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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 9 May 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Village Halls

1. **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to regenerate village halls in rural communities. [910775]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Village halls are at the heart of rural communities, and we want to ensure that they remain so for many years to come. That is why, on 5 April this year, the Government launched a £3 million fund to improve them. Grants of up to £75,000, or 20% of the project costs, are available for the refurbishment and alteration of these essential community buildings.

Craig Tracey: Village halls are a vital asset in many rural parts of my constituency, offering a wide range of activities for groups of people of all ages. I know that from personal experience, having served as chair of my local village hall in Shuttington for several years before my election. I welcome the fund, but how are village hall committees being encouraged to apply for it, given that they are often run by a large number of dedicated volunteers?

Dr Coffey: We have publicised the grant scheme on social media and fundraising community websites, and there have been more than 70 expressions of interest. The National Association of Local Councils has been informed, and I am sure that it will use its networks to advertise the scheme. I should point out that the deadline for applications is March 2020. The funds may already have been allocated by then, so we want to encourage as many village halls as possible to get on with their project proposals.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Bassetlaw will be happy to pioneer the green energy policy in village halls, along with the Secretary of State and the Government. We offer all our village halls to the Government, so that, with Government funds, they can work together to become carbon-neutral, and villages can see the benefits—

Mr Speaker: This is very interesting, but what is the question?

John Mann: The question, Mr Speaker, is this. Does the Minister agree that such a partnership would be in the national interest?

Dr Coffey: The Government have already done that extensively in village halls, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth will be delighted to take an interest in any proposals that the hon. Gentleman puts to her.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Although small, the village of Rushton in my constituency has a church, a pub, a village hall and a village newsletter. Village halls are extremely important. Will the Minister take this opportunity to praise all the volunteers who seek no reward, save to serve their local communities?

Dr Coffey: I certainly will. I am sure that in some of the villages in Buckingham tonight, the villagers will be gathering in their rural communities to watch Arsenal—hopefully—beat Valencia, just as they will have watched Spurs win last night and the mighty Liverpool win on Tuesday. Village halls are places where communities come together for moments of joy, but also for other important purposes such as community activities, and our villages would be poorer without them.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): I welcome the fund, but may I ask the Minister to look again at the eligibility criterion that forbids parish councils from bidding for it? In villages such as Rainford, Billinge and Seneley Green in my constituency, halls run by parish councils are real community hubs, and they would be good umbrella bodies to bid for the money on behalf of their communities.

Dr Coffey: I will certainly look at that again. I understand that village halls are usually run by separate entities, so I am not sure why there is a barrier to grant applications in the villages that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Hundreds of farmers are being treated for mental health issues. What plans have been made to ensure that village halls have a signpost to mental health help for rural communities?

Dr Coffey: Village halls are used for a variety of purposes, including the provision of health services, which are also available in the voluntary sector. I commend the hon. Gentleman's suggestion on how we can continue to use village halls to support farmers locally.

Farm Workforce

2. **Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that farmers have access to the workforce that they need during the harvest. [910776]

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): DEFRA is working closely with the Home Office on the future immigration framework as part of the longer-term strategy for labour in the food chain. The seasonal workers pilot is now open, and the first workers have arrived on UK farms.

Antoinette Sandbach: Eddisbury is the home of high-quality dairy farming and produces much of the country's milk. However, dairy farmers in Cheshire are having huge problems with staff recruitment. What steps is the Department taking to ensure that the £30,000 annual earnings threshold for migrant workers post Brexit will not apply to farm workers?

Mr Goodwill: As I have said, DEFRA is working closely with the Home Office on this issue. The Government are committed to ensuring that a wide range of stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute their views and shape the development of the future immigration policy. That is why the Government have embarked on an extensive programme of targeted engagement with businesses and other stakeholders across the UK.

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): In evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee, Archie Gibson of Agrico UK said that if Scottish farmers cannot get the seasonal workers they need to replace EU workers no longer able to come here, two fifths of farmers will cease the enterprise that needs that workforce; furthermore, three fifths will have to downsize. We all here, as the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) pointed out, have to make the not unfounded assumption that the same is true for the rest of the UK's farmers and growers. Therefore, will the Secretary of State make urgent representations to his Cabinet colleagues that our farmers need migrant workers? They need a ready supply—not a short-term pilot, but certainty of policy that will not leave crops rotting in the ground again.

Mr Goodwill: May I correct the hon. Gentleman? He says EU workers will not be able to come here; under whichever scenario we leave the EU, that will not be the case. Those who are already here will be able to stay. During the implementation period, people will be able to live, work and study as now, and there is a registration scheme. In a no-deal scenario, European economic area citizens will be able to live and work here without a visa for three months and then continue to stay by applying for European temporary leave to remain, which gives them 36 additional months.

Leaving the EU: Farming Policy

3. **Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con):** What plans he has for farming policy after the UK leaves the EU. [910777]

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): The Agriculture Bill lays the foundations for farming policy in England as we leave the EU. This new policy will be a system that pays public money for public goods, rewarding farmers for delivering environmental and animal welfare benefits. The protection of our countryside will allow us to leave the environment in a better state than when we found it while we support farmers to produce high-quality food in a sustainable way.

Rebecca Pow: I thank the Minister for that answer, but within that does he see soil health as a public good on its own terms or merely as a proxy or gateway for other benefits such as biodiversity, flood management—so important on the Somerset levels—and food productivity?

Mr Goodwill: Having studied soil science at university, I understand that soil is one of our greatest assets, and indeed the numerous environmental benefits and services that can be derived from activities that enhance soil health will be eligible for public money.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I am glad that the Minister has had a change of heart on that because he argued against my amendment on soil during the Bill Committee, but now he is on the Front Bench. What are we doing to try to meet net zero emissions from farming either through the Agriculture Bill or other mechanisms? The Committee on Climate Change again endorsed that this week. What are the Government doing and when is the target going to be reached?

Mr Goodwill: The hon. Lady makes a good point and, indeed, emissions from agriculture have fallen by about 16% since 1990. However, progress has stalled in recent years, with little change since 2009, and I know from the work we did together on the Environmental Audit Committee that we need to make further progress on that, particularly by looking at methane, which has a briefer half-life than other greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and so needs to be dealt with in a slightly different way.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): As we know, the potential of leaving the EU is creating some uncertainty so can the Minister reassure Cheshire farmers and the National Farmers Union that the current funding schemes that their members are working with will not be phased out until replacements are available to ensure that there will not be any loss of funding during any period of transition?

Mr Goodwill: We have made the decision clear with regard to the 2019 and 2020 schemes, and I remind farmers that the deadline for applications this year is 15 May as usual. I hope that they will get their applications in; sadly, in most years, we get a lot of applications in the last 24 hours.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): NFU Scotland and other farming organisations north of the border are increasingly concerned at the lack of agreement between the UK Government and the Scottish Government to allow a Scottish schedule into the Agriculture Bill. Will the Minister meet me and a cross-party delegation, including the NFU and crofters organisations, to hear from them what the industry would want in that schedule?

Mr Goodwill: I would certainly be happy to meet the right hon. Gentleman. I was in Aberdeenshire recently and met representatives of the Scottish farming unions, and last week I met Roseanna Cunningham from the Scottish Administration and discussed a number of issues.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): But where is the Agriculture Bill? It left Committee months and months ago, and given that we are spending an infinite amount of time on statutory instruments updating what the EU Commission is now doing, can we be assured that we will not have to completely rewrite the Bill—

although that could be useful in this time of climate change? We just need the Bill back so that farmers can have some certainty.

Mr Goodwill: I am as keen as the hon. Gentleman is to make progress. Perhaps the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), will be able to help, because as soon as we can clear the logjam and get Brexit out of the way, we will be able to get on with it. She is part of the team that is negotiating an accommodation between the two main parties, so perhaps she can help us to make some progress on Brexit so that we can get on with the Agriculture and Fisheries Bills.

Mr Speaker: I must say to the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) that I have received two approaches about him this week. First, I received a letter earlier this week in my office telling me what I already knew—namely, that he was a splendid fellow—and then I was at a book launch last night, when somebody beetled up to me to tell me that she was a constituent of his and that he was a splendid fellow. I do not know whether this is an orchestrated campaign, but I require no persuasion on this matter.

Environmental Education

4. **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to promote awareness of the environment and food production among young people. [910779]

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): Young people are at the heart of this year's Year of Green Action. We are working with the Department for Education on the £10 million flagship children and nature programme, which supports children from disadvantaged backgrounds to give them better access to the natural environment. We work closely with the DFE to promote awareness of pathways into food and farming careers.

Tom Pursglove: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. One of my constituents, Tom Martin, has set up a fantastic initiative called FaceTime a Farmer, which enables pupils to engage with agricultural and rural issues in the classroom via a video link with farmers out in their fields. Will the Minister join me in congratulating Tom on spearheading this brilliant initiative, and would he be interested in a meeting to learn more about it?

Mr Goodwill: I would certainly like to thank Mr Martin and farmers like him for all the hard work they put into such initiatives. FaceTime a Farmer is an exciting initiative to help children to engage with farming and get a better understanding of where their food comes from, and I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend and Mr Martin.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister pass on my congratulations to the Secretary of State on his decision to meet young people to talk about climate change? Unfortunately, the meeting this week had to be postponed for fully understandable reasons. Lola Chirico and 14 others were disappointed

not to be able to meet the Secretary of State, because they want to talk about climate change with him. Lola Chirico is my granddaughter.

Mr Speaker: Ah! What a heartwarming tale!

Mr Goodwill: The Secretary of State is sitting here, so I do not need to pass that on. It is certainly important that young people are leading the way, and I think that many of us are perhaps slightly embarrassed that we have been so slow off the mark. Going back to what my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove) said, it is important that young people should be aware of how their food is produced and where it comes from and of the seasonality in this country so that they can understand when different foods are in season. If they buy foods that are in season, they will be able to reduce the carbon footprint of the food they purchase.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): With an increase in the urbanised society and media, I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that the education of our young across all parts of our communities is very important. Against that backdrop, will he welcome and add whatever support he can give to Open Farm Sunday, which is a golden opportunity for young people to see agriculture in tooth and claw?

