beijing next year, we will have more rigorous measures and indicators for targets for the global recovery of the environment, in particular biodiversity.

I know that there is concern about the impact of pesticides, including on insects. The Government carry out a thorough assessment of pesticide safety using the best scientific evidence before authorising their use, drawing advice from the Health and Safety Executive and the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides. Pesticides that carry unacceptable risks to pollinators are not authorised, as was the case with the science-led restrictions on neonicotinoids: outdoor use of three neonicotinoids was withdrawn from 19 December 2018.

We also need to take action against invasive species. Such action is largely focused on the Asian hornet: last year, the National Bee Unit located and destroyed four Asian hornet nests to tackle that threat to our native species, and surveillance continues. Our inspectors carry out about 6,000 apiary visits per year in England and Wales further to protect our honey bees. Advice and inspections help us to manage pests such as varroa, keep endemic diseases such as foulbrood at low levels, and keep other exotic pests such as the small hive beetle absent from the UK. The Bees' Needs Week campaign, which happens every year in July, brings together expert partners to raise awareness of actions that all of us can take, whether we have gardens, window boxes, allotments or community gardens.

We have set out in the 25-year environment plan our step change in ambition for wildlife, in order to reverse declines. We have committed to improving protected

sites and restoring new wildlife-rich habitats outside the protected site network. We are investing in peatland and woodland restoration as a contribution to climate change mitigation, which will also provide important habitats for insects and other wildlife; Members know about our investment in the northern forest. The nature recovery network will expand and connect our existing wildlife habitats by developing partnerships that can effect changes to land management at a catchment or landscape scale.

We are consulting on conservation covenants, which will be voluntary but legally binding agreements that would enable landowners to leave a permanent conservation legacy on their land. Such public commitments to taking positive actions to preserve and improve treasured features on their land, such as trees, woodland or flower-rich meadows, would be binding on future owners of that land and overseen by responsible bodies to ensure that land management obligations were delivered. I have already referred to the new environmental land management system, which will be the cornerstone of the country's agricultural policy after we leave the EU. It is important that farmers are able to protect their crops, but also that people are protected from the risks that pesticides present, both to them and to the environment. It is therefore right to minimise the use of pesticides and to make the greatest possible use of other techniques, including non-chemical alternatives to protect crops.

I was surprised that the hon. Member for Leeds North West seemed to suggest that gene editing or GM could be used to modify crops. That is still a debate that matters, but it is important to highlight to hon. Members that we will continue to develop and refine our approach to pest control, with integrated pest management at its heart, minimising the need for pesticides. That approach combines different management strategies and practices to target and minimise the use of pesticides. The voluntary initiative scheme promotes and records IPM practices, and the uptake of that scheme is encouraging. It is important that we are able to protect crops, and such progress shows that the scheme works.

Regarding the introduction of a new environment Bill, I will give evidence to several hon. Members in about two hours' time, so I am surprised that the hon. Member for Leeds North West has already declared what he thinks should happen with respect to scrutiny.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Coffey: I am afraid I will not. The Government are open to this, and believe that what we have put forward is important. The policy paper that we published alongside the plan is an important indication of what else we want to achieve in that Bill.

Insect decline is a global problem that needs a global solution, which is why we will continue to play a leading role in the development of an ambitious strategy as we proceed. It is critical that we act now on the improving evidence base, internationally and at home, to ensure that we leave our environment in a better state for future generations.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Wildlife Crime

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered wildlife crime.

May I say what a great pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell? I also thank all those outside the Chamber who have engaged with this debate on social media through the excellent House of Commons digital engagement team. With nearly 4,000 comments, it is clear that there is a real strength of feeling on the issue.

The term “wildlife crime” covers a variety of different offences, but the common thread is simple: cruelty to and the mistreatment of animals and birds. For example, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has told me about the plight of hen harriers, which are being hunted to extinction. In 2018 the RSPB satellite-tagged more than 30 hen harriers in the UK, but in just six months half of them had died. Eleven disappeared in suspicious circumstances near shooting moors. It is unclear whether those birds were deliberately targeted by the owners of shooting moors in order to protect the grouse, pheasant or partridge for the shooting season, or whether they were collateral damage during a shoot, but a suspicious sign is that the tags disappear and the scene of the crime is cleaned up. Whoever is shooting the birds knows they have done wrong.

The RSPB identifies weaknesses in the law. Of 68 confirmed kills of birds of prey in 2017, just four prosecutions were brought, with only one conviction. The RSPB is calling for stronger sentences and points to the dramatic decrease in egg collecting offences after sentences were toughened. Such offences went from an average of 167 a year in 2010-15, to just 10 in 2017.

The National Farmers Union has expressed concerns to me about hare coursing, which it tells me is having a severe impact on farm businesses and rural communities, not to mention the hares themselves.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has secured this debate, and in particular that he has raised the issue of hare coursing. The feedback I am getting is that hare coursing is becoming more violent and aggressive and that higher sums are being wagered. If that is the case, does he agree that the response needs to be toughened up?

Christian Matheson: Not only do I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I suspect—I cannot point to any evidence with me right now—that there is an element of organised crime behind some of that hare coursing. That would be damaging to farmers and rural communities, which perhaps have not been exposed to that level of organised crime in the past.

The NFU highlights the lack of resources for tackling wildlife crime, but crucially it has identified how the law can be toughened by extending criminal behaviour orders across a wider area than just the county in which the

offence took place and by amending the Game Act 1831 to give police and magistrates the powers to seize dogs and reclaim associated kennelling costs from offenders.

Nowhere is the need for tougher laws more apparent than in the case of foxhunting. Local monitors have witnessed at least six foxes being killed by hunts in my own county of Cheshire this season. There were at least 10 additional reports of foxes being chased in the county and multiple reports of badger setts being blocked in the vicinity of hunts in Cheshire. Over the Christmas period, I and hon. Friends from the county were contacted by many constituents who shared horrific images and videos of foxes being slaughtered in hunts. It was those images and reports that led my hon. Friends and me to seek this debate in the House.

Laws were introduced for Scotland in 2002, and then for England and Wales in 2005 under the Hunting Act 2004, which was passed by the Labour Government and banned the use of dogs to hunt foxes and wild mammals in England and Wales. Although those were welcome and hard-fought pieces of legislation, overwhelming evidence suggests that they are regularly being ignored or exploited by hunts. The Hunting Act bans the hunting of wild mammals—notably foxes, deer, hares and mink—with dogs in England and Wales. However, the Act does not cover the use of dogs in the process of flushing out a wild animal, nor does it affect trail hunting, where hounds are trained to follow an artificial scent. The Government’s lack of political inclination to enforce or strengthen the laws lies at the heart of the issue.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate and for his comments about the support of the NFU in trying to deal with some of these appalling crimes. Does he agree that part of the challenge faced by many local police services across the country is the effect of austerity? Several hundred officer posts have been cut from Thames Valley police, which covers my area, in the past nine years due to austerity. That has had a serious and damaging effect on a number of aspects of police activity.

Christian Matheson: I accept that, and the particular consequence is that issues such as wildlife crime, which often requires specifically trained officers, are the first to fall by the wayside. If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will refer to that later.

The Prime Minister has openly declared her support for foxhunting, and the Conservative manifesto committed to granting a free vote on the issue, although I welcome the Government confirming that they would not bring forward such a vote during this Session of Parliament. The Hunting Act continues to be abused across the board. There is a sense of a lack of political will from Ministers, which means the issue is constantly swept under the carpet. Responsibility is put on the shoulders of crumbling police forces, which are struggling, as my hon. Friend said. They have had £2.7 billion of real-terms cuts in direct Government funding since 2010.

The League Against Cruel Sports has collated at least 282 reports of suspected illegal hunting activity across the UK since the beginning of the foxhunting season on 1 November 2018, and 42 separate reports of foxes being killed. That indicates the scale of continued illegal

hunting, although it is clear, when we take into account unreported cases and hunts that are not monitored, that the figures represent merely the tip of the iceberg.

The Hunting Act clearly needs to be strengthened. The evidence of abuse is clear and the required adjustments are straightforward. Weaknesses within the law, as identified by the RSPB and the NFU, are preventing blatant law-breaking by registered hunts from being effectively tackled. All that is needed is for the Government to have the will to act.

Fundamentally, the Hunting Act has no teeth. The deterrence value of penalties under the Hunting Act is significantly lacking. Only fines are available. Ministry of Justice data shows that the average fine for offences under the Hunting Act over the past 10 years was a measly £267, which is a price many hunters are willing to risk. It is certainly one they can afford. Custodial sentences need to be introduced to bring the law at least into line with penalties for other crimes against wild animals, such as badger baiting.

One of the main weaknesses is that the offence is a summary offence only, and an absolute offence. There is no offence, for example, of attempting to kill a fox with a hunt, and prosecutors would have to prove an intent to kill a fox. A hunt can therefore chase a fox across countryside with unmuzzled dogs following its scent. If the fox is killed unintentionally—whatever that might mean in this context—a conviction becomes difficult to obtain, as if chasing a fox with a pack of dogs does not indicate intent to kill it. Let us face it: the dogs do not know any better.

Even if there is video evidence showing the culprit with the dead fox, as happened in Cheshire, that is not sufficient to gain a prosecution, let alone a conviction. Cheshire police were criticised earlier this year when their press office put out a statement suggesting that we cannot believe everything we see on social media. Those press officers were right, but that does not mean we cannot believe anything we see on social media.

Another excuse is trail hunting, which allows for foxes to be accidentally killed by dogs on hunts. It is especially pernicious when the trail is laid using the urine of captive foxes. Why are the dogs not trained to follow a different scent? A gaping hole in the legislation allows hunts to claim that any chasing and killing were merely coincidental and accidental. For those who do not know, trail hunting involves people on foot or horseback following a scent along a pre-determined route with hounds or beagles. The concept of trail hunting is to effectively replicate a hunt without hurting a fox. It has been described by a judge in one case as a “cynical subterfuge”. In that case, the judge dismissed an appeal by two hunt employees who were part of the Harborough-based Fernie hunt and were convicted of breaching hunting laws. They were found guilty of hunting a live fox and digging into an active badger sett.

There is no system to record wildlife crimes in the UK and identify the size and scale of the activity. A recent Wildlife and Countryside Link report noted that 1,283 wildlife crime incidents were recorded by non-governmental organisations in 2017. Shockingly, only nine individuals and businesses were prosecuted.

Many wildlife crimes are not recordable or notifiable offences. That means that vital information about crimes that have been reported and investigated is not being

collected by police forces across England and Wales. Valuable information about trends in crime and intelligence, which would lead to the allocation of resources, is therefore lost. Without proper information, the Government are also under less pressure to actually do something about such crimes.

The practice of stopping up foxholes and badger setts, and using terriers to chase foxes out of their dens, continues. That surely demonstrates intent. Badgers are killed in the process, too. One Cheshire hunt monitor told me of such activities this year:

“On one occasion this hunt season we checked a large badger sett, it was fine and very active. The next day we discovered the hunt was due in the area...we went to check the sett on the hunt day and it had quad bike tracks leading straight to it and to several other setts in the immediate area, all entrances were filled in, we could see spade marks and boot prints. The hunt rode straight up to the badger sett that day and stopped, they were clearly surprised to see us, we then had to unblock 41 sett entrances or the badgers would have suffocated. We went back over subsequent days to monitor activity and we used thermal imaging technology to check the badgers were still alive. This sett is constantly targeted.”

David Keane, the police and crime commissioner for Cheshire, undertook a review of the laws relating to hunting and of his force’s implementation of those laws. He, too, found that

“the current legislation in the way it is drafted presents challenges to investigators and prosecutors”,

and that it causes confusion to the public and others.

Issues have been raised with Mr Keane regarding how legislation could be amended to assist. Following his review, he has made three proposals. The first is that recklessness should be applicable, beyond the current requirement to prove intent—a requirement that is not mirrored in all areas of criminal law. The second is for the introduction of an authorised list of scents, excluding fox or other wild mammal urine, for use in trail hunting. Thirdly, he has spoken of the need for a clearer definition of the role of, or restriction associated with, terrier men: those who follow the hunt around and assist.

In the past week, ahead of the debate, I have received countless emails from concerned citizens, appalled at the continued killing of wild animals for pleasure and the seeming inability of the law to bring people to account. Clearly, the laws on foxhunting are being deliberately flouted, by people who either believe that they are above the law, or are not deterred by the threat of the sanctions available under it. I fail to understand how someone can get pleasure from killing animals, and can conclude only that such people are in some way disturbed.

At the very least, the law on hunting with dogs needs to be changed to include recklessness as an offence. We might look at limits on the number of dogs allowed, and there is support across the House for increasing to five years the penalty for convictions for animal cruelty. That might help to deal with the bagging of foxes and the issue of hounds being given fox cubs for training purposes.

If those solutions are not adopted, however, we might have to consider another: banning hunting with dogs altogether. Hunts have had their chance to demonstrate that they are responsible, but they are failing to take it, possibly deliberately. The police are struggling nationally with manpower, and wildlife crime falls well below

[*Christian Matheson*]

other priorities. Police are not always trained in the finer points of the detail of wildlife protection laws. To make it easier, we need to give them the tools to do their job, and that means much tougher laws to protect our wildlife.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): Order. There will, unfortunately, be a four-minute time limit on Back-Bench speeches. I intend to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 3.27 pm. I call Sir David Amess.

2.43 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (*Christian Matheson*) on his splendid speech, and on attracting so many colleagues to support his point of view. We could not have anyone better to chair proceedings than yourself, Mr Rosindell, given your track record on the issue.

In the early years, when I was first elected to Parliament, only four or five colleagues on the Conservative Benches were against foxhunting—I am delighted that two of them are present this afternoon. A wonderful lady called Lorraine Platt, who founded the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, changed all that, and I think that now in excess of 60 Conservative Members of Parliament would be very much against foxhunting.

Throughout my parliamentary life, I have done everything I can to improve the welfare of animals and the environment in which we live. In so many ways, the quality of a nation should be judged by how it treats animals. To give a taster, I got on to the statute book the Protection against Cruel Tethering Act 1988, to protect horses, ponies and donkeys from being cruelly tethered. Together with Ann Widdecombe, in 2002 I introduced the Endangered Species (Illegal Trade) Bill. We led campaigns against live animal exports, the badger cull, animal experimentation, dog meat, the fur trade, netting and the killing of songbirds throughout the Mediterranean.

Legislation is all very well, but it is the enforcement that I am particularly concerned about. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (*James Cartlidge*) mentioned hare coursing. I was appalled that in Essex more than 500 cases of illegal hare coursing were reported in 2017. However, I am glad that, with consistent action from rural police forces across the country that are taking the crime seriously, there has been an impressive reduction in offences.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): In Lincolnshire there has been a significant reduction in that terrible crime, as a result of the great work done by Lincolnshire police. One of the difficulties that they face is that once the crime has been committed and successfully prosecuted, the sentences that people receive may be a fine of just £250, which is not a sufficiently significant deterrent.