Mr Goodwill: Having attended a number of Open Farm Sunday events in my constituency, I can commend it and I hope that more farmers will contribute to it so that more young people, particularly those from urban areas who do not understand agriculture and the hard work that goes into producing the food they consume, can attend those events. Perhaps not so much food would be wasted if people understood how much hard work was put into producing it.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Palm oil is an essential component of much of our food production, but unsustainable palm oil production across south-east Asia is wrecking a lot of natural forests. Will the Government join me in congratulating Chester Zoo on its sustainable palm oil campaign? What support can they give to that campaign?

Mr Goodwill: The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), who is sitting next to me, is visiting that tomorrow, and we are all certainly aware of the environmental impact of palm oil. There is a perfectly good alternative, in the form of British rapeseed oil, which is produced in places such as Yorkshire and East Anglia.

Leaving the EU: Welsh Seafood

5. **Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): What discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the Welsh seafood industry. [910780]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): Ministers from across the four Administrations in the United Kingdom meet monthly at the inter-ministerial group for environment, food and rural affairs to discuss the negotiations with the EU.

The most recent meeting was on 29 April in Cardiff, and we will continue to work together to secure the long-term profitability of the Welsh fishing industry as we leave the EU.

Liz Saville Roberts: Fishing vessels at Porth Dinllan and coastal communities around Wales land a whelk catch worth £6.2 million every year. Have the Welsh Government made any specific representations to Ministers to ensure that our fishermen do not face tariffs of 20% on exports to the crucial South Korean market after Brexit? Will he meet with me to discuss the importance of the seafood industry to Wales's coastal economy?

Michael Gove: I completely appreciate the vital importance of ensuring that the trade in whelks between Wales and South Korea is protected. One of the reasons why the Department for International Trade has prioritised making sure that we have continuity trade arrangements with South Korea is to ensure that Korean consumers can continue to enjoy this great Welsh product. The one threat to that trade would be the election of a Labour Government at the next general election because, as we all know, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) could not run a whelk stall.

Mr Speaker: I think that one probably requires a little bit of work and finesse, but it is only a matter of time. That was a first draft.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): Welsh fishermen will be particularly interested in the application of the Hague preference since the ability to invoke it and, more importantly, counter-invoke it against the Irish Republic is critical to our interests. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the withdrawal agreement will protect our ability to invoke the Hague preference, because he will understand that it is not part of the common fisheries policy but a political convention that needs to be invoked each year?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We will be able to continue to invoke the Hague preference in certain circumstances, and it is vital that we do so in defence of our interests.

Waste Incineration

6. **John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the potential merits of a moratorium on new waste incineration plants to promote recycling. [910782]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It is important to do whatever we can to recycle as much waste as possible, but waste incineration plants continue to play an important role in generating energy instead of diverting waste to landfill. However, our assessment is that additional residual waste energy capacity above that already planned to 2020 should not be needed if we achieve our recycling targets.

John Grogan: Further to that welcome reply, has the Minister seen the recent report from independent consultants Eunomia? It indicates that we will indeed have enough waste incineration capacity to deal with

our country's residual waste and that if we build more incinerators, the danger is that waste will be diverted from recycling.

Dr Coffey: I have not seen that report, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that we discussed this matter in his recent Westminster Hall debate. It is important to say that we are still making progress to ensure that we achieve our recycling targets, but incineration by default is certainly not the answer that we want to promote.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): As the fast fashion trend continues to increase, will the Minister outline both the short-term and long-term plans to tackle the hundreds of thousands of tonnes of clothing that is incinerated every year?

Dr Coffey: There is definitely a market for trying to extract fibres from textiles. We are considering extending the extended producer responsibility to textiles, but the policy is still under consideration.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): The Minister will know that Wales recycles more than any other part of the UK, with ambitious targets and a new £6 million fund to help businesses become plastic free. Should the Government not learn from Wales, given that they are flatlining on their own targets?

Dr Coffey: We do, and I commend the Welsh Government on that policy deployment. We are consulting on certain measures to try to increase recycling, and the consultation closes next week.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): As the Minister knows, the level of recycling in England rose from around 7% in 1997 to around 44% in 2011, but it has flatlined since then. Much of the incentive for the increase in recycling during those years came from avoiding the landfill tax, and Government capital grants for increasing recycling were balanced by landfill tax receipts. However, now that most household waste is incinerated, those incentives no longer apply. The "Our waste, our resources" strategy states:

"Should wider policies not deliver the Government's waste ambitions in the long-term, we will consider the introduction of a tax on the incineration".

Will the Minister tell us how many more years of flatlining it will take before she is willing to make that consideration?

Dr Coffey: The landfill tax has been important in reducing landfill. As I have just said, we are consulting on measures that build on the resources and waste strategy that we published a few months ago. We have been quite clear that we must ensure that we increase recycling, and we will take further measures if incineration is still proving part of the problem.

Farm Subsidy Payments

7. **Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab):** What steps his Department is taking to speed up subsidy payments to farmers. [910783]

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): We have delivered significant improvements to the basic payments scheme in England this year, with 99.7% of the 2018 payments now complete.

I am, however, acutely aware that we have much more to do to deliver the stewardship schemes to the same high standards.

Susan Elan Jones: My constituency borders rural communities in Cheshire and Shropshire, and I know there is immense concern in the farming community on this point. In view of the pretty damning report in 2017 from the Public Accounts Committee and the fact that a third of all UK farmers are now aged 65 or over, will the Government act and do something urgently?

Mr Goodwill: The hon. Lady makes a valid point and I do not underestimate the importance of getting this right. That is one of the reasons why we took responsibility for these stewardship schemes away from Natural England and gave it to the Rural Payments Agency, which is performing much better. But we do need to do better, not least because, if we want to incentivise more farmers to participate in these schemes, we need to make sure that we keep our part of the bargain and give them the money they deserve.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Not only is it a problem with stewardship schemes that existing farmers are not getting paid, but many farmers are deciding not to go into those stewardship schemes. The whole of our new agricultural policy will be going in that direction, so it is vital that the Minister now sorts it out. You have had some time—not the Minister personally—and it is time the Department sorted it out.

Mr Goodwill: Point taken. On my own farm I have just planted wild bird seed and a big area of nectar plants, so I will report to the House when my payments come through, although I have insisted to officials that I should be in the last decile of payments—I do not want them to accelerate my payments. I will be one of the last to get paid, so I will keep a careful eye on this matter.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What regime is planned for soil quality? When are we likely to get it? It is so important for carbon retention.

Mr Goodwill: As I mentioned, many of the public goods we are to deliver will result in better soil quality. We also need to have a debate on the role of livestock on mixed farms because many of the farms I have visited recently on which soil quality is improving are farms that use manures and slurry to improve the soil—we no longer have that in many of the big intensive agricultural areas.

Climate Change

8. **Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling climate change. [910784]

13. **Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP):** What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling climate change. [910790]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): Tackling climate change is a cross-Government priority and it is one of a range of issues that I discuss with all Cabinet colleagues. My

Department works closely with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to reduce emissions in the natural resources sector, as set out in the clean growth strategy.

Neil Gray: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Of course Scotland leads the way not only on renewable energy production but on the commercialisation of new renewable energy technology. Can he explain how this area is a priority for his Government when they are cutting the subsidies to renewable energy generators? When will he review that process so that Scotland can continue to generate new renewable electricity and export it to the rest of the UK?

Michael Gove: I am happy to congratulate the many entrepreneurs, innovators and others who have been responsible for powering ahead with the growth of the renewables sector not just in Scotland but across the United Kingdom. One of the reasons why subsidies for solar, for example, have been cut is because the price has come down—the subsidies were necessary to kick-start investment. It is a fact that 99% of solar power generated in this country has been generated since 2010—since the Conservatives have been in Downing Street.

Martyn Day: I understand that the Secretary of State sat in close attention when Greta Thunberg visited recently. Following her visit, will he tell us whether he agrees with the Scottish Government that there is a climate change emergency? If so, what does he intend to do to cut emissions from aviation?

Michael Gove: There absolutely is a climate change emergency and a need to act, and Greta Thunberg's testimony was incredibly powerful. When it comes to aviation, we need to work with the sector to ensure that we balance the need to promote growth and, indeed, the need to promote links across the United Kingdom while moving towards meeting our net zero goal.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): The Scottish Affairs Committee, the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee and, most recently, the Committee on Climate Change all agree with the Carbon Capture and Storage Association that carbon capture, usage and storage technology—CCUS—is essential for achieving a net zero emissions target by 2050. Does my right hon. Friend therefore agree that, in order to tackle climate change properly, we must develop a CCUS cluster like the Acorn project, which is centred on St Fergus in my constituency? Does he also agree that this cluster approach is far more effective technically and financially than previously proposed carbon capture and storage programmes?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and we are absolutely committed to supporting the work in St Fergus. Technological breakthroughs in institutions such as Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen are also precisely the sorts of work that we should be getting behind.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Today the Environment Agency announced that it is preparing for a catastrophic 4° rise in global temperatures and huge sea level rises. The EA says it

needs £1 billion a year for coastal defences, but the Government have allocated only £2.6 billion over six years—less than half of what the EA says is needed. When should we expect the necessary increase in funding and a plan to protect our vulnerable coastal communities?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. First, I record my thanks to Emma Howard Boyd and Sir James Bevan, the chair and chief executive of the Environment Agency, for the leadership that they have shown on this issue. Under this Government, record amounts have been spent on flood defences and record efforts have been made to combat climate change. However, in both cases, more needs to be done. The national policy statement will be forthcoming shortly.

Moorland Wildfires

9. **Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): What steps the Government is taking to reduce the risk of wildfire destroying moorland. [910785]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley): It is good to see the hon. Lady back in her place for the first DEFRA questions since returning from maternity leave and the safe arrival of baby James. Congratulations.

Protecting our moorland from wildfires is essential. The risk of severe damage from wildfire on wet, well functioning blanket bog is relatively low. Natural England is working with landowners and land managers through its uplands programme to develop long-term management plans. We are also currently undertaking a wildfire review to ensure that our future land management policies minimise the risks of wildfire.

Holly Lynch: I am grateful to the Minister for that response and for his kind words.

In West Yorkshire alone, there have been three significant wildfires in the past 18 months. The Minister will be aware that, if we manage our moorland and peat bogs responsibly, they will lock in water, which protects us from flooding; they will lock in carbon; and, kept wet, they will also protect us from wildfires. What more can we do to manage those moorlands and peat bogs responsibly?

David Rutley: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that healthy wet peatlands help carbon storage and minimise and reduce fire risk. That is why peatland restoration is an urgent priority. DEFRA is currently funding four large-scale peatland restoration projects across England, involving a £10 million fund, including in the north of England uplands, the Welsh borders, Dartmoor and Exmoor and, of course, the south Pennines: vital work that we need to take forward.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Staffordshire moorlands has some magnificent heathland, but it has been affected by severe fires in the last year. Those are sometimes caused by disposable barbecues. Has the Minister looked at ways of ensuring the more responsible purchase and use of such barbecues?

David Rutley: We work closely with Natural England and the Home Office to see how we can tackle these issues. Operational plans are in place with fire services as well.

Seabirds

10. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What plans his Department has to develop and resource a recovery plan for seabirds. [910786]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Our focus is on ensuring that effective monitoring and protection are in place. Since 2017, we have increased the protection of seabirds by creating five new marine special protection areas and extending a further nine sites. I draw your attention in particular, Mr Speaker, to the SPA at Flamborough Head, which has been extended to protect nesting and foraging areas for a range of seabirds, including kittiwakes and puffins.

Mr Speaker: I am greatly enlightened and deeply obliged to the Minister.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. The UK's seabird population is in serious decline. Will the Minister use the forthcoming review of the UK marine strategy to set out a recovery plan that includes both targets and a timeline?

Dr Coffey: Yes, we will. The plan will include targets to ensure that good environmental status is met for seabirds and set the indicators that we use to assess their status. Of course, we will continue to do other work such as reducing the impact of invasive species, which are damaging seabird colonies; carrying out the UK plan of action on seabird bycatch; and, as many across the House support, reducing marine litter, particularly marine plastic.

Environment Agency: Pay Dispute

11. **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Whether he plans to meet representatives of the Environment Agency to discuss the recent pay dispute at that agency. [910787]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): No.

Daniel Zeichner: That is very disappointing to hear. We have just heard praise for the Environment Agency, but its staff have seen a 20% cut in real terms over the past decade. The agency is suffering from recruitment and retention problems and, inevitably, low morale. Will the Minister think again and at least press the Environment Agency to reopen the discussions?

Dr Coffey: No, because it is an operational matter for the Environment Agency and it would not be appropriate for the Government to get involved in the human resources issues of an independent agency.

Major Infrastructure Projects

12. **Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): What steps his Department takes to ensure that major infrastructure projects comply with all environmental licences, permissions and protections. [910788]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I know this is a topic close to your heart, Mr Speaker.

Large infrastructure projects may require an environmental impact assessment of the likely significant environmental effects. In the case of nationally significant infrastructure projects, the EIA forms part of the development consent order application. Requirements are routinely imposed to ensure that development is delivered sustainably. Projects such as High Speed 2 include environmental minimum requirements and associated controls linked to the EIA.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am glad that the Minister brought up HS2. Even before construction has been given the go-ahead, the HS2 enabling works have breached environmental undertakings and assurances. Given that the project will destroy 100 ancient woodlands, how can we ensure that what DEFRA is trying to achieve in preserving our environment is not going to be destroyed by the HS2 construction companies as they desperately scramble to cut corners and cut the costs of this highly expensive and useless project?

Dr Coffey: The environmental impact assessment is an important part of the planning process. The development of HS2 will require a number of protective provisions, consents and licences for work that affects protected sites and species and other aspects of the natural environment. The Environment Agency and Natural England will continue to work with HS2 Ltd to ensure that it complies with the conditions set out by the requirements. I recognise the issue relating to the ancient woodlands, but I am sure my right hon. Friend will join me in celebrating the fact that 7 million new trees will be planted, and planting has already started.

Topical Questions

T1. [910794] **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): First, I thank colleagues from all parties for their support for the Government in giving the Wild Animals in Circuses (No. 2) Bill its Second Reading. Thinking of our responsibility to the natural world, I extend my sympathy to the family of Guardsman Mathew Talbot. Mathew died working on an anti-poaching initiative in Africa just two days ago. He was a distinguished young 22-year-old soldier who was fighting to preserve the natural world. Our sympathies go out to his family, friends and colleagues.

Nigel Huddleston: Vale of Evesham asparagus is the only asparagus with protected geographical indication status. As I am sure the Secretary of State is aware, we are currently in the middle of the British Asparagus Festival, which is held mainly in my constituency. Would

he like to join me at that festival and to show his support for great British farmers who grow not only the best asparagus in the world but so much more fantastic, world-class British produce?

Michael Gove: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his drawing attention to the importance of asparagus growers in our broader agricultural export successes. It is not only grown in the Vale of Evesham, beautiful part of the country though it is; we also grow world-beating asparagus in Yorkshire. Overall, asparagus exports have secured £3.2 million for this country. Although I cannot join the festival, I would be delighted to share some asparagus with my hon. Friend at the first available opportunity.

Mr Speaker: We are now considerably better informed about the asparagus situation.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Last week, the House made history by declaring a climate and environmental emergency. The Labour motion that was passed gives the Government six months to table urgent proposals to restore our natural environment and tackle devastating climate change. That means that the deadline is 1 November. The clock has started to tick. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether the Cabinet has met to discuss the urgent nature of the motion? When will he publish a timeline that clearly sets out how the UK can reach net zero emissions by at least 2050?

Michael Gove: I thank the hon. Lady for underlining the cross-party, consensual approach that the House has taken to dealing with climate change and the broader environmental crisis that we face. The House will be updated not only on progress against the 25-year environment plan and not just in response to the recent report by the Committee on Climate Change on how to reach net zero by 2050, but on a broader suite of measures that every Government Department, from the Treasury to my own, is committed to ensuring that we deliver.

T2. [910796] **Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): What steps have been taken to establish a Great Britain-wide deposit return scheme for plastic bottles, which the industry wants, including Highland Spring in Blackford in my constituency?

Michael Gove: Having had the opportunity to visit Highland Spring, thanks to my hon. Friend, I endorse wholeheartedly the company's leadership in providing high-quality products to so many people across the world. It also provides employment in his constituency. Highland Spring, like us, wants to ensure that we have a UK-wide scheme. Although I applaud the ambition of Roseanna Cunningham, the Scottish Government Environment Minister, in taking forward a DR scheme, it is absolutely vital that we make sure it works UK-wide. I hope and believe that the Scottish Government will now put the interests of the United Kingdom ahead of the ideology of separatism that sometimes creeps into some of the things they come up with.

T4. [910798] **Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): One of the recommendations in the Committee on Climate Change's report last week was a 20% reduction in meat consumption

by 2050 to meet that net zero goal. Can the Secretary of State set out how he plans to achieve that in a way that is fair and equitable? Red meat is obviously particularly important in the diets of children and women, and we do not want to use price as the mechanism.

Michael Gove: That was a typically balanced and thoughtful contribution from the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee. One thing I would say is that sustainable farming, particularly mixed and livestock farming, is a critical part of ensuring that we have a healthy environment. I absolutely take on board her point. One thing we absolutely do not want to do is use a crude taxation intervention when it is much more sensible to work with farmers to raise the quality of livestock. There are things we can do on how livestock farmers operate that can contribute to reducing emissions, while at the same time maintaining high-quality red meat that is available to people at every price point.

T3. [910797] **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): May I invite you, Mr Speaker, your officials and all Members in the Chamber to join me, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Kew Gardens, the British Beekeepers Association and others as the all-party parliamentary group for bees and pollinators discusses how we can green the parliamentary estate and get a hive of bees on board as well? Does the DEFRA team agree that we would all get a tremendous buzz to see Parliament as a hive of activity for our pollinators?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I had better answer this with a coat of honey. It is important that this Parliament is open to nature. We have already seen great changes through the Administration Committee and what we are trying to do about elements of plastic. The Department already has a beehive on its roof and I am keen that we should continue to do whatever we can as leaders. I am sure that my hon. Friend will also be very aware of the national pollinator strategy and how important it is to the future of biodiversity and sustainable food production.

T5. [910799] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): At Treasury questions a few weeks ago, Ministers boasted about how much hauliers had saved through the freezing of the fuel duty escalator. When I challenged them on the environmental impact, they looked absolutely amazed, as though the thought had never cross their minds. Should the Secretary of State be in a position of influence later this summer in a new Administration, will he be equally blinkered or will he be bold in tackling emissions from road transport?

Michael Gove: I am frankly amazed at the suggestion that any Minister should indulge in something as prideful as boastfulness. I suspect that my Treasury colleagues were pointing out that this Government combines economic efficiency with environmental stewardship in an unprecedented fashion, which is why we have been responsible for reducing carbon emissions faster than any other G20 nation while at the same time growing the economy over the past 20 years by more than 66%.

T6. [910800] **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): Consumers are doing everything they can to reduce the amount of packaging and to recycle their plastic, but supermarkets

are continuing to wrap fresh produce, in particular, in massive amounts of plastic that cannot be recycled. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is high time the supermarkets did more to protect our planet?

Dr Coffey: We are meeting supermarkets on Monday at a big event at the V&A, hosted by the food waste champion Ben Elliot, about how to reduce food waste. The majority of vegetables do not need plastic packaging to extend their life, but some do, which is why we have to take a scientific evidence-based approach. Let me point out to my hon. Friend what we said in the resources and waste strategy: we would like to see more plastic-free aisles in our supermarkets and unnecessary use of plastic must be stopped as quickly as possible.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Last month, I visited Mountfield Primary School in my constituency. The pupils there told me that the No. 1 issue for them is plastics and litter in their environment. Pupils at Canning Street Primary School have also raised this with me. What is the Minister doing to get plastics out of the lives of the children in my constituency?

Dr Coffey: First, let me thank the tens of thousands of volunteers who participated in the month-long litter-picking campaign. It really matters that we try to tackle litter locally, and that is about education and activity. We have given councils extensive new powers to impose fines to try to reduce such behaviour.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): The chair of the Environment Agency has highlighted the need for help in addressing coastal flooding. We need to protect not only houses, but some of the most fertile land in this country, from future flooding. Can we have a real plan for the way forward?