Sir David Amess: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I am glad that our two police forces are making some progress, but it is the implementation of the law, and punishments, that we are particularly concerned about.

I represent a little urban area; we do not have any foxhunts in Southend West. However, I drive along at night and see the odd fox or badger that sadly has been flattened by a car. I am very concerned about how people seem to have got around the 2004 Act. I would very much welcome an increase in penalties and more custodial sentences for illegal hunting. Average fines of £250 are a paltry punishment, frankly, for such cruelty, whatever a person thinks about foxes. Those Members who have kept chickens will know that it is not a lot of fun to find that they have been killed and played with—indeed, it can be very upsetting because they are pets. However, it beggars belief that anyone would set dogs on foxes and think that it is acceptable to have them physically torn apart. I think that most civilised people, and I would hope most Members of Parliament, would find that repugnant.

The law needs strengthening to stop deceitful trail hunting, and to protect our wildlife from the cruel sport of hunting with dogs. Nobody should be above the law, and those who continue in the inhumane killing of foxes and stags under the cover of trail hunting should be prosecuted.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): My hon. Friend and I both bear the scars of the legislation, and I do not think that anybody would claim that it was anything other than imperfect. However, does he agree that the one measure that would help most in this context, rather than reopening the entire argument, would be to make it unlawful to use animal scent for trails? That would be relatively easy to enforce, and it would create a clear divide between drag hunting, which is lawful and proper, and trail hunting, which is effectively unlawful and a disguise for the hunting of foxes.

Sir David Amess: My right hon. Friend has succeeded in shortening my speech, because that is exactly what I was about to say. I entirely agree with that point.

Nobody should be above the law, and those who continue in the inhumane killing of foxes and stags under the cover of trail hunting should be prosecuted. We will never end wildlife crime in this country unless our laws are robust enough to deal with those who willingly allow such unnecessary cruelty.

Although there are rumours every time we have an election, I am confident that foxhunting will never become legal again in this country. I have no doubt about that, and think that any such rumours are absolute nonsense. However, I do not feel that the law is acting in the way that most people would want it to. It seems to me that people have got around it in all sorts of ways. I look to the Minister, who has taken over from my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (*George Eustice*), who was particularly wonderful on such issues, to give a positive response to all the points that parliamentary colleagues will make on this very important issue.

2.49 pm

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I fully support the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (*Christian Matheson*). There is a key role for central Government in tackling wildlife crime. That is why the Labour Government, of which I was a

proud member, established the National Wildlife Crime Unit in 2006. It has a central role in examining a range of issues on enforcement, guidance and support, such as badger persecution, the illegal ivory trade, poaching, enforcement of the Hunting Act 2004 and hare coursing.

My first question to the Minister is whether she has yet made a decision on what is happening to central funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit post 2020. What assurances can she and the Home Office give for that funding? North Wales police has an excellent wildlife crime unit. Like the national unit, it tackles a range of issues on the ground, such as livestock theft, livestock crime, environmental crime and enforcement of fox hunting legislation.

I particularly want to raise the issue of sheep worrying, which is of tremendous concern to farmers in my constituency. I hope to put some points on the Minister's radar for her to respond to in her summing up. Attacks by dogs on sheep in the constituencies of my area of Wales have risen by a massive 113% over the past year, and they cost farmers in Wales and across the country £1.2 million—a tremendous amount of money. It is an absolute disgrace that dogs attack sheep because of, in many cases, irresponsible owners.

The 2017 report of the all-party parliamentary group on animal welfare made a number of recommendations on what the Government could do to give guidance to dog owners and to better enforce and modernise the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953. Will the Minister respond this afternoon to some of the issues raised in that report? Her noble Friend Lord Gardiner of Kimble, who has responsibility for the issue in the Lords, said at the time that he believed the report was a useful contribution and that he was working with the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice to take into account the all-party parliamentary group recommendations, under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith).

We recommended that the Home Office should collect statistics on sheep attacks by dogs across the country to see the scale of the problem—a point already made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester. Has that been done, or is it planned? The Ministry of Justice was charged by the report to look at sentencing under the 1953 Act, and the Agriculture Minister agreed to look at that in principle. Currently, there is a £1,000 fine, which was set in 1953. That is slightly out of date, in considering the ownership of a dog that attacks sheep and causes tremendous damage. There is no power in the Act for an owner to be banned from owning another dog in the future, following a conviction for worrying sheep. No action can be taken to seize a dog if the same dog is responsible for multiple attacks. The Sentencing Council was supposed to review the legislation. Can the Minister tell us whether it has? This is an issue of major concern, and North Wales police has again raised it only this week with the National Farmers Union in Wales and the National Farmers Union.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is making a very good point. Does he agree that in some cases—perhaps the majority—the irresponsible owner is irresponsible through ignorance? It is an urban owner who takes a dog into the countryside and perhaps does not realise that the dog needs to be on the lead when in the proximity of sheep.

David Hanson: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very valuable point. It is important to have a structure in place to raise awareness of the irresponsibility of letting dogs run wild. It is a wildlife crime. It will destroy flocks of sheep. Farmers in my constituency have had sheep and lambs killed overnight. It is distressing. It costs money. It cannot be insured against in a proper and effective way. It is an issue that North Wales police and the farmers are working on in tandem through its wildlife crime unit, to make sure that action is taken.

My plea to the Minister is simple. Will she give an update on the review of the 1953 Act? Will she give an update on whether the Home Office records statistics? Will she ensure that the promises made by her noble Friend Lord Gardiner in response to the report are kept, because this is vital? Finally, I welcome everything that my hon. Friend the Member for the City of Chester said about the enforcement of the Hunting Act, which I was proud to vote for.

2.55 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson). I agree with everything he said. I want to widen the debate to an international stage.

I hold a programme in my constituency called “Conversations in the street”, where I go around the villages and people tell me what is on their mind. One lady came up to me and said, “I want to discuss elephants with you.” I posted the issues that were raised on my Twitter account, and what was said about that topic on my Twitter feed was utterly pathetic. The lady had genuinely raised a question about what we were doing to protect elephants and wanted an answer. Our attitude towards elephants and elephant crime is shaming for our generation. Illegal trafficking of both live and dead animals is the fourth largest illegal international trade, after those in drugs, people smuggling and counterfeiting, and it is worth about £15 billion a year.

The Government have done a tremendous amount to ban the sale of ivory, which I very much welcome, and to protect elephants, but there is a growing threat from the illegal trade in live animals. That trade occurs for a number of reasons, but principally to try to improve tourism and to make entertainment better. The UK has been working through a number of organisations to prevent the trade—many aspects of it are illegal—but it presents a growing threat, particularly to the Asian elephant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) mentioned birds in the Mediterranean. I highlight the enormous difficulty we have in trying to control the killing of birds, particularly in Malta. We ought to concentrate on the annual spring hunt in Malta—it is still legal—which leads to the deaths of an enormous number of birds. We ought to do all we can to stamp that out.

We had a very successful international conference in the UK on this subject in 2014 and another, I think, in 2018. I commend the Government for their stance. Members have spoken about the crimes that take place in the UK, but we should not forget the global nature of such crimes. If we are protecting animals—our hearts

[John Howell]

go out to everyone who protects animals—we need to look at that from an international perspective. I hope the hon. Member for City of Chester will accept my remarks in the spirit that I give them.

2.59 pm

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell, in this important debate. I apologise for the fact that I am full of some sort of bug, so please excuse my voice. I thank my good and hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson)—a wonderful city—for bringing the debate forward.

I am very lucky to have grown up in my constituency of Crewe and Nantwich, which is a mixture of towns and villages surrounded by beautiful countryside. We greatly value our farming community in the area, with regular farmers markets, many excellent walks and, I bet, some of the very best farm shops in the country. However, representing a constituency that is surrounded by such glorious countryside means that, like my hon. Friend, I am regularly contacted by constituents who have concerns about wildlife crime.

Over the winter period, that concern seemed to intensify. Constituents were upset and infuriated that video footage taken each week seemed to show that foxes are being hunted and regularly killed by dogs. My constituents' anger came from the fact that despite it being against the law to hunt with dogs, the loopholes in the Hunting Act 2004 make it almost impossible to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt. I have raised this matter in the Chamber, and we desperately need the Act to be strengthened to ensure that the will of Parliament, and that of the overwhelming majority of the public, is respected. The Government should do the right thing and strengthen the Act by adding a recklessness clause, in order to end the ridiculous situation where hunt participants can avoid prosecution simply by claiming that the chasing and killing of a fox by their dogs was an accident.

Fifteen years on from the Hunting Act, foxes are still being ripped apart by packs of dogs and killed brazenly by hunt participants, who know that they can escape prosecution. I find it a strange hobby to dress up like a toy soldier to chase a much smaller and vulnerable animal, and I also find it strange that policymakers appear to take such a contrasting approach to this so-called sport, compared with other examples of animal cruelty.

It is clear that along with changes to the Hunting Act, we need to see stronger deterrents put in place. It is worth pointing out that the average fine for offences over the last 10 years has been just £267. Killing a fox carries a maximum penalty of £5,000, yet killing a badger can carry a six-month custodial sentence. Following a successful prosecution under the Hunting Act 2004, those responsible should face forfeiture of their dogs. As a dog owner myself, I have huge concerns about the way that those dogs are treated.

I have sat in the home of friends of mine when the sound of a horn has blared and, all of a sudden, their property has had a swarm of huntsmen and dogs tearing through it. That was quite an unnerving experience on a

Sunday afternoon, and my friends' animals and children were left terrified. Again, there seems to be an attitude of being above the law among people who partake in this so-called sport. I would like to see more clarity on the role of terrier men, who can operate independently but still frequently follow hunts. Their only known function is to block badger setts and escape holes to prevent foxes from escaping underground, and to use dogs to flush out any creature that tries to hide.

I am sure that it is blatantly obvious that I am not from a background where this kind of tradition ever took place. I am proud to be a member of the Labour party—an organisation that has consistently placed the welfare of animals high on the policy agenda and has committed to strengthening the Hunting Act.

3.3 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on raising this issue today. I agree with many things that he said; as he will know, there are some things with which I am not in total agreement.

It is no secret that I am an avid country sports enthusiast, and I am also very keen on conservation and animal protection, which is important to me. There is no reason that those two pursuits cannot be married together; I believe they can. As proof, we very clearly retained the habitat for such purposes on the land that I own and have access to. In recent times—having planted 3,500 trees, dug out two ponds and retained the hedgerows—we have seen an increase in insect life, birdlife and bee life, and in the number of songbirds and birds of prey, to which the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) referred. All those are protected.

There are many people who enthuse about conservation. I say gently that others who have the opportunity should practise it in a very real way, which I like to think I do. The hon. Gentleman, who spoke before me, would probably say the same things that I am saying. I believe that one cannot be involved in country sports without knowing the importance of conserving the wonderful countryside, which is why I was delighted that the Police Service of Northern Ireland appointed an officer who is designated solely to wildlife crime. It just so happens that that wee girl was a flower girl at my wedding 32 years ago, so I have an interest in her progression through the PSNI.

We have the issues of badger baiting and dogfighting, which I absolutely condemn, and the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) referred to attacks on livestock and sheep—they are all very important issues. The wildlife liaison officer is the central point of contact in the PSNI for police officers and staff who require advice, support and assistance in relation to all animal welfare or wildlife crime, with particular links to suspected breaches of the legislation or associated queries. The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 was amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, and the police liaison officer offers advice, support and assistance to the police service across the whole of Northern Ireland. She does a really incredible job—she is one of my constituents and also a good friend of mine.

In the very short time I have, I want to discuss what the hon. Member for Henley referred to: it is important to look at wildlife crime elsewhere in the world. I have

done the bit back home, where it is very important that we can actively discourage and legislate against those who blatantly break the law. It is said that across the world

“illegal wildlife trade is now the fourth most lucrative transnational crime after drugs, arms and human trafficking”.

It is worth some £17 billion a year. The money generated from the global trade in wildlife has been linked to funding terrorist activities: the people who are involved operate as cartels, with multiple organised crime groups working to a common purpose. The exploitation of wildlife is a low-risk yet high-reward form of crime. The 2016 “World Wildlife Crime Report” by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime shows the extensive involvement of transnational organised crime groups. The Minister does not have responsibility for that, but I would like some direction from Government on what they are doing about it.

It is clear that there is a real need for focused, targeted and strategised UK-wide policing of wildlife crime, and for officers to understand the importance of this. I know that the police in the UK and the PSNI in Northern Ireland do a wonderful job, but it must be co-ordinated. I believe that we could do this better if we took a UK-wide approach, and that the Department must take the lead in putting this strategy into place. We always get a good response from the Minister, and I look forward to it today.

3.7 pm

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): Like a few others present in the Chamber, I bear the scars of the 700 hours it took, in one capacity or another, to pass the Hunting Act 2004, which was introduced by the Labour Government and described by the League Against Cruel Sports as the most successful wild mammal legislation in England and Wales. It seems that a lot has changed since then, as the organisation has discovered what it considers to be the Act’s flaws, and I want to touch on that briefly.

There was a reason the Hunting Act 2004 ended up as it did: the Labour Government and the Ministers responsible for it recognised that it was not as simple as it seemed. Considerations relating to management control and humane control—wildlife management considerations—needed to be incorporated into the Act. The Labour Government completely understood that the idea that the legislation was ever going to be a blanket ban on the killing and control of foxes was unfeasible. Now, 15 years on, we are talking about what seem to the outside world to be various anomalies. I refer hon. Members back to the reasons we ended up in that place the first time—because of the complex way in which rural Britain interacts with wild, unhusbanded animals.

As a former employee of the Countryside Alliance and its current chairman, I should declare an interest and say that I am not here to try to justify the unjustifiable, or to try to promote or excuse lawlessness in any way. I absolutely share the concerns of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) about things such as illegal hare coursing and how that can be dealt with. I am realistic and hope that the organisation I have been involved with for many years is very keen to play a positive role in dealing with these issues in a proportionate and evidence-based way.

I want to touch on a few things that were mentioned earlier. On the question of raptors, I hope I can persuade Opposition Members that, as the Labour party has indeed recognised over many years, shooting plays a really important part in the upland management of the UK. That applies not only to biodiversity—that is not contested in any way—but to economic benefits and the benefits of the production of good quality, healthy food in the food chain. Before we write off everybody involved in upland management as a raptor persecutor, we must note that the vast majority recognise that that is a crime that needs to stop and they will co-operate with anybody who wishes to address that problem.

I should point out one of the complexities. The problems are just as apparent in areas that are not managed for shooting, such as the Isle of Man and the Isle of Skye—where huge attempts have been made to get hen harriers to breed again—as on managed uplands on the mainland where shooting does occur. We should treat with caution the assumption that the problem happens only on managed grouse moors.

Finally, as far as hunting is concerned, I could go on for a great deal more than the 42 seconds I have left, but I will simply say this. The idea that all the so-called problems can be cured simply by adjusting the hunting techniques, which was recommended by the Labour party and the League Against Cruel Sports when the Hunting Act went through, is a naive approach to an exaggerated problem. Trail hunting takes place on more than 25,000 occasions a year. The evidence, which might be good evidence, suggesting that there is a widespread problem exaggerates the problem. Whether it is raptor control or hunting, the best approach is a co-operative one involving the governing bodies of the organisations in question.

3.11 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on his insightful and sometimes passionate speech. Like others, I want to set out my opposition to foxhunting. The general election might not have decided which way the public felt, but when the Prime Minister announced she was pro-foxhunting my postbag was inundated with correspondence from people who were against bringing back foxhunting. I hope and pray that this country will never again see the foxhunting of the past.

Foxhunting and hare coursing have been covered very well in the debate. I want to focus my attention on the illegal theft of bird eggs. Although the introduction in 2000 of custodial sentences for the offences of egg theft and possession appear to have had a positive effect on reducing egg-collecting activity in the UK, there is no indication that the sentences have had an impact on the illegal egg trade. Why am I talking about the egg trade? Many egg collectors and egg thieves are attracted to endangered species, particularly endangered birds. Collecting bird eggs has been illegal in the UK since the Protection of Birds Act 1954 was passed, making it illegal to take the eggs of most wild birds. The law was further bolstered by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which provides stipulations for the protection of wild birds and their eggs and nests. Magistrates are able to hand down a range of punishments, from fines to six months in prison per egg.

[Chris Evans]

A variety of motivations lie behind egg theft. Recent arrests have shown that many collectors find themselves addicted to the process of tracking birds and capturing their eggs. The individuals who take part in those horrendous activities take pride in their ability to steal eggs from nests that lie in purposely secluded and difficult to reach areas. That is a blatant violation of the various Acts in place to protect the birds and it also eradicates the lives of very rare birds.

In one sickening case in 2011, someone stole seven golden eagle eggs that were so close to hatching that he likely removed a live chick from the shell just to have something nice to look at. After admitting to 10 charges of theft and illegal possession of bird eggs, he was given only a six-month sentence—a slap on the wrist for someone who clearly has a problem. Weak penalties for wildlife crime mean that offenders have little to fear. Those who collect the eggs face very short prison sentences, so there is no incentive for them to cease collecting.

The situation is made worse by an illegal bird egg trade available on eBay. A search for “bird egg collection” provides potential buyers with the option to purchase a red grouse egg. The RSPB has given the bird an amber status, which denotes an unfavourable conservation status as well as a decline in UK breeding populations. What is more, the red grouse species is protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

In recent weeks the Government have done very good work on social media, self-harm and suicide, but where there is a violation of the law it is up to them to say to eBay, “Why are you listing these eggs? Why are you encouraging a decline in our rare bird species?” It is up to the Government to talk to eBay, Gumtree and the other sites that sell bird eggs and fuel the trade. Very few people talk about it, but we must protect the valuable bird species in this country.

3.15 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), on his excellent introduction. Like him, I have been contacted by many constituents concerned about the same incidents where foxes have been slaughtered in hunts. That has led me to question how well the Hunting Act is working because, despite outlawing that horrific practice, the images tell me there are people out there openly flouting the law, making a mockery of the police, Parliament and the vast majority of people in this country who rightly recoil from such barbaric practices. As we have heard, there are very real concerns that across the country foxes are being targeted and killed by illegal hunts, and grave concerns that the various exemptions within the Act are being used to legitimise the indiscriminate killing of foxes.

The Library briefing paper tells us that the successful conviction rate for offences under the Hunting Act over the previous five years is about 50% as opposed to a rate of about 80% for all criminal offences. That tells me that the Act is not working in the way that it should, and those figures are just for actual prosecutions.

Many constituents ask me why the widely available images that we have all seen do not result in more prosecutions. If the Government’s position is that the law should be observed, whatever that law is, they should ask themselves some serious questions about whether the Act is working in practice. They should ask whether the police and Crown Prosecution Service have the knowledge base and resources to deal successfully with the Act as it is, and what changes might be made to increase the number of successful prosecutions. If their view is, “We don’t like the Hunting Act. We don’t really believe in what it is trying to do, but we are content to allow things to trundle along as they are with a half-hearted adherence to the law because we are scared of a public backlash,” they should be honest and say so.

It is clear that there is little confidence in the law as it stands and the capacity of the state to enforce it, so we need a thorough review of the Hunting Act and how it works. Once that is done, let us have a debate and a vote in Parliament on what should happen next. If we did that, hunting with dogs, which has no place in a modern society, would be outlawed. Let us ensure it is banned: no ifs, no buts, no exceptions under the legislation, and no more excuses.

As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester said, there needs to be a review of the high threshold. Perhaps using the word “recklessness” would give people more confidence in a law that the majority in this country want to adhere to. I appreciate that a review might take time, but I hope the Minister will respond positively when she winds up the debate.

In the meantime, I have some practical suggestions. The first concerns knowledge of the law by the police and Crown Prosecution Service. It is clear that some people are not experts in what is a specialist area.

Secondly, and this is perhaps the single most important action that can be taken to restore trust and confidence, the police must be seen to investigate and take action on any potential criminal offences that occur during the hunts. I am talking mainly about wider public order offences. We have seen lots of examples of threatening and intimidating behaviour, firearms being let off and vehicles being rammed into monitors and so on, giving the impression that some people are above the law and some are not. Everyone should be equal before law. At the moment some people seem to be able to get away with actions that in any other context would see them up before the magistrate, and that adds to the impression, sad though it is, that the authorities are not being even-handed in their approach.

To conclude the Hunting Act is not working. Let us reform it so that the cruel and vindictive practice of hunting with dogs is outlawed once and for all.

3.19 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I commend you for your ability to get eight Back-Bench contributions into a 90-minute debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on bringing forward the debate. This is clearly a popular subject, given the attendance and the number of speeches—that says a lot, given all that is going on in the main Chamber.

The hon. Gentleman began by highlighting the serious crime of killing birds of prey, and the fact that the RSPB wants tougher sentences. I think that most of us present would concur. His main focus was on foxhunting, the weaknesses in the current legislation and what he perceives as lack of political will from the UK Government to tackle those weaknesses. I am sure that he will be pleased to hear that in Scotland the SNP Government have recognised the weaknesses in the law there, which will be tackled. A new measure will flush out weaknesses—such as the fact that dogs can be used to flush out foxes. That is certainly something that the UK Government should co-operate on.

The hon. Gentleman noted that the average fine is only £267. I think it is fair to say, without stereotyping, that many people involved in such hunts would see that expenditure as merely the cost of doing business and a drop in the ocean. He highlighted issues with trail hunting and so-called accidental kills. That reminds us that there are still many hunt groups that somehow see their barbaric hunting as their right and tradition, with respect to both foxes and badgers. That is something we need to stamp out. He recommended improvements in legislation, including an offence of recklessness, and the addition to the law of further exclusions, such as on the use of animal scents. It would be good to hear what the Minister has to say about that.

I pay tribute to the work that the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) has done over the years on animal rights and protections. If I picked him up correctly, he was extolling the virtues of the fact that 60 Tories are now, he believes, against foxhunting. Sadly, that shows how out of date his party still is, because it is less than a fifth of it. It shows that there is a long way to go. I know that he is fighting the fight, and I urge him to keep doing that and to educate his colleagues.

The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) paid tribute to the North Wales police wildlife crime unit and highlighted the serious issue of sheep worrying, which is something I am aware of; it is certainly an issue for farmers in my area. I was interested in his call for statistics to improve the Government's understanding, and for a review of sentencing. Once again, I will be interested in what the Minister says. Police Scotland is working with the National Farmers Union of Scotland to raise awareness of the issue among dog owners. A recent case highlighted the fact that, in addition to the sad fact of the killing of sheep, the farmer, who lost a lot of livestock, was not adequately compensated. The farmer's livelihood was therefore put at risk too.

The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) widened the debate by talking about elephants, noting that the trade in wildlife is the fourth largest trade in the world, which is a real eye-opener. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) bravely battled an infection to put forward her points against foxhunting and, like the hon. Member for City of Chester, highlighted a point raised by her constituents about video footage apparently showing foxhunting carrying on unabated, although it is against the law, while that footage is not used for prosecutions or follow-up investigations. That certainly needs to be looked at. The "toy soldier" jibe about the way people dress up for hunts perhaps sums up their absurdity in this day and age.

I was privileged to hear a rare contribution by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who seldom ventures into Westminster Hall. It was good to hear

him say that he does what he preaches in relation to outdoor conservation. He has been actively involved in that work and I pay tribute to that. He also highlighted the global nature of wildlife crime and trade.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) talked about the need to protect raptors, and about the prosecution of crimes. He was the only Member today to argue that there is a need for upland management and shooting. I suppose many people might not share that view, but it is good to hear someone put it forward as a matter that needs to be looked at.

The hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) introduced a new subject to the debate: egg theft and the egg trade. He pointed out that unfortunately the people involved are naturally drawn to endangered species as they build their collections, creating a vicious cycle that could wipe them out, and that makes them even more attractive to other people involved in this illicit trade. That is another crime that should be stamped out.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) also highlighted concerns about foxhunting and his lack of confidence in the law as it stands. His point that all should be equal under the law is pertinent, and the Minister should address the matter of how the law works in the UK.

Scotland's wildlife is precious and a huge part of our national identity. It is also a valuable resource, because it attracts visitors and tourists who come to see dolphins or birds, for example. Not only is it humane to protect wildlife; it also makes economic sense. For that reason, the Scottish Government have been active in ensuring that Scotland's iconic and world-renowned great outdoors is protected, and they have undertaken species management where required. Wildlife crime is being tackled in Scotland through robust legislation, the management of species reintroductions, including the return of beavers, and work with a range of partners to minimise the risks and impacts of invasive non-native species. In their programme for government, the Scottish Government committed to establishing an animal welfare commission to provide expert advice on the welfare of domesticated and wild animals in Scotland, and work is now under way to establish that.

We all have a responsibility to protect our natural environment and the wildlife that lives in it. The SNP supports any reasonable measures to ensure that bird habitats are not poisoned by man-made chemicals and that firearms and ammunition are used and stored responsibly and legally. The Scottish Government are determined to crack down on those who commit crime against wildlife. As part of that commitment they have recruited special police constables across three divisions between the highlands, Aberdeenshire and Perthshire. The additional officers will be a valuable resource in tackling rural and wildlife crime.

In a similar vein, I pay tribute to the work of Graeme Gordon, a dedicated rural police officer who is a wildlife crime officer and Rural Watch Scotland administrator in my area of Ayrshire. I can vouch for his dedication to his job. He does a tremendous amount of liaison work with NFUS and the rural community. His work varies from investigating crimes to giving people a heads-up on issues and providing valuable advice. He also provides valuable updates to elected Members, including me. It is to Police Scotland's credit that the post is maintained

[Alan Brown]

while austerity is imposed on Scotland and the UK Government steadfastly refuse to backdate the £175 million in VAT owed to Police Scotland and the Scottish fire and rescue service. That is in stark contrast to the cuts to the police that, as other hon. Members have said, the UK Government have been making. It is no coincidence that crime increases when there are cuts to the police service. Another initiative in Scotland in recent years is the investment of more than £6 million in new forensic capability, including DNA24, robotics and powerful software to obtain DNA profiles successfully, in support of the Scottish justice system.

Clearly, we would all love wildlife crime to be eradicated. I long for the day when there is an end to fly-tipping and littering, not only because it creates eyesores, but because it endangers wildlife. I cannot for the life of me understand those who seem to go to extreme efforts to get rid of rubbish that could be uplifted, or that they could deposit at nearby council facilities. They work harder to fly-tip in the countryside than they would in driving their rubbish down the road. Similarly, I go out on walks with my wife, Cyndi, and our black Labrador, Coby, and we get frustrated when we see people who profess to enjoy the great outdoors but who cannot be bothered to take their juice cans, bottles or crisp packets home with them. I cannot understand that. We have a long way to go to eradicate wildlife crime completely, and I look forward to that day.

3.29 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on securing this important debate. He spoke passionately, and I know that he feels passionately about this issue. I am aware that there is great strength of feeling in Cheshire about it.

We have heard excellent contributions from Members across the House. My right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) spoke about the excellent report that the all-party group for animal welfare has produced on sheep worrying. I hope that the Minister will take note of its important recommendations. The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) talked about the international trade and the importance of working globally. My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) raised the issue of bird eggs, which is very important as their theft causes huge damage. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) highlighted the importance of conservation and raised his particular concerns. It was interesting to hear the response from the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), who talked about the approach to these issues being taken in Scotland.

People from across the country frequently contact me to tell me their concerns about the appalling wildlife crime in Britain today. Many have been mentioned already, including hunting with dogs, which is clearly a huge concern, hare coursing, badger baiting and raptor persecution. Last year, when I was serving on the Public Bill Committee for the Ivory Act 2018, we heard that the National Wildlife Crime Unit has only 12 members of staff to cover the entirety of its operations across the UK, and that includes administrative staff as well as enforcement officers. That level of resourcing is a great

cause of concern. How can we expect wildlife crime to be tackled in our country if we do not put in place the means by which we can stamp it out? The unit's financial future has been uncertain for many years, so will the Minister commit to guaranteeing funding for it beyond 2020?

I remind the Minister that, on Second Reading of the Ivory Bill in June last year, the Secretary of State said that, by October 2018

“we will be looking not just to ensure that we can continue to staff and support the officers who work in this field adequately, but to ensure that we go even further.”—[*Official Report*, 4 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 98.]

Nine months later, we are still no clearer on the funding issue. There cannot be a repeat of the threat to the unit's future, as happened in 2016, so we need clarity.

The six national wildlife crime priorities in Britain include poaching, the illegal wildlife trade and the persecution of badgers, bats and raptors. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester mentioned the persecution of raptors, and a new scientific study shows that hen harriers are disappearing on English grouse moors due to illegal killing. Natural England says that the analysis confirms

“what has long been suspected—that illegal persecution is having a major impact on the conservation status of this bird”.

I take the point, made by the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) that raptor persecution is not limited to grouse moors. It is important that wildlife crime is dealt with adequately, wherever it takes place. Labour has committed to carrying out a review in government of the environmental and wildlife impact of grouse shooting. What is the Government's position on that, now that we have seen the new analysis?