Michael Gove: Yes. I have had the privilege with my hon. Friend, who chairs the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, of visiting the Steart peninsula in Somerset and seeing effective flood management that makes sure that we balance the need to protect nature with the need to preserve farmland. It is vital that we say more, and we will shortly in our national policy statement.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Thinking of young people and food production, the primary school in the small village of Inver in my constituency has a polytunnel. I do not know whether the school grows asparagus, but it certainly grows very good carrots and other vegetables to make delicious soup for the pupils. The pupils also sell the vegetables to their parents to make money for the school. Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be very helpful if this idea was replicated in all schools across the UK? Perhaps, Mr Speaker, we could even have a polytunnel for hon. and right hon. Members to grow vegetables here on the estate.

Mr Speaker: That sounds very exciting, I must say—very entrepreneurial. I think it is time that I visited Caithness.

Michael Gove: All I can say is that I associate myself with the words uttered by you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Well, this is a very welcome trend and should be encouraged to continue.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): What discussions has my right hon. Friend been having with his Cabinet colleagues about cutting vehicle emissions—for instance, by improving the infrastructure of charging points in cities for electric and hybrid vehicles, which is absolutely critical to this aim?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I have been working with the Secretaries of State for Transport, for Business and for Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that charging points are automatically included in new developments. But there is more that we must do to ensure that we have an infrastructure that allows us to move towards ultra low emissions vehicles as quickly as possible.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Contrary to what the Secretary of State said to me last week, the DEFRA main estimate says that the budget for peatland restoration is unchanged. I am not going to ask for an apology, but the Secretary of State knows that peat amounts to 10% of our carbon dioxide emissions, so when is he going to increase the measly £6 million budget?

Michael Gove: After a rebuke like that, I must do so as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: As much as I would like to continue indefinitely with these stimulating exchanges, I am afraid that we must move on.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Persecution of Christians: FCO Global Review

1. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What response the Church of England has made to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's global review of the persecution of Christians, announced in December 2018. [910763]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman): The Church warmly welcomed the decision by the Foreign Secretary to launch an independent review of his Department's support for persecuted Christians, which is being chaired by the Bishop of Truro. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster made a joint submission to that review, setting out practical recommendations for how the Government could take action to protect Christians facing persecution and to promote freedom of religion more widely.

Diana Johnson: The Sri Lanka terrorist attacks brought home the FCO's recent review findings that Christians are suffering persecution at near genocide levels. Alongside the growing Christianophobia, there are growing incidents of Islamophobia—such as at Christchurch—and anti-

semitism. What more can the Church of England do in co-ordinating international action across all faiths to combat hatred and violence against different faith communities by varied manifestations of the far right?

Dame Caroline Spelman: That interim report, which I recommend colleagues read, is quite a shocking revelation about how extensive the persecution of Christians and other minority religions around the world is. Just yesterday, the Archbishop of Canterbury invited the Foreign Secretary and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Lambeth Palace to discuss international religious freedom. The meeting included the Chief Rabbi and representatives of other faiths, because, as the Bishop of Rochester said in another place, it is almost impossible to predict when such terrorist attacks will occur and where.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): The Foreign Secretary has commendably authorised that independent report, but does my right hon. Friend agree that unless the Department for International Development also engages with the interim report and with the recommendations in the final report when it is produced, this country will never achieve what it could achieve in addressing this issue internationally?

Dame Caroline Spelman: I do agree. In fact, one of the key points of the Church of England's submission is that there needs to be a joined-up approach more widely, right across Government, to the challenges of keeping freedom of religion and belief. That is why, with the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), I visited the former Minister who was jointly responsible at DFID and the Foreign Office to make sure that civil servants receive the right kind of training so that they really understand the threats that persecuted religious minorities face.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Lady will be very aware of the situation in Sudan at the moment, with such a complex outcome following the removal of Bashir. Will she urge the Archbishop of Canterbury to look at the possibility of an early visit there to make sure that Christians in Sudan are protected?

Dame Caroline Spelman: This allows me to share with the House a bit of good news on a rather serious and depressing subject, which is that the Archbishop of Canterbury, together with Pope Francis, brokered a meeting in Rome of the key players from the Sudanese conflict zone. Those talks made really significant progress in bringing about peace in countries where a war has claimed over 400,000 lives.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): International aid spending to recipient countries needs to be cut unless effective action is taken against attacks on Christians. Do the Church Commissioners agree?

Dame Caroline Spelman: The Church Commissioners are completely supportive of the statutory requirement in our law that 0.7% of our total income as a country should be spent on the world's poorest people. In fact, DFID's programmes do direct themselves to the support of vulnerable minorities, but obviously the point of the report commissioned independently by the Foreign

Secretary is to see how much more effective we can be at tackling the threats to religion and to people's freedom of religion and belief.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Voter Registration and Participation

3. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What recent steps the commission has taken to increase voter (a) registration and (b) participation. [910765]

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South): While the commission's remit does not include increasing participation in elections, it has an important duty to promote awareness of elections. The commission's campaign for this year's local elections saw over 570,000 applications, exceeding its target by 36%. Its campaign relating to the European parliamentary elections ended on Tuesday, and it saw a further 539,206 people apply to register. The commission also works to make improvements to the registration system itself. It is supporting the UK Government in their work to reform the canvass, and later this year it will publish the findings of feasibility studies examining how publicly held data could be used to improve the registration system.

Mr Sheerman: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, but does she agree that we have seen a serious decline in registration activity? The number of young people registering in time for the Euro elections has been pitiful. The fact of the matter is that we can go digital and do all that stuff, but it used to be about knocking on someone's door and checking that they were on the register, and that is what really worked.

Bridget Phillipson: My hon. Friend will know that the commission wants as many people as possible to be registered to vote and able to participate in our democracy, but he is right to point out that young people are far less likely to register to vote than others. I will make sure that the commission is aware of his concerns and takes account of what he said as its research work continues in this area.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Can the hon. Lady outline any discussions that have taken place regarding the ability to vote online and any security advice that has been sought with regard to that proposal?

Bridget Phillipson: I am not able to provide any recent updates, but I will ensure that the Electoral Commission contacts the hon. Gentleman to discuss his interest in that area.

Mr Speaker: Mr Chris Ruane? Oh, very well—the hon. Gentleman could come in on this question if he wanted, but if he wants to preserve his own question, so be it.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Staff Bullying and Harassment: Cox Recommendations

4. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What the timeframe is for the implementation of the recommendations made by Dame Laura Cox in her report on the bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff. [910767]

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Dame Laura made three fundamental recommendations. In response to the first, the Commission immediately terminated the Respect and Valuing Others policies. In response to the second, the Commission has been considering options for the investigation of non-recent cases of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct and expects to put a final proposal to the House before the summer recess. In response to the third, the Commission has agreed the establishment of a working group to consider how the process of complaints against MPs could be made fully independent, and we are in the process of agreeing the membership. Finally, the House service has appointed an independent director of cultural transformation, to translate Dame Laura's wide recommendations into tangible, meaningful and lasting change.

Justin Madders: I am grateful for the update. It is very important that the House is seen to be acting swiftly on this. Let us not forget that it is more than seven months since the report came out, and it is frankly damning that we are still talking about things happening in the future. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to get on with this and get the justice that victims deserve.

Tom Brake: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I can reassure him that the House of Commons Commission is considering these important recommendations at every meeting, but we have not made the progress that we should have done. These are complex issues, and we hope that the working group will be established soon, to process how to deal with complaints against MPs independently of Members of Parliament.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that response, but I want to push him a bit further. Underlying attitudes—sometimes misogynistic or deeply sexist attitudes—are frequently behind sexual harassment. What plans does the Commission have to implement training or awareness raising that targets people who are unlikely to take it up if they are not required to do so?

Tom Brake: The hon. Lady makes a valid point. She may be aware that training is being made available to staff, and I understand that a trial will be made available for Members. Although the Commission and I are not in a position to require Members of Parliament to attend those sessions, I think it is essential that they do.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Voter Registration

6. **Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): What recent assessment the commission has made of trends in the level of voter registration. [910769]

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South): The commission carries out regular assessments of the completeness and accuracy of the electoral registers, including how levels of voter registration vary by demographics such as age and ethnicity. The most recent published assessment found that, across Great Britain, 85% of eligible people were correctly registered, and 91% of entries on the register were accurate. The commission's next study, on the December 2018 registers, is due to be published later this year.

Chris Ruane: Before every election, the Electoral Commission runs an advertising campaign to get people registered, and it judges the effectiveness by the number of downloads of registration forms. Those advertising campaigns have cost as much as £90 per download. Bite The Ballot, an organisation that recruits young people in schools, can have a 100% success rate in going into sixth forms and getting people on to the electoral register, and it can do that for 25p a time. Will my hon. Friend take that back to the Electoral Commission and ask it to have service level agreements with Bite The Ballot and other organisations that have an effective record on registration?

Bridget Phillipson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who I know has a keen interest in ensuring that people are registered to vote. The commission does not currently have service level agreements with other organisations. Instead, it collaborates through informal partnerships. The commission has a responsibility in law to raise awareness. There is plurality in the system, and that is its strength. However, I am sure that officials from the commission would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss what more can be done in this area.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Has the commission made any assessment of the registration of EU citizens to vote in the European Union elections that are about to take place, and whether it would be appropriate for them to be able take to polling stations on 23 May the form that they are required to have handed in by 7 May if they want to vote in those elections in the UK?

Bridget Phillipson: Following the 2014 European parliamentary elections, the commission did identify that the law needed to be simplified so that EU citizens from other member states might register to vote in the UK. However, following the EU referendum, the UK Government made it clear that the parliamentary elections to the European Parliament in 2019 would not take place, and therefore the commission did not continue to develop any further recommendations in this area.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Christian Community in Sri Lanka

7. **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What support the Church of England is offering to the Christian community in Sri Lanka in response to the recent terrorist attacks in that country. [910770]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman): These were appalling and despicable attacks, and those affected were in the prayers of millions right around the world on Easter Sunday. They were clearly directed at the Christian community in Sri Lanka not just in their churches, but in secular environments such as hotels where they were having Easter Sunday lunch. The Anglican Church in Sri Lanka is small but active, and it is working closely with the Anglican communion to build its capacity in the local community and to better protect itself.