We have heard that, unfortunately, no database is kept of reported wildlife crime in England and Wales, although the RSPB keeps a record of bird crimes. Crimes are recorded in Scotland, and figures released last week show that the number of wildlife crimes north of the border has fallen by 11% to the lowest recorded level in five years. At the same time, Scotland has a conviction rate of 96% for those found to have committed wildlife offences, which is the highest rate since 2012.

I believe that even those figures are likely to be wildly unrepresentative of the true number of wildlife crimes committed across Britain. We know that such crimes often take place in remote, rural areas and are likely to go undetected. There is simply not enough specialist knowledge and training in our overstretched police forces, which pushes the burden of covering all UK wildlife crime on to the overstretched few staff at the National Wildlife Crime Unit.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester, the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) and my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) talked extensively about the concerns about the Hunting Act 2004. The fact that so many hon. Members focused on it shows that there are serious concerns about it, which the Minister must take very seriously.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): On the National Wildlife Crime Unit, does my hon. Friend agree that, unless something is done about wild

birds and birds of prey, their very existence may be threatened? Some species may become extinct if nothing is done.

Sue Hayman: We have just heard the new figures for hen harriers. It is incredibly important that these issues are taken seriously, recorded properly and acted upon if we are to stop that kind of wildlife crime.

I want to reiterate the commitment that Labour made on Boxing day: in government, we will strengthen the Hunting Act by closing the loopholes through a number of key measures. We will consult on reviewing sentencing to ensure that effective deterrence includes the use of custodial sentencing, in line with other wildlife crimes; strengthening the criteria for issuing research licences; removing the exemption on the use of dogs below ground to protect birds from shooting, as it risks appalling fights between dogs and wild mammals; and introducing a recklessness clause—hon. Members have talked about that today—to prevent trail hunting from being used as a cover for the illegal hunting of wild animals.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): The constituents of Weaver Vale and Chester would welcome that. People are tired of evidence being presented to the Crown Prosecution Service, and the current law is just not effective enough. I thank my hon. Friend for that.

Sue Hayman: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. When the Labour party consulted on the animal welfare plan last year, that was one of the main issues that came up over and over again.

Labour's Hunting Act was a key milestone in banning that blood sport, but we have heard today about new practices that have developed to exploit loopholes in the legislation. We want to call time on those who defy the law and tighten up the Hunting Act to ensure that it does what it was intended to do. As we have heard, a poll commissioned by the League Against Cruel Sports found that only one rural resident in six believes that hunting with dogs reflects countryside values. More than nine in 10 think that countryside values are really about observing nature.

The Law Commission's 2015 report on wildlife law states that the legislation governing the control, exploitation, welfare and conservation of wild animals has turned into a complex patchwork of overlapping and sometimes conflicting provisions. It has recommended reforming wildlife law in England and Wales to reduce its complexity. In 2015 it produced an excellent report and a draft Bill that deals with many of the issues we have discussed today. I want to ask the Minister why the Government have not taken the recommendations of the extensive piece of work that they commissioned any further.

I urge the Minister seriously to consider drafting a database of wildlife crime for England and Wales so that we can have a much better idea of the scale of the problem, set out the plans for the future of the National Wildlife Crime Unit, as its funding is due to run out in 2020, and really listen to the concerns that Members have expressed today so that wildlife crime in this country can be tackled once and for all.

3.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship,

Mr Rosindell. I know that you are passionate about animals and wildlife, so I am sure that you have enjoyed the debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on securing this important debate on wildlife crime. I know that he is particularly concerned about the events that took place over Christmas in his constituency and nearby. Following his parliamentary question in January, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs officials contacted the Cheshire Constabulary, which has confirmed that an investigation into the five fox deaths is ongoing. We will be informed when or if the Cheshire constabulary decides to refer a file to the Crown Prosecution Service. As he will appreciate, I cannot comment further on that specific matter, but I assure him that I am confident that the police will ascertain whether a crime has been committed and, if so, will take appropriate action.

The Government recognise the importance of tackling all wildlife crimes, which is why DEFRA, together with the Home Office, directly funds the National Wildlife Crime Unit to support its work to investigate these crimes. The National Police Chiefs Council, the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Government also contribute to that funding. The National Wildlife Crime Unit is ably led by Chief Inspector Louise Hubble, who I have met. It helps prevent and detect wildlife crime by obtaining and disseminating intelligence, undertaking analysis that highlights local or national threats, and directly assisting law enforcers in their investigations.

Across the UK, more than 500 specially trained wildlife officers across most forces support investigations in their local areas. DEFRA provided additional funding for the unit to carry out a project on internet-related wildlife crime. The unit has subsequently identified wildlife-related online criminality as a thematic threat area. I will bring to its attention the points made by the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans).

The unit's funding structure will continue until the end of the comprehensive spending review cycle. Decisions on funding beyond 2020 will be taken at the next review, which is due to start this summer, as right hon. and hon. Members will know. I cannot say any more at this stage, but as the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) noted, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is very committed to this important unit. I am pleased that wildlife crime seems to be an increasing priority for many of our police and crime commissioners across England and Wales.

There are six UK wildlife crime priorities: badger persecution, bat persecution, the illegal trade in species protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, freshwater pearl mussels, poaching and raptor persecution. Wildlife crime priorities are set by the UK wildlife crime tasking and co-ordination group, which is chaired by the chief constable wildlife crime lead. Priority areas are those that either are assessed as posing the greatest threat to the conservation status of a species or show a high volume of crime and require a UK-wide tactical response. Each priority has an implementation plan—with plan owners identified—to prevent wildlife crime, improve intelligence gathering and strengthen enforcement of the law.

Raptor persecution is one of the UK's wildlife crime priorities. All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and there are strong penalties

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

for those committing offences. In the five years up to 2017—the latest year for which data is available—there were 107 prosecutions for crimes against wild birds and 75 convictions. The police are leading efforts to prevent the persecution of birds of prey. I praise the work done by North Yorkshire police, particularly on Operation Owl, and I commend police and crime commissioner Julie Milligan in particular. She has been fundamental not only in that work, but in chairing the rural group of police and crime commissioners. She has also made hare coursing a key priority for work across a number of forces.

In addition to activity to disrupt and deter criminality, officers of the North Yorkshire police have worked to raise awareness about raptor persecution among local landowners and members of the public. Only through working in partnership with those living and working in rural communities can raptor persecution be combated. Despite instances of poisoning and killing of birds of prey, populations of many species, such as the peregrine, red kite and buzzard, have increased. I fully recognise, however, that some species continue to cause concern.

The Government take the decline in the hen harrier population in England particularly seriously, and we are committed to securing the future of that iconic species. That is why we took the lead on the hen harrier action plan, which sets out what will be done to increase hen harrier numbers in England, including the trialling of brood management. In the recent judicial review of the lawfulness of Natural England's decision to grant a licence for trials of hen harrier brood management, the claimants' claims were dismissed. The proposed brood management scheme will continue. It seeks to manage the conflict between the conservation of hen harriers and the grouse shooting industry. That decision means the important work to protect and conserve the hen harrier can continue.

The hon. Member for Workington referred to an article that was published in a journal yesterday; I take that issue very seriously and will be seeking to meet the chair of the raptor persecution group, Superintendent Lyall, to go through it in detail. Although it is not for the Government to tell the police or the Crown Prosecution Service who they should be investigating and charging, we should take a proactive approach, particularly to stamp out the persecution of birds of prey.

The Government also support work to combat hare coursing, which is pursued under the poaching national wildlife crime priority. Police action against hare coursing is supported by the poaching priority delivery group, which brings together law enforcement and NGOs to improve intelligence gathering, enforcement and prevention of those crimes.

The Government recognise the distress that hare coursing causes for rural communities. I know that it is a priority of my own police and crime commissioner, Tim Passmore. Concerns are about not just the activity itself, but, increasingly, the associated violence between those involved or damage to property suffered by those whose land is blighted by the activity. There is also increasing concern about the involvement of organised crime in that particular venture. That is why I welcome the ongoing work done by police forces under Operation Galileo, which contributed to a 30% reduction in hare

coursing incidents in Lincolnshire last year. I also commend the work of the six forces across the east of England, which come together to share intelligence so that they can try to stamp out that particularly heinous activity. The Hunting Act 2004 bans all hare coursing in England and Wales. Anyone found guilty of hare coursing or illegal hunting under that Act can receive an unlimited fine.

That brings me to hunting and the concerns raised by the hon. Member for City of Chester. The 2004 Act has been in force since 2005 and has fundamentally changed hunting with dogs in this country. Before that Act, between 21,000 and 25,000 foxes were killed each year by organised hunts, which accounted for only 5% to 6% of all annual fox deaths annually. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) pointed out, further culling of foxes is often undertaken for predator control.

The introduction of the 2004 Act made it an offence to hunt wild mammals with dogs or to knowingly allow land to be used for fox hunting. Since the Act came into effect, many hunts have turned to trail hunting as an alternative to live quarry hunting. Clearly, trail hunting is a huge improvement on live fox hunting, while still allowing hunting groups to undertake an activity important to them and much of the rural community.

I recognise it is possible that dogs used for trail hunting may on occasion pick up and follow the scent of live foxes during a trail hunt. If that occurs, it is the responsibility of the huntsman and other members of hunt staff to control their hounds and, if necessary, stop the hounds as soon as they are made aware that the hounds are no longer following the trail that has been laid. The Act has been used successfully to prosecute those who break the law. Between 2005 and 2017, a total of 778 individuals were prosecuted under the Act and 469 individuals were found guilty. The Government have no plans to amend the 2004 Act, but I have heard what hon. Members have said on that, and I will address sentencing guidelines. I recognise that the Labour party has changed its stance since the Act was introduced, but at the time, Parliament decided that the offence would not carry a custodial punishment. The Act allows for fines of up to £5,000. Sentencing is a matter for judges and sentencing guidelines. We would look to the independent Sentencing Council to consider that particular matter—based on correspondence that I have had with it, it absolutely and strongly defends its independence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) referred to the illegal wildlife trade. I am proud of the Government's record on making changes, including the groundbreaking Ivory Act 2018. The Government recognise that wildlife criminals do not respect international borders, which is why the UK is committed to its global leadership in tackling the illegal wildlife trade. As has been said, we started a series of groundbreaking London conferences in 2014, the first of which secured ambitious agreements from more than 40 Governments to take urgent co-ordinated action. It was hailed as a turning point in global efforts to tackle those damaging activities, in particular in generating a response from China on its role in tackling the heinous trade. In October 2018 the conference returned to London.

The United Kingdom Government are investing more than £36 million between 2014 and 2021 to take action to counter the illegal wildlife trade, including work to

reduce demand, to strengthen enforcement, to ensure effective legal frameworks and to develop sustainable livelihoods. A good example of that is building on the successful ranger training deployments that we have already done in Gabon and Malawi. The UK is committing a further £900,000 of new funding to develop a British military counter-poaching taskforce. Its members will train park rangers to use more effective and safer counter-poaching techniques as they seek to disrupt such criminality.

I assure hon. Members of our expertise and of the way in which we work with other countries. For example, I have made several trips to African countries, and at the 2018 conference, with a particular focus on birds, for the first time we brought in people from the Americas. I am pleased that we will support one of those regional conferences this year, with that particular focus.

One of my hon. Friends referred to bird trapping in Cyprus. The Government take our responsibility to combat wildlife crime in Britain's overseas territories seriously, which is why we have supported the sovereign base areas administration on the island of Cyprus in its work to counter illegal bird trapping. In particular, I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence who made it a personal pledge when he visited the bases to ensure that it was happening, and the Minister for the Armed Forces.

That work is being done through a combination of enhanced police action, eradication of non-native habitats and enforcement of regulations. The SBA administration works closely with Birdlife, the RSPB and other NGOs. The administration is confident that the enhanced measures are delivering meaningful results. I therefore welcome the report released this month by the RSPB and Birdlife, which shows a continued decline in the number of birds being illegally killed on the bases.

On enforcement, it is important to remember that the enforcement of all offences, including wildlife offences, is an operational matter for the police. It is not only for individual chief constables to determine how their resources are deployed, but for locally elected police and crime commissioners to hold their forces to account and to set priorities, including on how they tackle the crimes that matter most to residents and businesses in rural and urban areas alike. However, the Government are taking steps to ensure that the enforcement of wildlife protection legislation achieves the best possible outcomes for wildlife through the expertise hosted by the National Wildlife Crime Unit and the involvement of the National Police Chiefs Council.

Several people talked about notifiable offences. DEFRA has supported work led by the National Police Chiefs Council and the Home Office to explore widening the range of notifiable wildlife offences, including some of those relating to foxhunting. Other offences put forward for consideration include those relevant to raptor and badger persecution, crimes against deer, and the criminal damage of protected habitats. The benefit of an offence becoming notifiable is that there is a national standard for the recording and counting of such offences by police forces in England and Wales, and reports produced by the Home Office provide a measure of demand on the police and inform the public of the scale, scope and evidence of crime in their local communities.

The National Police Chiefs Council is now considering stakeholder feedback, and a formal submission will be made to the Home Office this spring. The decision on which, if any, offences might become notifiable does not sit with my Department, but will be taken by the Home Office. I am conscious of growing interest, as is the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who is taking a particular interest in the issue, including sentencing.

In response to the point made by the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), livestock is not wildlife so it is outside the scope of today's debate, strictly speaking. However, I will ask my noble Friend the Minister in the other place to write to him about the questions he asked. I will ensure that that happens.

I also have an extra point to make to the hon. Member for Islwyn. I was pleased that only a couple of months ago a particularly strong sentence—more than three years—was given to someone convicted of smuggling birds' eggs, so important changes are being made in that regard.

On sentencing, I have already tried to make the point about the maximum fine, in particular under the Hunting Act. I will work with other Ministers, and I have raised illegal wildlife trade issues before with a previous Minister for Justice. We have an opportunity, and there is interest across Government to see what more we can do, but I stress to the House that we might have to change the law specifically. There are indications about how we extend the maximum sentence for animal cruelty from six months to five years. I commit to work with fellow Ministers to see what we can do. It is down to the independent Sentencing Council to change any guidelines under existing law.

The Government will continue to support work to protect our wildlife from criminal activity, to deter people from breaking the law and to punish those who do. We are equally committed to leading international efforts to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. I believe that there has been a change in behaviour, brought in by the Hunting Act. I fully recognise the concerns expressed by hon. Members who do not believe that the Act goes far enough but, as I said, the Government do not intend to reopen it in this Parliament. I again thank the hon. Member for City of Chester for securing this important debate, and all those who contributed to it.