Helen Goodman: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for that answer. It is indeed tragic that 257 Christians were killed in the attacks directed at them on Easter Day. Everybody is entitled to freedom of religion and belief. Does she agree that the message we should send out from this House is that no faith sanctions conflict against another?

Dame Caroline Spelman: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady. I could not put it better myself.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend pass on to Christians in Sri Lanka just how much we admire their peaceful and dignified response, and indeed that of all Sri Lankans, to this atrocity?

Dame Caroline Spelman: I certainly will pass that on. The Archbishop of Canterbury immediately called the Bishop of Colombo after these attacks, and has offered support and help to bring the perpetrators to justice. The bishop himself has called for "the safety of places of religious worship and to prevent any individuals or group taking the law into their hands or provoking acts of intimidation or violence against any community or group." This remains crucial in that country.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Electoral Law

8. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What recent representations she has received from the Electoral Commission on the effectiveness of electoral law. [910771]

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South): The commission believes that there is an urgent need for simplified and modernised electoral law. It has submitted evidence to the recently announced inquiry on electoral law by the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs. The commission is concerned that a piecemeal approach to electoral law reform will

increase complexity and inconsistency. As part of these reforms, it wants legislation to improve the transparency of digital campaigns, to bring greater alignment between party and candidate regulatory frameworks, and to strengthen the impact of its sanctions.

Patricia Gibson: Does the hon. Lady share my concern that electoral law was broken in the EU referendum, the close result of which must now be questioned? Given that the Tories in Scotland were fined £400 by the Electoral Commission over a £100,000 dark money donation in the weeks before the 2016 Holyrood election, does she not agree that penalties for breaking electoral law must be urgently reviewed to ensure that they are fit for purpose and genuinely deter those minded to cheat?

Bridget Phillipson: The commission continues to urge each of the UK's Governments to introduce legislation to strengthen its sanctioning powers. Its view is that the penalties need to be more proportionate to the income and expenditure of parties and campaigners.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Electoral law is far too important to play party politics with, in my view. I have the pleasure of serving on the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. I also served on the independent commission on referendums and their rules, run by the Constitution Unit. In its report, which was very comprehensive, we made a number of recommendations for changes to the law. May I ask the hon. Lady whether she has read that report, what she thinks of those recommendations and whether she, like me, would encourage the House to look at them urgently and pass them into law?

Bridget Phillipson: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, who raises an important point. Many of those recommendations are in alignment with the views of the Electoral Commission in urging change. She will know that the Government have indicated that they intend to bring forward changes to digital imprints for online campaigning, which will be an important step forward. I am sure that the commission would be grateful for any action she took to urge Ministers to bring forward that legislation as quickly as possible.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Cathedrals: Fire Safety

9. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking to increase fire safety in cathedrals. [910772]

10. **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking with the Government to ensure the fire safety of cathedrals and churches following the Notre Dame fire. [910774]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman): Fire safety is a concern for all historic buildings, and they are particularly vulnerable during renovations or building works. Since the Notre Dame fire, the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division has worked with the Cathedral Architects Association to ensure that its records are up to date. It will continue to work closely on that issue, and a national conference on the matter is being considered.

Sir Desmond Swayne: George Osborne, the former Chancellor, found £40 million for the fabric of our cathedrals. Are we ensuring that that money is spent effectively, and that cathedrals work closely with local fire brigades?

Dame Caroline Spelman: The Church of England was deeply grateful to the former Chancellor for the £40 million of funding on the commemoration of the centenary of the first world war, and it resulted in important repair work to some of our most iconic buildings. For example, Lichfield cathedral was completely rewired, and it might otherwise have had to be closed because of the fire risk it represented.

Daniel Kawczynski: What steps are being taken to support the creation of 3D laser maps to record our notable historical buildings and provide an accurate record of their construction in the event of damage?

Dame Caroline Spelman: I wonder whether my hon. Friend has enjoyed watching the TV programme “Ancient Invisible Cities”, where scanners are used to reveal what lies behind ancient buildings such as pyramids. I must tell the House, however, that such methods are very, very expensive. Lincoln and St Albans cathedrals have done that, but there are many other ways to try to be sure of the data on our cathedrals. We have good archives, maps, photographs and accounts that often give an excellent record of what lies behind those magnificent stones.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's impassive countenance suggests that he is not at this time willing to vouchsafe to us his viewing preferences, but they have been hinted at by the right hon. Lady, and perhaps he will update us on the matter in due course.

Refugees in Sri Lanka

10.36 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister for Asia and the Pacific what representation his Department has made to the Government of Sri Lanka regarding the safety of 1,193 UNHCR refugees in Negombo, who went to Sri Lanka fleeing religious persecution in their countries, but who now fear for their safety following the terrible Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka.

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): Following the Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka, there have been reports of isolated incidents of violence and of intimidation and discrimination against Muslims, refugees and asylum seekers. In Negombo, a suburb to the north of Colombo where the terrorist attacks took place, 985 refugees and asylum seekers were forcibly displaced from their ordinary places of residence, according to UN figures. Those refugees and asylum seekers, who are mostly of Pakistani origin, are being temporarily housed and protected to meet their immediate security and humanitarian needs.

Our high commission in Colombo, led by our outstanding high commissioner, James Dauris, is in contact with the Government and UN agencies to work towards a more sustainable solution, and the UK is monitoring that situation carefully, along with other partners. The UN is providing basic support for food, drinking water, and immediate medical assistance, and co-ordinating with civil society to provide additional relief items. The humanitarian situation at the police station in Negombo is a concern. The police have so far been very welcoming, but we understand that facilities there are insufficient.

Staff at our high commission are assisting in advocating and co-ordinating with the Sri Lankan Government more generally to identify safe and secure relocation options to ensure the protection of refugees and asylum seekers. We understand that processes are under way for some of the refugees to be resettled in third countries, and 412 refugees are currently in the midst of the UNHCR resettlement process.

Ministers and representatives of the UK Government have met Sri Lankan counterparts over the past three weeks to reinforce the importance of inclusivity and respect for human rights in response to the Easter Sunday attacks, and to underline the importance of Sri Lankans working together to avoid intercommunal tensions. As was brought up earlier, I think we can all be pleased, without being complacent, that over the past three weeks there has been a sense of unity within Sri Lanka as a whole.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Security and Economic Crime visited Sri Lanka on 2 and 3 May, and met the President, the Prime Minister, military and religious leaders and senior Government officials to highlight the importance of those points and to talk more generally about security resilience. Foreign and Commonwealth Minister Lord Ahmad and I have met the Sri Lankan high commissioner over the past fortnight to raise general concerns about refugees and minority rights in Sri Lanka.

I think all of us want to put on the record our grave concern about what happened. These were terrible events and our commiserations go to all those who remain affected and will be affected for some years to come.

Siobhain McDonagh: I thank the Minister for his response. I am sure we all send our heartfelt sympathy to the people of Sri Lanka and to all those mourning the loss of friends and family following the terrible Easter bombings.

Now that the spotlight of the media has turned, another tragedy is unfolding. There are 1,193 UNHCR refugees and asylum seekers, including 174 children, who have fled to three makeshift refugees camps in Negombo: the Pasyala Ahmadiyya mosque, the Negombo Ahmadiyya mosque and Negombo police station. Hostility towards Muslims following the attacks has led to growing violence, leading the refugees and asylum seekers to seek urgent safety. The conditions in the camps are worryingly inhumane. There is a severe lack of food and water, minimal toilet facilities, no medical facilities or basic sanitary facilities, no walls or beds, and not enough space to lie down. Over the bank holiday weekend, a child was born on the floor of one of the mosques. No doctor was present. Just this morning, latest updates indicated that more than one person had been taken to hospital due to illness.

The refugees and asylum seekers are largely from religious minorities who have suffered threats, attacks and persecution in their home countries. Many are Ahmadi Muslims who fled Pakistan, where their religious views may be punishable with death. Ahmadi Muslims identify as Muslims, but do not believe that Muhammad was the final prophet sent to guide mankind. This leads many of the refugees to be deemed to be “non-Muslim” in their home countries and to face persecution because of their beliefs. Now, in Sri Lanka, they face an imminent threat to their safety because they are considered to be Muslims.

The welfare of those in the makeshift camps is an immediate and serious concern, as is the possibility that these people will be forced to return to the places they fled from. Will the Minister use all his power to expedite the resettlement of the UNHCR refugees to safe third countries?

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Lady. She is very persistent: this is the third day running that she has applied for an urgent question on this matter. Robert the Bruce would be proud: if at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again.

The hon. Lady makes a very serious point, not least about the Ahmadi Muslims and the terrible paradox of their situation. They are regarded as outcasts in much of the Muslim world, but find themselves very much at the forefront of tensions. It is important that we do not overstate those tensions. As I said in my statement, the high commission on the ground and our UNHCR partners will do all we can, but it is remarkable that, given the history of intercommunal conflict in Sri Lanka, over the past three weeks there has been relatively little that has led to direct concern. However, she is also quite right to say that housing over 1,698 asylum seekers and refugees, according to UN figures, in three unsatisfactory makeshift camps—the Negombo police station and the two mosques—is clearly not sustainable.

[Mark Field]

Civil society contacts with whom we are working have reported other incidents of displacement and harassment of refugees in other parts of Colombo. It is important to recognise that we work together with many other high commissions and embassies in the area, including those of the US, Canada and a number of European countries who have a strong Sri Lankan diaspora whom they also wish to represent.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Can the Minister be more specific about the support the Government are giving to the Christian community in Sri Lanka following the Easter Sunday attacks?

Mark Field: I am always touched by the amount of work my hon. Friend does in this regard, not just in Sri Lanka, but across the world. We are of course concerned at reports of minorities being intimidated, and as she rightly says, the focus of the attacks on Easter Sunday was the Christian community in several locations across Sri Lanka. As she will know, we welcome the interim report by the Bishop of Truro on the persecution of Christians worldwide and we look forward to the final report, which is to be published in the summer.