3.56 pm

Christian Matheson: I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. The term "wildlife crime" has been given quite a wide exposition. I welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), who gave us the international dimension, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson), who gave us the rural farming dimension. I particularly welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), from the soon-to-be city of Southend, simply on the basis that he, the right hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale), and indeed you, Mr Rosindell, were pioneers of the cause of animal rights in the Conservative party when—if Government Members will forgive me—it was not always a fashionable cause in that party. Those hon. Members led the way, and I am grateful for that.

[*Christian Matheson*]

I am most grateful to the Minister and the shadow Minister for their expositions. My only concern about much of what the Minister said is that, although we are now out of the foxhunting season this year, when it begins again next year and the foxes continue to be killed in that dreadful way, the calls for further reviews and tightening of the law will continue and grow louder. I thank all hon. Members from across the Chamber for their contributions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered wildlife crime.

Tourism: East of England

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

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

That this House has considered tourism in the East of England.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. Tourism is a vital industry, not only because it supports so many other industries but because it is an excellent source of direct investment into our economy from abroad. Naturally, the east of England is too vast a region, with too much to offer, to cover adequately in 30 minutes. That is why, perhaps unsurprisingly, I would like to focus on Colchester and explain why I believe it deserves the attention, investment, and support of Government.

Many people will have heard of Colchester borough, perhaps from having eaten some of Colchester's fantastic local produce such as Wilkin & Sons of Tiptree, Fairfield Farm crisps and our world-famous oysters, eaten since Roman times. But how many will know about our incredible wealth of history and the tourist attractions our town and borough have to offer? How many know that we are Britain's oldest recorded town and Britain's first Roman city? Colchester castle is the largest Norman keep in Europe. We have the largest and longest intact Roman walls in the country, which can still be walked around today. We have the only Roman circus found in Britain. One of the world's best-known nursery rhymes, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star", was written in Colchester. We are home to the Parachute Regiment and have been a garrison town since Roman times. We have the largest Victorian water tower in Britain.

I have barely scratched the surface, as Colchester is the jewel in the crown of East Anglia, especially when it comes to heritage. Whether people are discovering our Anglo-Saxon, Roman and Norman heritage at Gosbecks archaeological park, visiting Holy Trinity church, Colchester castle or the Roman Circus Centre, living like the personal physician to Elizabeth I at Tymperleys, staring up in awe at Jumbo, our Victorian water tower, visiting our stunning town hall, having dinner at the Old Siege House and seeing the musket balls still stuck in the wooden beams from the English civil war, or taking a walk around our Roman walls, built to avoid a repeat of the revolt that saw Boudicca burn the town to the ground in AD 60-61, Colchester is a town in which history truly comes alive.

Our town has so much more to offer than just heritage. We have fabulous leisure facilities, stunning parks including Gosbecks, Castle Park, Westlands and High Woods country park, and the River Colne on our doorstep. Constable country and the Dedham vale offer beautiful landscapes. For those who want something a little less peaceful, we have Leisure World, Jump Street, numerous soft play facilities, Rollerworld—Europe's largest roller sports facility—and a wealth of new facilities planned at the new Northern Gateway leisure development sitting alongside Colchester United and Colchester rugby club, which are both going from strength to strength.

Our cultural offering is second to none, making us the cultural capital of Essex and arguably the eastern region. The Mercury theatre is going through a multimillion

pound redevelopment programme called Mercury Rising. Colchester Arts Centre, Firstsite, the Minorities and the Headgate theatre all offer fantastic theatre, exhibitions and much more. Many start in Colchester and then spread out across the country and beyond.

It has never been easier to visit Colchester: it is 50 minutes from the City of London by train, 30 minutes from Harwich international port and 45 minutes from Stansted airport. It could not be easier to come and see our exciting and vibrant town with an incredible past and a bright future.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): I note that the motion on the Order Paper reads:

“That this House has considered tourism in the East of England”.

I wonder if the hon. Gentleman would be willing to be consider tourism in any part of the east of England other than Colchester. Might he recommend that people stay on the train for an additional 15 minutes in order to sample the delights of Ipswich?

Will Quince: Although my speech is somewhat Colchester-centric, of course I would advise anybody coming to sample our heritage and tourist attractions, who choose to base themselves in Colchester for all sorts of reasons, to use it as a base to go and experience other places with considerably wealthy heritage and tourist attractions. Ipswich is one of those, just a bit further up the A12.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): Stevenage is also in the east of England. It is a little further up the A1(M) and also on the east coast main line. We also have wonderful culture and heritage, despite being the first new town. Rooks Nest is the basis of E. M. Forster’s novel, “Howard’s End”. We also have Knebworth House, which has a great history. There is lots of culture around the whole of the east of England.

Will Quince: I used to live in my hon. Friend’s constituency, so I have sampled a number of the tourist attractions with my wife, and I hope to do so again. Knebworth House hosts a number of festivals throughout the year and is a popular attraction. Clearly, we are building on fertile ground when investing in the east of England, and Colchester in particular.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a persuasive case for Colchester. I could do likewise for Lowestoft. Does he agree that for the east of England as a whole we should adopt a more comprehensive rather than piecemeal approach to showcasing our glories?

Will Quince: My hon. Friend is right; even in Colchester I do not think we are good enough at taking a holistic approach to our tourism offering. I have not spent much time in Waveney but I very much hope to. Essex and the eastern region as a whole should do far more—perhaps through local enterprise partnerships—to ensure we make an attractive proposition across the board, to spend a week in East Anglia and the east of England and sample the delights of the region.

I would appreciate if the Minister outlined how we can increase Government support for Colchester and the wider east of England. Will he agree to visit Colchester to help me to promote our town as a fantastic destination to visit and invest in? Outside this debate, I have already made efforts to encourage Government investment. I

am aware that this may be a matter for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, but I would like to reference briefly the stronger towns fund and future high streets programme. I have written to the Department in support of Colchester Borough Council’s recent application to the future high streets programme. I hope the council will be successful in receiving some of that £600 million fund.

We need investment to continue Colchester’s momentum—in a tourism not a political sense—in attracting tourists from across the UK and further afield. The full potential of Britain’s oldest recorded town and its first Roman city should never be squandered. Funding from the future high streets programme or similar Government funds would go a long way to double down on our existing strengths. The building blocks for truly remarkable growth in our tourism sector are there, but Government investment is needed to keep the ball rolling.

If Colchester received some of the £1.6 billion available under the stronger towns fund, specifically the £600 million to be allocated competitively, we could significantly enhance our town’s attractions, unlock its many assets and encourage further visitors to the area. I have mentioned that investment builds on fertile ground in the east of England, but investment must lead the way if tourism is to follow.

Hon. Members will be pleased to know that this is my last reference to Colchester: upgrading the A120 between Braintree and Colchester, and the A12, is key. I ask that the Department for Transport look favourably on the bid, to get people to our town and region.

Outside the Roman walls of Colchester, we have the good fortune to enjoy truly remarkable natural sites, which continue to attract visitors from across the country and overseas. More than 10,000 hectares of land in the region are administered by the National Trust, employing approximately 140 staff members who lead a network of 2,200 local volunteers, and attracting 1.5 million visitors annually. Naturally, that provides a strong foundation for a thriving hospitality sector. The east of England’s hospitality sector has a workforce of more than 246,000 people and represents 8% of overall regional employment. That adds a staggering £5.8 billion to the region’s economy. Historic England has estimated that heritage-related trips alone generated £16.9 billion across the country in 2016. The extent to which our region is already on a firm footing is clear.

The foundation and the businesses are there, the infrastructure is largely there, and the sites are there. The east of England, with Colchester leading the way, has so much to offer. We just need investment to truly unlock our potential. I repeat my invitation to the Minister to please visit Colchester, to help me to promote our historic town and the surrounding region, and to encourage Government funding to support and develop the east of England’s appeal as a tourist destination.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. A number of Members wish to catch my eye to speak. This is a half-hour debate; a Member may make a speech only if they have the permission of the Member in charge and of the Minister.

Will Quince *indicated assent.*

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Michael Ellis) *indicated assent.*

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I call Priti Patel.

4.9 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) on securing this important debate. It fills all our hearts—and I would like to think those of our constituents—with joy and optimism to celebrate the culture, heritage, community and, importantly, diversity we share across the east of England. My hon. Friend is my constituency neighbour and we share the borough of Colchester. It was a real joy to hear him speak about the positive aspects of tourism in Colchester borough, many of which we share, and stand up for tourism and hospitality more widely, which, as he said, have real economic benefits.

I would like briefly to make a number of key points. The hospitality sector is pivotal to the tourism ecosystem across the east of England, including in Witham, which is urban, rural and coastal. Tourism has many guises, and hospitality comes in many forms, including pubs, clubs, bars and restaurants. We should pay tribute to the people who work sometimes very long and difficult hours in pressurised circumstances in the hospitality sector. If I may say so, the hospitality sector in Essex in particular is enormous. It is based very much on seasonal work and on individuals working incredibly hard to produce great outputs and make a strong contribution to both our local economy and the national economy. That boosts tourism not only in our constituencies but in the region and the wider country.

My hon. Friend mentioned one of the finest products in the country: Wilkin & Sons Tiptree jams and preserves. That is now an international export; it is well known not only in the House of Commons but in some of the finest establishments—hotels and shops—around the world. Wilkin & Sons, which is based in the village of Tiptree in the Witham constituency and the Colchester borough, is a stunning example of a family business that has gone from success to success and expanded internationally. It contributes to many aspects of tourism; it has tea shops and farms, and it is a magnet for tourists. At the same time, it employs people in the local community and sells the great Tiptree brand internationally, boosting our standing in the world and generating tourism to the region and our country. Of course, there are many other attractions in the area, including the Museum of Power in Langford in my constituency, and Tollesbury on the coast, which are all known for the great contribution they make to the tourism sector.

Let me make two final points. I mentioned employment and seasonal work, which are pivotal to ensuring that constituencies such as mine have a thriving tourism economy. At the same time, the hospitality sector needs a flexible labour market and flexibility about how it recruits and trains workers—migrant workers in particular. The Government are testing a seasonal agricultural workers scheme, which will absolutely affect the east of England and we hope will have a positive impact on tourism, hospitality and the agriculture economy—that attracts tourism, too—in the region.

Finally, there have been many debates in Westminster Hall about infrastructure in the eastern region and in Essex. My hon. Friend rightly pivoted to the A12, the A120 and the rest of our road network. If our economy is to grow and the tourism sector is to be successful, we need much more investment in infrastructure. The Government need to lean in and influence local authorities in particular to stick to their pledges to support investment in the expansion of the A12, followed by the A120, which the Government have indicated their backing for in the past, to ensure that tourism continues to thrive and grow.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. I am going to call the Minister no later than 4.20 pm, so you have three minutes each. I call John Whittingdale.

4.14 pm

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Thank you, Mr Hollobone; I will be very brief. I was first elected to the House to represent a part of Colchester, so I fully endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) in promoting its many attractions, which I can vouch for.

I now represent the Maldon district. We are all part of the east of England, which does not always get the attention it deserves—people talk about the Lake district and the west country—but has many attractions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) mentioned some of the attractions in her constituency—indeed, I used to represent some of those as well. We share what is known as the saltmarsh coast, which is an extraordinary asset for recreation, wildlife and sailing.

The other great asset I represent is a place that should be nationally famous but is not: the Stow Maries great war aerodrome, the last remaining first world war aerodrome. It is being restored, with the help of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund, but it does not attract nearly as many visitors as it should because it is not well enough known.

In Maldon and elsewhere we recognise that digital marketing is key—perhaps the Minister will touch on that—and that people now look online to see where there are attractions, but there is not enough co-ordination. The Maldon district promotes things in the Maldon district, and Colchester borough promotes things in Colchester, but there needs to be more co-ordination so that we can demonstrate all the region's attractions to people who are thinking of visiting the east of England. I am thinking not just of Essex; I am very happy for the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin) to participate as well to promote Suffolk. We sit on this great asset, and I do not believe we are yet doing enough to exploit it.

4.16 pm

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): It is great to participate in this debate about Colchester and other small villages around eastern area principalities. The speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) was rightly dominated by events in Colchester. I spent three years in Colchester, but he has told me

things about it that I did not pick up in that time. I look forward to receiving an invitation to the oyster festival, which I missed while I was there. Also, as an advocate for Tiptree jam—I think Tiptree is just outside his constituency—I feel another visit in support of a colleague coming on.

Southend, which I represent alongside Rochford, is built on tourism. It receives 7.5 million visitors each year, up by half a million since 2016, when statistics were previously produced. Tourists generate £335 million in revenue for the town, up by £22 million since 2016. The local authority tells me, very specifically, that there are 9,586 jobs as a result of tourism, which is up by 607 since 2016. More than £50 million is generated by overnight accommodation, up by £2 million since 2016. Tourism is a very big part of our economy, and it has built up over time.

I recommend that all hon. Members come to Southend. We have Adventure Island, the seafront and London Southend international airport. Southend is a great place for people to base themselves if they want to be outside central London but just 50 minutes by train to Tower Hill. We have three casinos, a number of good golf courses, kitesurfing, sailing, Southend United and nightclubs. We have prestige boutique hotels, but also guesthouses and big-ticket hotels such as Plaza, Holiday Inn and Premier Inn.

I would like to draw one of those hotels to your attention, Mr Hollobone. I am pretty sure you would be welcome at any time at the establishment of Garry Lowen, who runs Gleneagles Guesthouse. I was with him celebrating National Bed and Breakfast Week over the weekend. Fortuitously, I got two press releases out of that constituency visit, because he is our candidate in the local government elections tomorrow. If colleagues want to pop down tomorrow, they could sample the best of Southend, see the tourism and how it fits into the eastern region, and also campaign for Garry in the election.

Mention was made of social media, which is incredibly important. Southend has concentrated heavily on visitsouthend.co.uk, and in just a year it has moved from 120th to 25th in the English tourism social media index. That has really driven its promotion of what it has to offer.

All that remains is for me formally to invite everyone to Southend. Mr Hollobone gets a free stay at Gleneagles Guesthouse; I am afraid lesser mortals only get free Rossi's ice cream, but everyone is very welcome.

4.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Michael Ellis): It is a pleasure to be the Minister responding to this debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) for raising the subject and commend him for the passion with which he spoke. In fact, all Members were walking advertisements for their constituencies, and rightly so. My hon. Friend mentioned “Twinkle, twinkle, little star” and the Parachute Regiment—that must be the only time those two have been in the same sentence. He also talked about Colchester jams, preserves, crisps and oysters. I hope that he will be sent some samples and, if so, no doubt he will share them.

My hon. Friend touched on the importance of tourism generally. Colchester is known to be the first Roman-founded city in Britain and, as such, the current settlement can lay claim to being Britain's oldest town. That is some accolade. As a result, it is part of the “most ancient European towns network”, among such illustrious locales as Argos in Greece, Cadiz in Spain and Cork in Ireland. The network's members seek to work together on issues such as tourism, city planning with heritage taken into consideration, and archaeological research.