Freedom of religion and belief is clearly a priority for the Foreign Office, and we and our high commission are working to ensure that the threads of the report that are particularly relevant to Sri Lanka will have an impact there. The Christian community in Sri Lanka is of long standing. Part is Roman Catholic and other bits are Anglican, from our colonial times, but we hope to work together with all Christian communities. This is part and parcel of a package that does not represent one religion above others, but ensures that in this melting pot within Sri Lanka, all religions and faiths can live side by side peaceably and in prosperity.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing it. She has been very persistent and is right to draw to the House's attention the plight of these refugees. I also thank the Minister for his response. I know he is very busy at the moment covering a large number of countries, but he brings a dedication to these issues, for which we are all grateful.

It is a matter great sadness that, despite the surge of national unity led by the Sri Lankan Government in the wake of the Easter Sunday attacks, groups of mindless individuals have instead responded to the attacks with reprisals against the refugee communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. They have responded to an act of sectarian hatred with further acts of sectarian hatred, which ultimately is what the terrorists want. The Sri Lankan Government have as much of a duty to crack down on this violence and to protect those refugee communities as they have to track down the organisers of the Easter Sunday bombings.

On behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition, I wholeheartedly endorse the demands of Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and the other non-governmental organisations about

what the Sri Lankan Government must do now to protect the refugees and make sure they are given adequate shelter and care while the situation is resolved. Will the Minister say today that the Government will not just endorse those demands but press counterparts in Sri Lanka to act on them? Will he also tell the House what support the Government are providing to Sri Lanka and whether, if any help is requested by the Sri Lankans, the British Government will respond?

As my hon. Friend said, the bitter irony is that many of these refugees in Sri Lanka are there having already fled religious persecution, and they have done so only to find themselves under attack again. The Government of Sri Lanka must urgently protect them.

Mark Field: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind words about my work. We have been on the opposite sides of this Chamber and other Chambers in this place several times in the past 48 hours, and I thank her for her constructive comments and for the work she does. She is absolutely right that we need to nip in the bud any return to sectarian hatred—something that is well known to anyone who has Sri Lanka close to their heart. The report makes very clear what is expected of the Sri Lankan Government, and we very much hope to work closely with them.

I have been to Sri Lanka as a Minister on three occasions in the past two years. It is a country that we take seriously, and I was very keen for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Security and Economic Crime to go out there in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, not least because we have some expertise to share in the important areas of institutionalised communication and preparedness. It is not for us to dictate that agenda, and obviously there is already important co-operation on the security and intelligence side, but we need to work closely on structures for the future to ensure that any sectarian hatred is nipped in the bud. When my right hon. Friend was in Sri Lanka, he met key national security figures, including the Defence Secretary, the State Minister of Defence and the army commander, as well as the Prime Minister. He also met the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Colombo.

We see our role as not to dictate but, hopefully, to provide useful advice. More generally, I hope that our experience as a result of what has happened in one part of the United Kingdom—Northern Ireland—can bear well on moving towards the reconciliation that all Sri Lankans deserve.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The Sri Lankan economy has recently benefited from increased tourism, particularly through cruise ship visits. Can the Minister assure me that he keeps the travel advice for British citizens on Sri Lanka under constant review? How can he ensure that our visitors to Sri Lanka continue to contribute to its economy?

Mark Field: I thank my right hon. Friend for her constructive thoughts; she is absolutely right. To recap, on 25 April the FCO amended our travel advice: we now advise against all but essential travel to Sri Lanka, except for airport transit. Obviously we hope that our advice can be adjusted as soon as possible, when the security situation allows, but given the somewhat chaotic immediate aftermath of the attacks, we felt that it was

prudent. However, we understand that cruises and the fledgling but successful tourism industry in Sri Lanka will be very badly affected until we feel it is wise to update our travel advice.

The Foreign Secretary has made a statement to the House about the steps that the Government will take in the aftermath of the attacks. We very much hope to be able at the earliest opportunity to ease the travel restrictions that we put in place three weeks ago, but obviously that will be led by the evidence and the facts on the ground.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Thank you for granting this urgent question, Mr Speaker; I commend the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for securing it. I concur with her words and those of the shadow Minister and the Minister of State. We add to those messages of sympathy to the people of Sri Lanka and those who have been caught up in the horrendous terror attacks of Easter Sunday. It is clear that some have heeded the wise words about compassion and tolerance spoken by the Bishop of Colombo, Dhiloraj Canagasabey, in response to the attacks, but that others have not. I hope that those words will now be heeded.

This is a tragedy heaped on a tragedy. Many of those who were caught up in the horrific terror attacks were already refugees: Ahmadis and Christians from Pakistan, Shi'as from Afghanistan, and refugees from Iran who had fled from religious, ethnic and political persecution in their country. What further assistance can the Minister provide to the UNCHR in expediting asylum claims? What assistance can he offer to the Sri Lankan Government? If, for whatever reason, the Sri Lankan Government cannot offer asylum, what can the UK Government and their counterparts do to ensure that these poor people are offered safe refuge as soon as possible?

Mark Field: I know that the hon. Gentleman also applied for an urgent question on the matter; I suspect that he will table more next week on related matters.

Clearly we are working together. The pace at which we are working with UN agencies has increased in the aftermath of the attacks. As I mentioned, 412 individuals are already going through the process of resettlement to other parts of the world. We will continue to work closely with our partners in Sri Lanka; obviously there is a process that needs to be gone through, but we and they will try to expedite it to ensure that those refugees who are entitled to be moved on are moved on as quickly as possible.

I do not want to trivialise these matters, but we are obviously very pleased to see that the Sri Lankan cricket team has arrived in the UK for the world cup, which is imminent. That has some relevance at this point, because the first match of the one-day international series, which I believe will take place on Saturday week, will be against Scotland, of all places. I hope that, in true Scottish national style, the team will be given a very good welcome when they play in Broughty Ferry, or wherever it may be.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): The terrorists declared war on civil society and against the peace of Easter Sunday. What support can the Government give

the Sri Lankan authorities so that they can take speedy decisions and actions against reprisal attacks, which would only aid the terrorists in their objectives?

Mark Field: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: sectarian hatred needs to be stamped out. That is clearly a matter for the Sri Lankan authorities, but we obviously stand ready to co-operate and assist in any way in which we may be asked to do so.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for asking the urgent question. The Minister said that 412 refugees were currently involved in the UNHCR resettlement process. May I press him on that? How many of those refugees does the UK intend to take, and what more can we do with the UNHCR to increase the number who are resettled and brought quickly to a safe haven?

Mark Field: I hope the hon. Lady will excuse me if I write to her with more specific details once I have them to hand.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend commend the local Muslim communities who have already given many refugees shelter in mosques? What more can this country do to help with those camps, which appear to be pretty unpalatable at present?

Mark Field: As my hon. Friend says, this can only be a short-term, interim measure, and we need something much more sustainable in future. The Government are spending £8.3 million of Conflict, Stability and Security Fund money on interfaith dialogue, reconciliation, police reform and training and de-mining in Sri Lanka, and a large sum on a wide range of other work, but I hope that elements of that can be used to deal with this urgent problem as well.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) has said, these refugee communities belong to religious minorities. Will the Minister make it clear to his Sri Lankan counterpart that there can be no question of their returning to Pakistan, Afghanistan or Iran, where they will inevitably face religious persecution?

Mark Field: I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman that when there is a well-founded case for refugee and asylum status, there should be no question of that.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is easy to find compassion for people who were persecuted, left Pakistan, came to Sri Lanka and now face further persecution. Will the Minister confirm that he will stand up for the Ahmadis, who have been through so much, and is there anything practical that the international community can do to help the Sri Lankan authorities on the ground?

Mark Field: I hope that I have explained in some detail what we are doing on the ground, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right, and we will do all that we can. The plight of the Ahmadis, which is a global plight, is close to our hearts. As my hon. Friend probably knows, Lord Ahmad himself is an Ahmadi Muslim.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Given that the underlying issue is discrimination, and given that many of these poor refugees come from Pakistan, what representations will the Minister make to Imran Khan to make it clear that the blasphemy laws have no place in a modern world? They have caused not only this problem, but the case of Asia Bibi and, previously, the deaths of Salmaan Taseer and my friend Shahbaz Bhatti. It is about time that those laws were removed. Will the Minister do something about it?

Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that our own high commission, and our excellent high commissioner Tom Drew in Islamabad, have made our concerns very clear. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Asia Bibi case. I think that we were all greatly relieved at the outcome, but obviously the security of her family is still at the forefront of our minds. I do not want comment on further speculation, but the fact that this matter has been resolved is, I think, a tribute not just to the Pakistan authorities but, in particular, to the new Pakistani Government. However, I will endeavour to ensure that our high commission is made fully aware of the specific concerns that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Change UK): Will the Minister undertake to raise with Sri Lanka the need to seek UNHCR assistance in managing the settlements so that they are not de facto detention camps? Also, further efforts need to be made for the security of these refugees, and Sri Lanka needs to deploy adequate numbers of law enforcement officers to ensure the protection and security of these vulnerable people.

Mark Field: The right hon. Lady makes the valid point that there is a risk, particularly if resettlement takes longer than we would all wish, that the settlements become de facto detention camps, which would be an unsatisfactory state of affairs, to put it mildly. As I have

said, my counterpart from the Home Office was in Sri Lanka only last week and I know these sorts of issues were actively discussed. We will continue to make the case to which the right hon. Lady has referred.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Minister will be aware that the Ahmadi community in the UK is very active, including delivering condolence cards to Christian churches here following the attack in Sri Lanka and raising lots of money for charity in the UK and abroad. If that community chooses to fundraise for the refugees in Sri Lanka would the Government be able to match, or indeed better, the sum it raises?

Mark Field: I had better be a little careful because though I have these added responsibilities, I do not have Treasury responsibilities. However, the right hon. Gentleman is right that it would be useful if we were able to match that sum in the way that we have on other occasions; perhaps he could write to me with specific details of that and I will take it up with the Treasury and other Departments.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Vulnerable ethnic and religious minorities in Sri Lanka must be protected, and the Sri Lankan Government have given an undertaking to protect those who wish to worship their God. What has been done to assist those Ahmadis who have fled Pakistan in fear but are now afraid in Sri Lanka and seek somewhere else to relocate to to achieve that?

Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman always speaks for the dispossessed across the world and stands up for the freedom of religious belief. As I have said, we are working closely on the ground to do all we can with international partners, particularly the UN, to make life better for those impacted. I hope to report back either in FCO questions next week, or in due course, about progress in what is happening in Sri Lanka.

Business of the House

11.2 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): The business for next week will include:

MONDAY 13 MAY—Second Reading of the Non-Domestic Rating (Preparation for Digital Services) Bill.

TUESDAY 14 MAY—Opposition day (unallotted day). There will be a debate on prisons and probation followed by a debate entitled “Health and local public health cuts”. Both debates will arise on a motion in the name of the official Opposition.

WEDNESDAY 15 MAY—Motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (Further Implementation etc.) Regulations 2019, followed by general debate on serious violence.

THURSDAY 16 MAY—General debate on the definition of Islamophobia, followed by general debate on the international day against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. The subjects of these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 17 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

Colleagues will also wish to know that subject to the progress of business the House will rise for the Whitsun recess at the close of business on Thursday 23 May and return on Tuesday 4 June.

The whole House will want to join me in congratulating the Duke and Duchess of Sussex on the birth of their new son, Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor. We wish them a lifetime of happiness together.

I am delighted that the Bill to enable the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster has this week been introduced. In the wake of the tragic fire at Notre Dame, and with clear evidence here from recent fire incidents as well as falling masonry and many other safety issues, this Bill is vital to ensure we safeguard the seat of our democracy for future generations.

Finally, I am looking forward to taking part in one of the first voluntary independent complaints and grievance scheme training sessions for Members of Parliament later today, and I encourage all Members to show their commitment to our new behaviour code by taking part in one of the training sessions as soon as they can. As the six-month review of the ICGS is now well under way, the roll-out of the training for staff and Members will continue to demonstrate our commitment to treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the forthcoming business. I was going to ask her for the Whitsun recess dates, so I am pleased that she has announced them. May I ask for an update on when we are likely to get the list of ministerial responsibilities? I should also like to press her on the summer recess dates. The deputy Prime Minister said that he thought 2 July was the cut-off date for EU matters. It should not be beyond the House to provide those dates.

Members have often raised the issue of Ministers and other MPs visiting their constituencies without giving notice, and it has now happened to me. The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) kindly

informed me that she was coming to my constituency, in fact getting me an invitation to launch a train—apparently there will be tea and sandwiches in one of my favourite places in the constituency, the New Art Gallery—but I had not even been invited, even though those events were taking place in my constituency. This is the second time that that has happened. The Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), kindly apologised to me when I was given notice of an event only two hours before she visited. Those Members were actually being quite helpful; it is just that something is going wrong with the offices and the invites. Will the Leader of the House please raise these courtesies and protocols with her colleagues? Members should be told about these visits, and indeed invited to the events.

I am pleased that the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill has been introduced. As we have all said, the skills and jobs should benefit all our constituencies throughout the country, not just a few property companies based here in London. We need to ensure that our constituents are involved. I say gently to the Leader of the House that I am sure the Clerk of the House practically faints when she mentions Notre Dame, because he would never allow people to be in this building if it was not safe. We know that people are constantly firefighting here every day, and no one would be allowed in the building if it was as unsafe as that.

Will the Leader of the House update us on when the withdrawal agreement Bill will be introduced? There has been some debate in the media about that. I do not think it was Faisal Islam who tweeted about it this time, but there has been some suggestion that it could be next Thursday, and I know that a Backbench debate has been scheduled for that day. Are the Government going to bring back the withdrawal agreement Bill next week?

We need certainty on that matter, because the right hon. Lady will have seen the research from the Incorporated Society of Musicians which shows that the uncertainty over Brexit is continuing to cause real damage to the music industry, which is a very important part of our GDP. The ISM has concerns about future work, mobility, visas, transportation of instruments and equipment, and health and social security. The research showed that 63 respondents cited difficulty in securing future work in the EU27 and EEA countries as the biggest issue that they faced because of Brexit. More than one in 10 respondents reported that offers of work had been withdrawn or cancelled with Brexit being given as the reason. May we have more certainty for that sector?

Many Members are trying on the captain's hat, even though there is no vacancy for the captain of the ship, but as they look through the periscope, they will see that 200,000 nurses have left the NHS since 2010. If there is not a crisis, why are the Government having to recruit tens of thousands of nurses from overseas? It is because nurses are being driven out of the overstretched NHS owing to the lack of Government funding. Why are we seeing the first sustained fall in GP numbers in the UK in 50 years? Why are they leaving the profession? We also know that 30,000 ambulance staff have quit their jobs. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Secretary of State for Health—when he takes off the captain's hat—makes a statement on that crisis?

[Valerie Vaz]

When the Home Secretary takes off the captain's hat and looks through the periscope, he will see the crisis on our streets. The Prime Minister said yesterday that she had chaired a summit and a taskforce, and there will be a general debate on serious violence next week. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) wanted to raise this matter with the Leader of the House. Will she ensure that the Home Secretary comes to the House next week to report on the taskforce and to tell us exactly what is going to happen to stop people dying needlessly? Our police need their resources. Our criminal justice system also needs resources, and barristers are about to walk out on strike. It was no good the Leader of the House saying last week that it is up to the Justice Committee to respond when I raised the Criminal Bar Association's strike. She cannot outsource responses to Select Committees; we need to know what the Government are doing.

The Leader of the House kindly said that she would get an answer to Opposition day motions within eight weeks, but exactly when will our climate emergency motion receive a response? The clue is in the word "emergency". She will have seen the news about the effect of climate change on the unprecedented decline in biodiversity, and I will read out the whole thing so that people know what I mean. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services says that

"1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction".

We need a response, and I understand that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs did not say when he would respond to our Opposition day motion.

May we have a debate in Government time on their flagship digital identification system Verify, which is failing its users? Only 3.9 million people have signed up, and it will affect those applying for universal credit most of all. Some 25 million users are expected by 2020.

I am pleased that the Backbench Business Committee agreed to a debate today, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), in tribute to John Smith, the former leader of the Labour party, as we approach the 25th anniversary of his death on 12 May. He served as an MP for 24 years, and I am sure that hon. Members will do him justice. I remember the image of Smith and Brown striding into the Commons to take the Government apart with their brilliant arguments. At this time, we think of his widow Elizabeth and his brilliant daughters Sarah, Jane and Catherine. He would have been pleased that today is also Europe Day, which marks peace and prosperity within Europe.

The Opposition also wishes Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor and all the babies born this week peace and prosperity for their futures.

Andrea Leadson: The hon. Lady raises several issues. The list of ministerial responsibilities will be updated in due course, and the summer recess is obviously subject to the progress, so I will announce it as soon as I can.

As for West Midlands Trains, I am glad that the hon. Lady accepts that my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) went out of her way to ensure that she was invited. It was a matter for West Midlands Trains and has nothing to do with any

Government mission. As a matter of fact, when my hon. Friend raised the issue with West Midlands Trains, she was told that the hon. Lady had in fact been invited but had not checked her emails. I hope that that deals with that query. The hon. Lady should feel free to apologise to my hon. Friend if she wants to.

Turning to the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill, I am glad that the hon. Lady shares my delight at its introduction. I am particularly grateful to her for being one of the Bill's sponsors. It is important that it is a parliamentary project, so I am delighted by the cross-party support for it.

The hon. Lady asked when the withdrawal agreement Bill will be introduced, but that is obviously subject to the talks with the Opposition, so I am sure that she will be able to get an update from her own side. It is the Government's intention to seek cross-party agreement to get a Bill that the whole House can support. It is absolutely essential that we leave the European Union, and it is utterly unacceptable that we have not done so three years after the referendum. I say to all hon. Members who are worried about the impact on businesses and on people going about their everyday lives that if they support the withdrawal agreement Bill, we can put such issues to rest and get on with the important matters that our constituents are concerned about.

The hon. Lady mentioned GPs, and I can tell her that under this Government the NHS is having its biggest-ever investment, with £33.9 billion in cash terms by 2023-24. There are over 4,500 more paramedics since this Government took office, and Health Education England recruited the highest number of GP trainees ever last year—nearly 3,500. We are committed to increasing access to general practice, which is vital to us all. The hon. Lady raises the issue of serious violence and the serious violence taskforce, and I hope that she noticed that, in response to the many requests from across the House, I announced that we will hold a debate in Government time on serious violence next week. It is my expectation that the Home Secretary will lead the debate—although, of course, that is not a matter for me to determine—and it is for Departments to decide who is the appropriate responder.

On Opposition day responses, I confirmed a couple of weeks ago that, in response to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee's recent report on resolutions of the House of Commons, I have shortened the deadline for the Government to respond to motions passed by the House, from 12 weeks to eight weeks, to ensure the House gets those responses faster, while still ensuring that there is time for full and proper consideration of resolutions.

Finally, the Government and all parties agree that climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing the world. To give the hon. Lady a few of the Government's actions, we have planted 15 million trees since 2010; we are calling for an increase from 10% to 30% of the world's oceans to be marine protected areas by 2030; we have reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by 25% since 2010; and we have launched a 25-year environment plan with a pledge to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste. Those are just a few examples of this Government's excellent work, and we are determined to be world leading in our actions, not words, to tackle the global challenge of climate change.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): May we have an urgent debate on the Turkish incursion into the Cyprus exclusive economic zone? The incursion is unlawful and unacceptable, and it is shocking that a NATO ally is responsible. This House needs an opportunity to condemn those actions.

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend raises a serious issue that I am sure she will wish to raise at Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions on Tuesday 14 May. I commend her for raising the importance of such an issue.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business. I wish her, most sincerely, all the best in her renewed leadership campaign. I do not know who has better odds—her of becoming Prime Minister or me of succeeding you in the Chair, Mr Speaker. I suspect it might be me, but it now looks like the Gloria Gaynor of 10 Downing Street might not survive much longer as the men in grey underpants set a timetable for her departure. So can we have a debate on cruelty in sport? There are now so many runners and riders that it will be like a dysfunctional grand national, with one Minister saying that few of them know how to ride.

The council elections went well, didn't they? It is hard to think of an election in which both the Government and the main Opposition party got royally stuffed. We are all now looking forward to the European elections—the SNP certainly is—and we cannot wait to see the Tory manifesto. I bet they will be up all night writing that one. “Chapter one: we want to leave the EU, but the party won't let us. Chapter two: please don't vote for Farage! Chapter three: erm, that's it.” I do not know whether the award for best comedy in a party political manifesto has yet been awarded, but it should definitely be delayed until we see that cracker.