Colchester is easy to get to. I say that without undertaking to go there myself immediately, but I am keen to go and I will do my very best—I hope to go there this year. It is a short distance from London by train or car, and London Stansted airport and the ferry port of Harwich are also in close proximity. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) spoke about the world war one aerodrome. I am not sure whether the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport budget will allow me to fly to his constituency—if it did, it would probably be in a world war one biplane. It is an attractive location that I have read about, and a lot of aviation enthusiasts would definitely be interested in visiting it. I hope more people will hear about it after today's debate.

James Duddridge: At London Southend airport there are a number of private helicopters that can be hired. Could I arrange for one to pick the Minister up at the London Heliport and take him to London Southend airport, so he can go to the aerodrome and maybe tour the whole area, going as far as Ipswich or somewhere even more exotic?

Michael Ellis: My hon. Friend is very generous to offer to pay for that journey, but I could not possibly intrude in that way. We will see if we can get there by more conventional means.

There is an impressive selection of attractions in the area, including Gosbecks Archaeological Park and Colchester Zoo. The Government have provided support to lesser known attractions in Colchester. Over £5,800,000 went to projects through the Heritage Lottery Fund, including contributions to the redevelopment of Colchester castle, the restoration of the Moot Hall pipe organ and the Transforming People to Transform Museums project, which aims to develop local skills. That represents nearly £6 million of Government investment in tourism attractions in Colchester. That is not to say that there is not more that we can do, because of course there always is.

Tourism is a crucial part of our economy, and I am pleased to say that it is thriving in the UK: 2017 brought record numbers of international visitors and was our best year ever recorded. The visitors spent record amounts of money across our great nation. Tourism is an important part of our economy; it provides jobs in the most rural of areas, brings wealth and prosperity to our coasts and cities, and is a much loved activity that enriches all parts. There is more that we can do. The upcoming future high streets fund, which colleagues touched on, and the recently announced stronger towns fund will contribute towards developing our more rural and coastal visitor economies in the years to come.

[Michael Ellis]

Tourism is good for us as a people and as a nation; we are on the world stage, being open and inviting to visitors. It is often said—and recently oft repeated—that this country remains open for business. I have been repeating the line that we are also open for leisure. We want people to visit this country for its wonderful leisure options and attractions, including our heritage and cultural offers, which are second to none. That is a reason that as a nation we punch above our weight in many spheres, including in soft power, where we are No. 1 in the world on the Portland analysis of soft power. We gain much by visiting other places and becoming more rounded, understanding individuals. As the UK prepares to leave the European Union, we will continue to be an open and welcoming nation.

To that end, I commend VisitBritain to all my hon. Friends who mentioned their constituencies today. That organisation does a tremendous job promoting the United Kingdom to the world, using images from across the country to demonstrate the wonders we have to offer potential visitors. I also commend the Discover England fund. The east of England has benefited from a good deal of Government funding, focused on the development and promotion of tourism across the area.

As this debate is specifically about the east of England, I mention several projects that have enhanced the tourism offer there. The Passport to the Coast project seeks to encourage visitors to build their own itinerary and experience the coastline from Hull to Harwich in all its glory. The Friendly Invasion project aims to attract visitors from the United States to explore the many American air force bases in East Anglia, where approximately 180,000 US airmen were stationed during world war two. The east of England touring route will take visitors from London to Northumberland, over the length of the east of England. Those visitors can

develop their own individual itineraries for their journey. These are among the options that VisitBritain has, and I recommend that hon. Members look at the Discover England fund projects, which are designed to get visitors out of London and heading to all parts of the country.

The cultural development fund is another way in which the Government have been supporting our cultural offer. We recently announced £4.3 million funding for the Thames estuary production corridor. That project will make the area a world leader in the cultural and creative industries, by investing in apprenticeships for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, creating new jobs and workspaces in the area, and delivering Estuary 2020, an international arts festival that will draw audiences from across the world. The fund is part of the Government's creative industries sector deal, which sees Government and industry working together to invest in the future of the sector and, more widely, the future of these locations.

Staying with the arts, there is a lot of support for the arts scene in the east of England. Arts Council England has provided £300,000 to local organisations working collaboratively in the promotion of cultural tourism, with the aim of increasing cultural tourism in Suffolk and Norfolk. The Making Waves project received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council England to encourage collaborative working between the arts, culture and tourism sectors, and to encourage a greater contribution to local social and economic strategies. The ultimate goal is to make places in the east of England, such as Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft, even better places to live, work and visit, by supporting the creation of local cultural strategies, increasing cultural education for children and young people, and using heritage and the arts to drive economic growth. Heritage and the arts certainly do that, and all Members can benefit from that.

Question put and agreed to.

Health Inequalities

4.30 pm

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered legal duties on the Secretary of State to reduce health inequalities.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I am delighted to have secured this debate and to raise this important issue.

In 2016, the Health Committee Chair, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), led a thoughtful and important debate on this issue, noting that in the Prime Minister's first speech in No. 10 Downing Street she had put reducing health inequalities at the top of her list of priorities. But July 2016 is now a very long time ago, and since that date we have heard a great deal less about that injustice. During that time, inequality of health outcomes between those in affluent areas and those in areas of deprivation has persisted.

That injustice has been obscured by improvements in overall health outcomes—and, of course, by all the other business that has been going on in this place and distracting us from the reasons that so many of us came to Parliament. As the Government unveil the NHS 10-year plan, it is right that we make a conscious effort to revisit the question of health inequalities. I want to do so in particular because I can see unequal health spending by local clinical commissioners in my area. While decision-makers may pay lip service to tackling health inequalities, it is not the driver that it is meant to be under the law.

Of course, the primary causes of health inequalities are complex and varied, from unemployment to poor housing. While no one would suggest that healthcare spending is the answer, we must ensure that all healthcare decision-makers understand their duties and the importance of their obligation to provide access for, and direct spending toward, those most in need. Healthcare spending is the one part of the mix that Government can control, and it is right to expect healthcare spending to be focused on tackling both unequal health outcomes and unequal access to healthcare.

The allocation of funding to local commissioners, which the Minister will probably touch on, rightly includes an adjustment for health inequalities based on the mortality rate. An area with a higher mortality rate, such as my borough of Telford and Wrekin, will get more funding per head than an area with a lower mortality rate, such as neighbouring Shropshire, but that is not the end of the matter, particularly when it comes to major hospital reconfigurations, which are happening in so many places across the country.

While funding may be allocated to separate clinical commissioning groups on the basis of need, when it comes to a major reconfiguration, CCGs will group together to form a joint CCG, bringing widely disparate areas under their umbrella. The funding and resource decisions are then made by the joint CCG, without considering health inequalities between those disparate areas. That is exactly what is happening in my area.

Telford is a post-war new town, created on the east Shropshire coalfield, and it has areas that are among the most deprived in the country. It has, by every measure, significantly worse health outcomes than

Shropshire, a county that has better health outcomes than the national average, and significantly better outcomes than Telford, by almost every indicator.

We are experiencing just such a hospital reconfiguration. Telford and Shropshire have combined, and funding for hospital care is allocated to the area as a whole. What we have seen is a joint CCG, representing those disparate areas, deciding to direct the bulk of its funding to the more affluent area, and to move existing resources there from an area of deprivation. That is a clear failure of the duty to narrow health inequalities.

The national health service database has the figures there for all to see. When it comes to health outcomes, Telford and Shropshire are at different ends of the spectrum. For someone living in Telford, the premature mortality rate is 25% higher than for a person living in Shropshire. Children in Telford are far more likely to suffer from obesity or to be hospitalised for dental decay. Tragically, rates of suicide and cancer in Telford are significantly higher than in Shropshire. Smoking rates, inactivity in adults and other such indicators show the very same disparity. The truth is that a shire town in rural England is healthier than a new town built in a former mining area on the east Shropshire coalfield, and NHS spending allocations are required to recognise that greater need. It is that simple—yet in practice, that is not what is happening.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 makes it clear that there is a requirement to move towards greater investment where levels of deprivation are higher. Under the Act, that is a legal duty on the Secretary of State, NHS England and CCGs. The guidance makes it clear that inequalities

“must be properly and seriously taken into account when making decisions”.

As a former non-executive director of an NHS trust, I know that the NHS constitution requires the NHS to pay attention to sections of society where improvement in health and life expectancy do not keep pace with that in the rest of the population.

It is not enough for the Government or NHS England to hand over the cash to a joint CCG and then say, “Job done,” as far the health inequality duty is concerned. CCGs also have a duty to narrow health inequalities and, if they are not complying—as in my area they are not—I ask the Minister how we can hold them to account. What steps can be taken to enforce that requirement?

This is happening not only in Telford. Across the country, from Lewisham to Huddersfield, the NHS is carrying out controversial restructurings of hospital care similar to the one in Telford, where funding and resources are being targeted toward a single area. If what is happening in Telford is happening elsewhere, decision-makers are ignoring their duties to address inequalities—or maybe they are merely paying lip service to them. It is all very well to commit to narrowing health inequalities, but that commitment is manifested only on a spreadsheet when we do our allocations to CCGs; it is not happening in practice when it comes to spending that allocation of funding.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. In my area, East and North Hertfordshire CCG is being

[Stephen McPartland]

forced to merge its management and executive teams, but so that it does not have to consult with local people, it is going to keep three separate boards. As a result, we are concerned about how decisions will be taken going forward and, although the spending will be going to the three separate CCGs on paper, in reality one committee will be making those decisions and getting the boards to ratify them. The concerns she is raising in her area are repeated around the country.

Lucy Allan: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and I am aware of the position he sets out. He is absolutely right; these problems are happening elsewhere with the combination of CCGs coming together and not being able to meet the needs of the individual areas that are receiving the funding.

In Telford, the local hospital trust serving both Telford and Shropshire announced in January, after five years of bizarrely convoluted and contorted deliberation, that it was pleased to announce its investment of a total pot of £312 million in a state-of-the-art critical care unit in the leafy, affluent shire town of Shrewsbury in Shropshire, 19 miles from Telford. In addition, the trust announced that it was pleased to say it would transfer Telford's women and children's unit and emergency care from Telford to Shropshire.

I have repeatedly asked the revolving door of hospital management over the past five years to explain how that proposal narrows health inequalities, how that decision improves the health outcomes of the most disadvantaged groups in the area they serve and how it improves health access for the most disadvantaged group if it is moving their provision 19 miles from its current location.

The response to my questions over a significant period has been to take no notice whatever. As an MP I have found, and I know from talking to them that many colleagues have also found, that local hospital trusts and CCGs feel no obligation whatever to respond to or even take notice of elected representatives. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) noted in this place just last week, in an excellent debate on his local trust, that he had "absolutely no influence" on any decisions made by the CCG in his area.

As the Shrewsbury and Telford trust felt no obligation to respond to questions on this incredibly important issue, I asked the then Secretary of State if he could seek a response on my behalf. However, even that did not bring so much as an acknowledgement that reducing health inequalities is an important issue for the hospital trust or the CCG when making spending decisions.

The trust seems to feel entirely unaccountable to anyone. The Department of Health and Social Care says that it is accountable to NHS England, and NHS England says that the trust board is accountable to the trust chairman. In reality, there is no accountability. This subject has been raised with me over and over again by local residents who strongly oppose this reallocation of funding from a disadvantaged area to a more advantaged area.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): My hon. Friend will be aware that there are health and wellbeing boards at play in local authorities.

How effective has her local health and wellbeing board been at holding the CCG and other parts of the NHS to account, not only for their spending decisions but for how those decisions impact on frontline patient care?

Lucy Allan: I thank my hon. Friend for sharing his expertise in this area. My local council and health and wellbeing board have equally not been listened to on this issue. It is a Labour council, but it has tried extremely hard; if there was an opportunity to suggest otherwise, I would perhaps take it, but that is not the case. Both tried hard and have not been listened to. Most frustrating has been that the voice of local people has not been heard. Who do we expect to enforce this statutory duty? We cannot expect constituents to crowdfund a legal process because we want to hold CCGs to account.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady share my concerns on integrated care providers? Those should be statutory bodies and not in any way open to being private companies, which can hide behind commercial sensitivity, for exactly the reasons she says.

Lucy Allan: I thank the hon. Lady for her comment. There was an interesting debate on that issue on Monday night in the Chamber. This is an important issue, and I have a lot of sympathy with what she says.

On the injustice of unequal health outcomes, I said at the outset that that is of course not about spending more, and that poor health is not only about healthcare but is a much wider issue. However, if the NHS overlooks its statutory, constitutional and moral duty to properly consider health inequalities when making major spending decisions, the Secretary of State has a legal duty to act; he cannot just sit on his hands and say it is down to local clinicians. That response is all the more frustrating in my case because all six voting members of the Telford CCG voted against the transfer of resource from an area of deprivation and to an area of relative affluence, whereas all six voting members of the CCG in the more affluent Shrewsbury naturally voted for the funding resource to be transferred to their area.

In our case, Telford CCG was made to vote again until it came up with the right answer and allowed that transfer of funding. [Interruption.] That is very topical, yes. This whole issue reminds me exactly of Brexit. I wish I had not come on to that point; this should be a Brexit-free zone, for a change, so that we can all maintain our sanity. However, it is similar in the way that those in power have not been listening to the people. It is extremely important to note that, if we give that sort of funding to relatively affluent areas and take resource away from the most disadvantaged, we are doing something wrong. No Government could think that that was a good idea. I am grateful to the new Health Secretary, who came to Telford to visit our Princess Royal Hospital earlier this month and took the time to see for himself the fantastic work being done in the very areas that the management is seeking to close and to transfer 19 miles away to Shrewsbury hospital.

I would like to get something else off my chest, to further illustrate the problem of unequal health spending. Six months ago the Government gave the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust £3 million for winter pressures. The trust decided to spend all of it in Shrewsbury—all

of it—despite there being no evidence that the decision reduced health inequalities between the areas that it serves and not even an indication that it had considered health inequalities when making that decision.

No Government could possibly condone transferring resources from an area of need to an area of greater affluence and better health outcomes. The Government have a legal responsibility to ensure that that does not happen. Everyone in this room will agree that NHS funding decisions must focus on the areas of greatest need, and where that is not happening, we cannot ignore it. The trust has been able to forge ahead with a plan that has never made sense to local people, that was roundly opposed by a consultation that took place, bizarrely, two years after the original decision was made, and despite MPs and councillors vocally pointing out the plan's shortcomings and its failure to address health inequalities. The hospital trust and CCGs carried on regardless. It cannot be down to local people to enforce the Act. I can only conclude that decision-makers perhaps do not understand their duty to narrow health inequalities or—of more concern—that they do not understand the extent of the need, disadvantage and health inequality in the area they serve.

The flat-out refusal to even discuss the reconfiguration's impact on health benefits and outcomes for the most disadvantaged has been extraordinary. I have written letter after letter for a considerably longer period than the consultation lasted and I have not received any answers. My trust treats the issue as if it was entirely irrelevant to its reconfiguration plan. If it is not able to show how its plans narrow health inequalities, it must think again.

I know that once the Secretary of State receives the relevant documentation from my local council, he will carefully consider whether to call in the Telford proposal for review by an independent reconfiguration panel. For that, I am most grateful. I hope the panel will look closely at the failure to address need and disadvantage and, on those grounds alone—there are many others—throw out the scheme. If the Government are committed to reducing health inequalities and not only focusing on better health for all, they need more than just warm words. I ask the Minister to remind hospital trusts and commissioners generally, and the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust and its commissioners specifically, to give due regard to their duty to demonstrate how their spending decisions narrow health inequalities.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister to keep focusing on this issue. It is so easy to lose sight of the reason we all came to this place, and it is too easy for the Department or the Minister to believe that health spending is allocated and targeted towards need, and that we do not have to look beyond the spreadsheet. We have to ensure that it is happening in practice on the ground. We cannot simply say that we have done our bit and that there is no need to look any further. Health inequalities are a shameful injustice of unequal lives and unequal life chances. I know that the Secretary State wants to ensure that no NHS decision-maker allocates funding in a way that exacerbates this injustice, whether in Telford or any other area.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The debate can last until 5.30 pm. I am obliged to call the Front-Bench spokespeople no later than 5.07 pm. The guideline time

limits are five minutes for the Scottish National party spokesperson, five minutes for Her Majesty's Opposition's spokesperson and 10 minutes for the Minister, with the mover of the motion having two minutes at the end to sum up the debate. The next 18 minutes will be for Back-Bench Members. You can all contribute if you speak for no more than four and a half minutes each.

4.49 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on bringing this issue to the House. I am always very pleased to support her on any issues that she brings to the House. They are always ones that I am interested in, and that is why we are all here—because we are all interested in this issue.

The issue of health inequalities is of grave concern to me, as I hail from what too often feels like the poor relation when it comes to health issues—Northern Ireland. Our NHS is stretched beyond capacity and without access to many services that the UK mainland has. I suspect that when we hear from the spokesperson for the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), she will tell us how things are progressing in Scotland, and I always feel envious of things that are being done there. I wish that we could replicate them in Northern Ireland.

People in Northern Ireland do not have access to children's heart doctors. Parents and their sick children have to fly to the mainland or travel to the Republic of Ireland. Over the years, a number of my constituents have fallen into that category. It is because we do not have enough demand on paper to keep a paediatric cardiology team in place, yet in practice far too many children are having to travel, with no family support, out of Northern Ireland to London or to the Republic of Ireland. They are treated unequally because, let us be honest, they come from Northern Ireland. The access that they have is not the same as people have on the mainland. The fact that they are going to London or to the Republic of Ireland is an indication of the problem.

Then there are those who suffer from rare diseases, who feel the inequality of suffering from something that is not common enough for there to be a focus on it or for funding to be put into it. That is heartbreaking. When we consider that 54% of UK cancer deaths are from rare and less common cancers, we suddenly realise that it is so wrong that there is such inequality in funding across areas including policy, services and research. In particular, symptoms of rare and less common cancers can be less well recognised or vague and, as a result, too many people are diagnosed late or through a presentation at an accident and emergency department, which generally means that outcomes will be much poorer.

I am not sure whether anyone here reads *The Times*, but there is a lovely photograph on the front of that newspaper today of a wee lassie who went to America to get proton beam therapy. It was a success, and that was one of the first ever examples of this. It is one of those heart-warming stories. It gives us encouragement when technological advances are made and there is an opportunity for health services elsewhere in the world to progress in such a way. It was good news that that young girl, who is now nine, was able to be back home with her family and her cancer was away.

[Jim Shannon]

We must address training on symptoms and publication and awareness of information to stop the inequality for those who know what to look out for with breast cancer but have no idea that the early symptoms of fast-spreading pancreatic cancer can seem like gallstones. Sometimes the issue is diagnosis and knowing the right symptoms. We must address the inequality of coverage and funding for rare diseases in the UK.

Those are not the only areas where I see inequality. I recently asked a further question regarding concerns that I have. I asked what steps the Department of Health and Social Care was taking to ensure that provisions relating to health inequalities and the life expectancy of people with learning difficulties and autism were included in the prevention Green Paper. It is important to address inequalities for those who have complex needs. Every one of us, as an elected representative, is each and every day impacted by cases involving complex issues—constituents who have not one ailment or problem, but multiple problems. That is the life we live. This was the response from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine):

“The ambition of the Green Paper focuses on both reducing health inequalities and increasing healthy life expectancy. We are currently considering policy options, and will be mindful of impacts on people with learning disabilities and autism.”

I look to this Minister to perhaps provide more enlightenment on that question.

We need a more proactive approach for vulnerable people and more of a focus on the inequalities that exist for those who are slightly different healthwise and who process things slightly differently. It is safe to say that currently we operate in a postcode lottery for health. I understand the budgetary constraints and they are a fact of life, but it is imperative that there is UK-wide access to healthcare that is not impacted by someone's address, illness or ability or inability to communicate. I say this gently to the Minister: simply put, we must do better.

4.53 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing the debate. This is such an important subject. A Cornish MP absolutely understands health inequalities and the lack of funding to target them. In Cornwall, there is no shortage of examples of health inequalities. I will mention just a few issues: vascular disease, including diabetes, kidney disease, dental health problems, skin cancer, diagnosis times for people with severe conditions, including ankylosing spondylitis—I chair the relevant all-party parliamentary group for that—and mental health services. It is clear that in Cornwall there are inequalities in all those areas.

My hon. Friend was right to address the need to allow funds to be targeted towards health inequalities. As a Member for Cornwall, which has long been underfunded compared with the rest of England, or at least the English average, I fully support that. However, in the short time that I have this afternoon, I would like to address a different aspect of health inequality—dementia. Dementia is a disease, but it is not primarily treated by the NHS. It is a Government commitment to provide

NHS services free at the point of use. If someone has a stroke, heart problems, cancer or flu, the NHS will treat them free of charge. If someone has dementia, a recognised disease, it can cost tens of thousands of pounds—I learned today that it can cost up to £100,000—to get the care that they need.

I am suggesting that it would be in the interest of the Government, the Department of Health and Social Care and certainly those who are concerned about social care budgets to make dementia an NHS problem, rather than a problem for social care. According to the Alzheimer's Society, which is about to launch a call for a fund for dementia, 50,000 avoidable hospital admissions happen simply because we do not adequately care for those with dementia or for those who care for them. Failing dementia care services could be avoided. According to independent reports, 23% of all services for dementia are failing. That sounds quite dramatic, and it is dramatic when one sits with a person who has cared for a loved one and who has also been in hospital because she cannot cope with being awake every night and trying to ensure that her husband does not turn on the stove, fall out of bed or fall down the stairs. Where we have failing services, because the issue is not properly dealt with within the NHS family, we really have problems and we cannot fully understand how severe the problems are.

People who treat dementia patients would be adequately trained if this disease were brought within the NHS window, the NHS envelope. We would be able to ensure that everyone who cared for someone with dementia was adequately trained. Independent reports say that 38% of carers who care for people with dementia have not been trained in the disease or all the things associated with Alzheimer's or dementia.

I have welcomed and am so pleased with the commitment to the 10-year plan for the NHS. It is time, and this is an opportunity, to address health inequalities and to treat dementia as a disease within the NHS and one to be treated by the NHS. I would therefore like us, as we develop the plan, to create a recognised pathway of care for those with dementia and to ensure that all those providing care are adequately trained in dementia care and all that goes with it. Clearly, that will have a cost, but I believe that it is the right way to care for people, many of whom have served this nation for such a long time during their lives.

My father-in-law suffered full frontal dementia for many years—for 10 years—and it was such a battle to get the support that he needed. Even when he was completely dependent and could not do anything for himself, he was still cared for within social care and not the NHS. That was the case right up to the day he died, even though he died of pneumonia. That was a few years ago, but it is one example of how we do not fully understand dementia. Stories are hidden at the moment, but by dealing with dementia within the NHS as a disease, we could really help people to reduce so much of the harm and the inequality that we have talked about. We could do something fantastic and make better use of the money that is available to care for those we all care about.

4.58 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) on securing the debate. She was absolutely right to say that, as important as our NHS is in treating and caring for us when we get ill, reducing health inequalities—in my Oldham East and Saddleworth constituency, there is an 11-year life expectancy gap between rich and poor—goes beyond the NHS and the Government's 10-year plan.

The term “health inequalities” refers to the increasing mortality and morbidity that occur with declining socioeconomic position. This is the systematic, socially reproduced, differential distribution of power in relation to income, wealth, knowledge, social status and connections. There is overwhelming evidence that those factors are the key determinants of health inequalities, influenced by written and unwritten rules and laws across our society. Those things, rather than biological and behavioural differences, drive these inequalities. No law of nature decrees that the children born to poor families should die at three times the rate of children born to rich families, but that is the reality in 21st-century Britain.

Given that those health inequalities are socially produced, they are not fixed or inevitable. If the Government were committed to tackling these burning injustices—let us face it, what could be more unjust than knowing you are going to die earlier because you are poor?—a starting point would be to tackle their regressive, unfair economic and social policies.

Countries that have a narrow gap between rich and poor have not only higher life expectancy rates, but better educational attainment, social mobility, trust between communities and so on. Fairer, more equal societies benefit everyone. Unfortunately, the concentration of power in tiny elites is happening more than ever in the UK.

Just four weeks ago the Office for National Statistics published data with more evidence that these inequalities are on the increase, with income inequalities increasing in 2018. The average income of the poorest fifth of the population after inflation contracted by 1.6% in the last financial year, while the average income of the richest fifth rose by 4.7%. This followed “fat cat Friday” in January when it was revealed that top executives were earning 133 times more than their average worker—up from 47 times more in 1998.

At the same time we are seeing increases in both infant and child mortality, which—as shown in the latest study, just 10 days ago—correlate with increasing child poverty. These increases, the first in 100 years, mean that four babies in 1,000 will not see their first birthday in the UK, compared with 2.8 in 1,000 in the EU.

Two weeks ago life expectancy estimates were revised downwards by six months by the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries in its latest mortality projections model. The institute now expects men aged 65 to die at 86.9 years, down from its previous estimate of 87.4 years, while women who reach 65 are likely to die at 89.2 years, down from 89.7 years. Public Health England's investigation into flatlining life expectancy revealed—as many of us, including Sir Michael Marmot, have said for a number of years—that austerity has wrought misery and poverty, and ultimately an early death for too many of our citizens.

As analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and others has shown, since 2015 the lowest income decile has lost proportionately more income than any other

group as a consequence of personal taxation and social security measures. Last autumn's Budget had only marginal impacts on the household income of the poorest, while reducing the number of higher rate taxpayers by 300,000. Last week's spring statement followed that trend. There was nothing for the 8 million working poor, the 4 million children living in relative poverty or the two thirds in working families, and nothing for the 4 million disabled people living in poverty.

These health inequalities are socially produced, so they are not fixed or inevitable. They can be changed, and that should give us hope.

5.3 pm

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): Thank you for calling me, Mr Hollobone. I am pleased to be here this afternoon and that the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) has brought up this matter of health inequalities. She mentioned the Health Committee of the previous Session. I chaired the Health Committee under the last Labour Government, which looked into health inequalities and found that there are great difficulties in moving on from that.

In 2010, the Marmot review on health inequalities was published. Since then, we have had legislation. I was on the Committee for the Health and Social Care Act 2012. I was really pleased that health inequalities and population health was a big issue, and it was put in statute that those things needed addressing. I am sad to say that I have not heard a murmur from Ministers since then in relation to reducing health inequalities.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) said, Sir Michael Marmot was a leader on this matter. He is now involved in the Institute of Health Equity, which, in September last year, released a fascinating publication. In conjunction with that publication, Sir Michael Marmot wrote on his blog about the complexity of health inequalities, a point recognised by the hon. Member for Telford and my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth. Sir Michael Marmot wrote:

“There has been a contradiction at the heart of recommendations for action on health inequalities. No one is more concerned with health than those of us in the health sector. But the key determinants of health inequalities lie outside the health care system. It is not so much what doctors do, or don't do, for patients that cause health inequalities, but the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.”

That is absolutely true. To be fair, the coalition Government tried to bring in legislation that would help people to recognise that, not only in the health service, but in the wider world.

The report published last September, “Reducing Health Inequalities Through New Models of Care: A Resource for New Care Models”, is really worth reading. Sometimes I despair when I hear Members of Parliament saying that we do not want new models or changes in the health service, because this is what happens and that is how it should be. In fact, the Institute of Health Equity provides some great guidance that we could all learn from, in terms of what should or should not be done.

One issue highlighted in that report is that the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 came into force in 2013, across the public sector. The report says:

“The Act states that for public bodies procuring service contracts over a certain threshold”—

[Sir Kevin Barron]

both examples given are below £200,000—

“the authority must consider: ‘a) how what is being proposed to be procured might improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the relevant area, and b) how, in conducting the process of procurement, it might act with a view to securing that improvement.’”

That is exciting, at one level. However, on the next page, regarding take-up of those considerations, the report states:

“Social value contracting is still relatively underdeveloped within the NHS, even though it is a legal requirement. Only 13 per cent of CCGs were able in recent research to evidence active use of the Act.”

Under those circumstances, it seems to me—it is not just the NHS, but the rest of the public sector—that we need to concentrate our minds, as a nation, on how we get through this issue. It is an issue not only of health, but of many other things.

The report talks about using

“social prescribing to create action on social determinants”.

The Minister—in her life before being elected—comes from close to the borough of Rotherham. Rotherham Social Prescribing service has won national awards for how it works with different communities. Voluntary Action Rotherham also works with different voluntary groups—not groups that deliver health services as such—to ensure that people get the help that they need now. Social prescribing, in my view, is a way to get away from the health service and into the wider communities, and it is an avenue that this House should encourage. I hope the Minister agrees with that.

5.7 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Obviously, we are discussing the duty to reduce health inequalities, but as other hon. Member have mentioned, the increase in life expectancy is stalling and healthy life expectancy is falling. There is an exact linear correlation with deprivation. Women in poorer areas will have 26 years of poor health compared with 13 years for the least deprived. That all generates health pressures in the health service and in social care. Last year, the Scottish Government passed the Fairer Scotland Duty, which puts an obligation on all public bodies to work towards reducing inequality.

There are different aspects to this issue, including access to healthcare, which the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) talked about. In Scotland, we now spend £185 a head more on health and £113 a head more on social care than in England. That allows us to offer free personal care, which allows people the luxury of staying at home if they need the support mentioned by the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas).

A key issue of access to healthcare is free prescriptions. They are not available in England, other than for a very limited number of conditions, not including asthma. Asthma UK has conducted surveys showing that, at some point, half of all patients have not collected their prescription, and that three-quarters of asthma patients struggle to pay for their prescription. Of those who did not collect their prescriptions during that period, 13% were admitted to hospital. That is not cost effective.

The long-term plan talks about access to a digital GP, video access and healthy people being able to buy genomic testing. I am sorry, but all that will feed the inverse care law of increasing demand from the better-off instead of tackling unmet need among poorer people. Those are the people who do not attend appointments for screening, who live far away from services and who do not have access to decent healthcare.

On the public health and prevention side, obviously Scotland was the first to enact the smoking ban, followed by England. We have introduced minimum unit pricing to try to tackle alcohol, which is another one of the scourges. That policy has yet to be enacted here. I welcome the UK Government’s sugar tax, but I would like to see some action on advertising junk food to children before 9 pm. Scotland has also signed up to the World Health Organisation’s global action plan, which tries to improve physical activity and participation in sport, particularly among women, girls and the elderly.

It is particularly important to invest in children and we try to do that in Scotland through the Best Start grant, the Baby Box and the fact that our early years education is available to all children and does not just depend on parents’ circumstances or work pattern. If we do not invest in children, we inevitably end up spending more later to pick up the pieces.

As has been said, Professor Marmot highlighted in his report the fact that increasing poverty means increasing inequality. The welfare cuts, particularly the benefit freeze, have driven an increase in every group in poverty over the last number of years. Poverty in England is at 22%, it is 24% in Wales and it is down at 20% in Scotland. However, if we look at the disabled, pensioners and children, we see that they are particularly vulnerable. Child poverty was falling, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies says that it will climb by another 7% before 2022. In England, child poverty is now over 30%, in Wales it is 28% and in Scotland we had got it down to 21% but it has climbed to 24%. That is due to the impact of welfare cuts on families.

For the last several years infant mortality has risen in England. That is a measure that we use to look at health on a worldwide basis in developing countries. The Scottish Government mitigate policies such as the bedroom tax, and they have measures such as the Scottish welfare fund, which is why we have the lowest levels of child, disabled and pensioner poverty. However, in all those classes poverty is still increasing and we are having to use £100 million a year on it.

The Government talk about tackling worklessness, but 70% of children have a working parent. What we have is the working poor. The International Monetary Fund says that a more equal society is a healthier society, which brings better economic growth, so what we need to do is promote the real living wage, to make work pay. We need to tackle poverty. It is the biggest driver of ill health, which means we need a “health in all policies” approach. The NHS alone cannot fix this problem.

5.12 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Hollobone.

This has been an excellent debate, and I start by thanking the hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) for securing it and for her excellent contribution. Sadly, many areas across the UK face similar issues to those affecting Telford, as we have heard. As we know, our NHS was built for everyone. The original leaflet explaining the NHS to households across the country read:

“Everyone—rich or poor, man, woman or child—can use it or any part of it.”

Seventy years on, we cannot forget that ethos, which is why this debate is so important. I also thank all other hon. Members for their contributions to the debate. Due to time, I will not name them all.

Health inequalities are avoidable, but they still persist so clearly, both nationally and locally, within our communities, as we have heard. It cannot be right that in England men and women from the most disadvantaged 10% of areas on average now die 9.3 and 7.3 years respectively sooner than those in the 10% least disadvantaged areas. And those living in the most deprived areas not only die much earlier than those living in the most affluent areas but they also live much longer in bad health. For example, between 2014 and 2016 women in the most deprived areas could expect to live for 51.8 healthy life years, meaning that their remaining 27 years would be spent in bad health. That is compared, for instance, to women in the least deprived areas, who could expect to live for 70.7 healthy life years, with only 15.5 years in bad health.

It has to be said that there is also a persistent north-south divide in both life expectancy and healthy life expectancy, with people in the southern regions of England on average living longer and with fewer years in poor health than those living further north. For example, 2015-17 figures show that men and women in the north-east—my region—have the lowest life expectancy at birth in England, at 77.9 years and 81.6 years respectively. That is compared to the south-east, where men can expect to live for 80.6 years and women for 84 years.

However, health inequalities also exist within local authorities. For example, the longest life expectancy in the country is in the richest borough, Kensington and Chelsea; I am not surprised. Nevertheless, the most disadvantaged people in that London borough can expect to live for 14 years less than their most advantaged counterparts. Such a stark difference is completely unacceptable.

Also, children living in poverty are more likely to die before the age of one, become overweight, have tooth decay or even die in an accident. Parents living in poverty are also more likely to smoke, experience mental health difficulties, be a young parent, be a lone parent, experience domestic violence and other negative outcomes, all of which also increase adverse childhood experience risk factors that impact children’s health, too.

So, after a century of decline the number of deaths in childhood in the UK has risen for two consecutive years, with the highest mortality rates evident in the poorest communities. Life expectancy in the UK had always increased slightly, year on year, for over a century, largely due to improvements in nutrition, hygiene, housing and control of infectious diseases. However, it seems that that is not happening any more.

What are we going to do? Labour is committed to a new health inequalities target, to improve life expectancy, mortality rates and children’s health. The target would be independently assessed, and as the hon. Member for Telford called for, the Health and Social Care Secretary would be held accountable to Parliament and would produce an annual health inequalities report.

The four biggest risk factors that affect health—smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, poor diet and lack of exercise—also affect the poorest in our communities. Public health services support those people. However, there have been public health cuts to the tune of £800 million between 2015 and 2021, and local authorities have been put in untenable positions, where they have to make difficult decisions.

I believe that the Government already have a moral duty to ensure that health inequalities are reduced, but unfortunately they have not taken that duty seriously enough, so I would like the Minister not only to set out her commitment to reducing health inequalities but to lay out details of how the Government will reduce them, and I urge her once again to reverse the cuts to public health budgets.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): If the Minister concluded by 5.28 pm, that would allow Lucy Allan time at the end of the debate to sum up.

5.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and to respond to the debate. I feel that it is a major challenge and an absolute responsibility for Ministers in the Department to do everything we can to tackle inequalities. Frankly, that is why all of us got involved in politics and stood for public office, because we want to do the best for everyone in our society.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) for her very persuasive argument in opening the debate. She has been an absolutely fantastic champion for her constituents, at a time when difficult decisions are being made about how to reconfigure health services in her area. She has not been backward in coming forward to make her case, because this is the second time that I have responded to her on it. I know that she will continue to make her case.

I will just say something about some of the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised. When the NHS makes decisions on how best to deliver health services for a local community, clearly those decisions are made locally and should be locally responsive. However, it is equally the case that the public become very nervous about the potential downside of any decision. It is therefore absolutely crucial that engagement is constructive, with dialogue and transparency, so that the public can have confidence that the right decisions are being made.

My hon. Friend articulated her case with clear reference to inequalities in the area that is served by that configuration. It is important that we have a way of addressing those points, because there is a perception that the pointy-elbowed middle classes are better at fighting for themselves than everyone else is. We all have a duty to ensure that everyone can have confidence in the decisions that are made. I encourage my hon. Friend to continue to give

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

challenge, because it is only when we provide her with answers that she can give her constituents reassurance. I know that she will continue to give that challenge.

On that basis, I would give a gentle prod to some organisations within the NHS. We often find that some areas are better at consultation than others, but we are elected representatives who are here to give challenge on behalf of our constituents, and I would like to send a message that the NHS needs to be more transparent in its decision making throughout.

I thank all Members for their contributions to this debate, and I will try to address most of the points that have been raised. Turning to the legal duties on the Secretary of State, we have regard to the need to reduce health inequalities. That requires concerted effort across all our health services. That is a priority for us, and it is a particular priority for me. Clearly, other factors contribute to poor health outcomes and inequalities, which go beyond the gift of the NHS and the Department of Health and Social Care, meaning that we need to take a cross-Government approach to the problem. Housing is clearly an issue; we know that poor-quality housing can be a driver of ill health and health inequality. We have heard about employment and income, and clearly education is a factor as well. We need to equip everyone with the tools to live a healthy lifestyle and look after themselves well. Equally, this issue is about access to services, and we know that there is much we can do within the NHS and the wider healthcare system.

Debbie Abrahams: Is the Minister aware that there was an interdepartmental public health group specifically to look at the wider determinants of health and how each Department could do its bit? Would she consider re-establishing that group to address the important issues that have been raised?

Jackie Doyle-Price: We have a number of inter-ministerial groups looking at particular areas of inequality, such as rough sleeping and the first 1,001 days. The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) spoke about the importance of early intervention; if we could get that right, that would be a real way of addressing inequality. My short answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) is that we pick up public health in a number of ways, but my priorities are the first 1,001 days and particular pinch points where there are real inequalities. We will continue to look at those areas, not least because supporting those individuals is not just better for them, but makes financial sense. If we can tackle some of these issues earlier, not only do individuals live longer and healthier lives, but there is a reduced cost for the health system.

Dr Whitford: Many of us have spoken about the fact that poverty drives ill health. Can the Minister tell us whether any discussion is taking place between the Department and the Department for Work and Pensions about the impact of welfare changes over the past few years, and how to tackle them?

Jackie Doyle-Price: I have been in close consultation about that issue with the recently departed Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah

Newton). She has really challenged the DWP to look after people who are vulnerable, and put in place safeguarding policies for them, so I confirm to the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire that that discussion is taking place.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) raised the issue of dementia. Clearly, dementia has a big impact on the number of years in which people can enjoy a healthy life, and we must get that right. For that reason, we have introduced the ageing society grand challenge, which is focused on narrowing those inequalities. My hon. Friend is right that we must have better integration with social care; there have been a lot of moves towards better integration between local authorities and the NHS, and that must continue.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) referred to public health cuts. We have tackled those through the NHS forward plan, and have said that this is an area in which we expect the NHS to focus and work collaboratively with local government, specifically highlighting health visitors and the wider public health agenda. My answer to the hon. Lady's point is "watch this space", but we recognise that we spend less if we spend wisely, which has to be about getting the system to work better.

Derek Thomas *rose*—

Dr Whitford *rose*—

Jackie Doyle-Price: I have limited time, and I would like to get through this.

We have made it clear that the long-term plan will be focused on reducing inequalities. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned people with learning disabilities and autism, and I can tell him that those people are a real priority for me. When we consider inequality, the life expectancy of people with those conditions is massively less than it ought to be, and we need to fix that. This year we expect all local health systems to set out how they will reduce health inequalities by 2023-24 and by 2028-29. Through that, we are targeting specific areas. NHS England will highlight areas in which it can do specialist commissioning. One example is people who are rough sleepers, who have low levels of life expectancy.

I absolutely agreed with what the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) said about social prescribing. How we deliver health services depends not only on medicalised professions and clinical support; when tackling inequality, a lot of the wrap-around and de-medicalised support can deliver better health outcomes. I am very excited to hear about what is happening in Rotherham, so I might pay a visit next time I go to see my mum. That would be quite nice.

Turning to the specific points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Telford about her local trust and the impact on inequalities, she has clearly articulated the issues that she is concerned about. The decision is clearly a local one, but it is within the gift of the council to make an appeal to the Secretary of State, and I gather from my hon. Friend's comments that that will happen. I obviously cannot prejudge the outcome of that case, but I assure her that when it arrives on the

Secretary of State's desk, he will consider it impartially. She has articulated the concerns from her constituents' perspective extremely well.

I am under no illusion about the fact that tackling inequality requires commitment and leadership, energy and focus, and national and local accountability. Let us look at the plans that come from clinical commissioning groups later this year and interrogate them to make sure that they will tackle inequality. We will make sure that we stand fully behind them to ensure that they deliver.

5.27 pm

Lucy Allan: I thank all Members for participating in the debate this afternoon. I am grateful to have heard not only their contributions but their passion for the subject, which I share. The Minister has been very kind in making a commitment to transparency and better communication by decision makers when it comes to major changes in local areas, and I will hold her to that commitment.

Health inequality is such an important issue, which we do not talk about enough in this place. We must do better, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said. I loved that the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) mentioned that there is hope for improving life chances and opportunities for those most in need. We all have to keep focusing on this issue and keep it on the agenda, despite the whirlwind of everything else that is going on around us. It has been refreshing to talk about something that we are all passionate about and will change lives. I again thank the Minister. I will gladly continue to work with her to ensure that the issues in Telford are addressed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered legal duties on the Secretary of State to reduce health inequalities.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Wednesday 20 March 2019

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Informal 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:

Ministers were unable to attend the informal General Affairs Council (GAC) due to parliamentary business. Alex Ellis, director general of the Department for Exiting the European Union, represented the UK at the informal GAC in Bucharest on 11 and 12 March 2019. The agenda covered a discussion on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-27 and a debate on the EU strategic agenda.

Until we leave the European Union, we remain committed to fulfilling our rights and obligations as a full member.

Multiannual financial framework for 2021-27

The Council had an exchange of views on the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-27. The Commission stated that the EU needed flexibility to address urgent matters which could not be foreseen, and asked for enhanced collaboration between the funds and instruments. The Commission also stated that the EU needed a stronger link between its budget and policy framework. Most member states spoke in favour of flexibility but stressed the need for it to be balanced to ensure predictability.

EU strategic agenda

In preparation for the EU strategic agenda, Ministers reflected on the future of Europe, and in particular, the overarching priorities that should guide the work of the EU over the coming years. Ministers discussed growth and competitiveness as one of the priority themes for the next strategic agenda. Ministers also discussed security and migration as key priorities.

Alex Ellis intervened to highlight that some of the priorities highlighted in the discussion were ones in which the UK had a strong interest in continued collaboration with our international partners, especially on the challenges we faced collectively, such as security, climate change, global trade and migration.

[HCWS1431]

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 20 March 2019

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Future High Streets Fund

The following is an extract from Housing, Communities and Local Government questions on 4 March 2019:

Jake Berry: The Government have been clear that online taxation in retail needs to be done as part of an international agreement, but we have also been clear that, if we cannot get such an agreement, we will come

forward with our own 2% tax on online retail to ensure that we can continue, as we did in the last Budget, to give relief to those retailing on our high streets.

[Official Report, 4 March 2019, Vol. 655, c. 648.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry):

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron).

The correct information should have been:

Jake Berry: The Government have been clear that online taxation **of businesses that derive value from user participation in retail** needs to be done as part of an international agreement, but we have also been clear that, if we cannot get such an agreement, we will come forward with our own 2% tax on online retail to ensure that we can continue, as we did in the last Budget, to give relief to those retailing on our high streets.

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**not later than
Wednesday 27 March 2019**

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