We have not had an answer to the meaningful vote on the withdrawal agreement, but I think that the House deserves one. The rumour is that the Government will bring it back next week, with Thursday being suggested. What are the Government's plans for the meaningful vote? When, and in what form, will they bring it back? This purgatory cannot go on any longer. Nothing is being done. Important Bills need to be brought back to the House, and we need to get back to work. The House rose early on two days this week, and this place is quickly becoming an international laughing stock. All I can say is that, after 20 years of devolution, we are looking forward to completing the powers of our Parliament in Scotland, and it will be goodbye to this place.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his, as ever, rather witty, if a little misguided, contribution. The fundamental problem is that his party does not believe in abiding by the result of referendums, whereas the Conservative party does. We had a referendum in 2016, and we are determined to deliver on the result by leaving the EU; Scotland had a referendum in 2014 and, regardless of whether it has another one, the SNP will abide by it only if it gets the result it wants.

As a huge supporter of the United Kingdom, I also welcome the 20 years of devolution, which has been a huge success—except to the extent that the hon. Gentleman's Government in Scotland have failed to take up many of

the powers they have been offered under devolution. It is extraordinary that a party in Scotland that claims to be able to set up within 18 months a new independent country with its own currency, while staying in the EU, cannot even manage to accept powers to take on VAT, welfare or any of those modest little issues. It seems extraordinary to me that the hon. Gentleman is preaching to my party, which is determined to deliver on the democratic will of the people.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): T.S. Eliot said:

“Knowledge is invariably a matter of degree”.

That was brought home again this morning when the Environment Agency predicted that many coastal areas, including much of South Holland and The Deepings, are at imminent risk of flooding. That is curious, given that for at least two decades the Environment Agency has predicted flood risk so inaccurately.

Floods have taken place everywhere, from Tewkesbury to Carlisle and from Stratford-upon-Avon to Gloucester, yet none of those has appeared on the Environment Agency's flood risk maps. The Environment Agency seems to ignore both internal drainage and the reality of flooding, and it seems to me that its knowledge of real flood risk is a matter of question.

Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on how such agencies can be brought to account? I am thinking of Network Rail cutting down trees, of Natural England ignoring the stewardship of the countryside and now of the Environment Agency alarming and distressing very large numbers of my constituents. These people should be held to account by this House and be answerable to Ministers.

Mr Speaker: Some people think that we have already had the debate, but I always enjoy the mellifluous tones of the right hon. Gentleman and his unfailing invocation of literary testimony. He enjoys it, even more than we do.

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend raises an important issue for his constituency, and I understand his concern about unnecessary scaremongering. However, the chief executive of the Environment Agency does an excellent job; I would say that because I appointed her when I was Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. She is assiduous in ensuring that people are made aware of the risks from climate change.

Having ratified the Paris agreement on climate change in November 2016, reduced emissions faster than any other G7 nation and, in the past year, generated record levels of solar and wind energy, the United Kingdom is leading the world in tackling climate change, but we still have to do everything possible at home to ensure that we protect people and our environment from the impact of global climate change.

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): New data shows that there have been nearly 5,500 hoax calls to the West Midlands ambulance service in the past five years. Hoax calls not only waste hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money, but put lives at risk due to delays in answering calls from patients who genuinely need help. Will the Leader of the House join me in condemning those who make hoax calls to our emergency

[Colleen Fletcher]

services? Will she look for an opportunity to have a debate in Government time on the vital work that our ambulance services do and how we can all help to reduce the number of hoax calls for the future?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady has raised a very serious issue. Hoax calls to any of our emergency services are absolutely to be condemned. She will no doubt be aware that ambulance services deal with more than 23,800 emergency calls every single day, and it is totally unacceptable for anyone to waste their time. The Government have introduced a significant increase in paramedic numbers to deal with the challenge facing our ambulance services, but I recommend that the hon. Lady seek an Adjournment debate so that she can discuss directly with Ministers what more can be done.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): To channel the spirit of my inner right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), somebody once wrote:

“Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.”

Will the Leader of the House congratulate the 82 Members of Parliament who attended the training programme on autism awareness last week? I was proud that they wanted to change themselves and take on board the learning and exercise. Will she encourage the remainder of our colleagues from all parties to attend the future training courses that are being run by the all-party group on autism and the National Autistic Society? More importantly, will she ensure that people with autism and their families are catered for in the Bill on the restoration and renewal of the House, so that this country can have a Parliament that is the most autism-aware and friendly destination in the world?

Andrea Leadsom: I truly commend my right hon. Friend for her work on autism. It is excellent that that number of colleagues attended the autism training day, and I encourage as many Members as possible to get involved with that training. It is an absolutely key requirement of the restoration and renewal of this place that we do everything we can to make it accessible to those with particular disabilities or challenges, to make this the most person-friendly Parliament in the world when we come back to it in the 2030s.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week, including the Backbench Business debates on Thursday.

I declare an interest: I am the chair of the all-party group on football supporters. In that light, I congratulate both Liverpool and Tottenham on their amazing comebacks over the past two nights. The television has been electric. Those were probably the best two comebacks since Lazarus all those years ago.

Meanwhile, in other parts of the country, football supporters are struggling with the dreadful ownership of their clubs. At Newcastle United, where I am a season ticket holder, we have Mike Ashley and have to put up with everything that he delivers to us. Across the river in my own constituency, we have the situation at Gateshead football club, where Dr Ranjan Varghese

and his financial adviser Joe Cala have sacked all the staff, including all the playing staff apart from one who has a contract that runs to June. The club is now talking about leaving the ground, which is owned by the local authority, and moving somewhere else. May we have a debate in Government time about the football authorities' fit-and-proper-person test for being a club director? Frankly, these people are turning football into a joke.

Andrea Leadsom: I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in commending Liverpool and Spurs for their excellent results. It is great to see an all-English final. I hope that football clubs and managers all across the country listen to what the hon. Gentleman has said. It is vital that the excellent work done to promote sport, particularly football, throughout the country is properly managed and cared for. We have Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport questions on Thursday 23 May, and I recommend that the hon. Gentleman raise the issue then.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Following on from the question from the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), I know that you, Sir, will of course have been absolutely amazed at what Liverpool did this week, but you will have been even more impressed by what happened last night, when Tottenham came back from an even more difficult situation.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the problems in football, but what has not been noticed is the long-term partnership between Tottenham Hotspur and the American National Football League. Two American football games will be played at the new Spurs ground next year, and this week the NFL announced that it will base its first academy at Barnet and Southgate College, where 80 youngsters will be taken in and given the opportunity for education and character development and to play American football. Premier league sides and the NFL are working together, so it is not all bad news. May we have a debate so that we can discuss these issues and in particular recognise the work that the NFL has done with its academy?

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting forward the good side of some of the work done by football clubs in collaboration with other football leagues. I will certainly take away his request for Government time for a debate. Members often raise their own pet sports—mine being rugby, of course, rather than football, and we all know yours, Mr Speaker—and I will certainly take away that suggestion. We regularly have debates on sport and the contribution that it can make to our national life, and it is right that we continue to consider these issues.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): A recent study of 17,000 police personnel across the UK found that 95% of officers and two thirds of operational police staff have been exposed to traumatic events, with 20% reporting symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder. Will the Government consider making a statement on this health crisis in our police service?

Andrea Leadsom: The report that came out was extremely concerning, and this is an opportunity to pay tribute to the police for all the amazing work they do to keep us safe. The hon. Lady will know that, as part of our NHS long-term plan, mental health and support for mental

health issues are a high priority, as is achieving parity of esteem between mental health and physical health. We will see much more support available in the years to come. Nevertheless, she is right to raise the issue. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate perhaps to discuss it directly with Ministers.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): As well as congratulating Liverpool and Spurs, I am sure that you will join me, Mr Speaker, in wishing Arsenal and Chelsea all the best for this evening so that we can have a full slate of English clubs in the European finals. On an even more serious point, may I ask for a debate on what one might almost call online economic terrorism against small businesses? Last week, I visited an excellent small business in my constituency that has been targeted over a certain matter, with a particular employee being the subject of that targeting. The business has been asked, or it has been told, that unless it fires that employee it will continue to be targeted. Fortunately, the threats are being taken seriously, but the young woman who owns and has grown that excellent business rightly wants me to raise this in a debate in the House of Commons. I am sure that it is not the only case that Members have come across.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises a very concerning issue about unfair intimidation of a business over whatever the activity is of one of the employees. It is absolutely right that when enforcement is required the police support any business that is trying to defend an employee against unfair accusations. I do not know the precise details, but I would encourage him to speak directly to Ministers about what more can be done.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I wanted to ask the Leader of the House to celebrate Europe Day with me, but I know that is dangerous on her territory. I have been campaigning for a long time about the poison coming through our air, polluting our air, poisoning our children and poisoning pregnant women. It is a disaster. Now we have realised—I asked every Secretary of State to introduce air quality monitors in every primary school, but I was rebuffed. May we have a debate on air pollution and what the Government can do about it before 2040, when 1 million people will have lost their lives to air pollution?

Andrea Leadsom: First, I absolutely join the hon. Gentleman in celebrating Europe Day. European nations are our friends and neighbours and we have a strong and long-term relationship with them. He raises an important point about air pollution and is right to do so. I can tell him that air pollution has reduced significantly since 2010. Emissions of toxic nitrogen oxides have fallen by 29% and are at their lowest level since records began. Of course, we have to take action. We have put in place a £3.5 billion plan to reduce harmful emissions from road transport and, as he points out, we will end the sale of new conventional diesel and petrol cars and vans by 2040. Very importantly, we are implementing our new world-leading clean air strategy, and we will absolutely be tackling the very real concerns we all have about the quality of the air we are breathing.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Yesterday, we wore a white rose for ovarian cancer. We know that it and cervical cancer can be killers, and the Government are doing a great job in trying to encourage more women to

have smear tests. Does my right hon. Friend share my great pleasure at the research that came out just last month that showed that, when girls have had the HPV vaccination, that has led to a dramatic decrease in cervical cancer? Given the concerns about measles outbreaks across the world, may we please have a debate in this place on the importance of having vaccinations, because vaccinations save lives?

Andrea Leadsom: I share my hon. Friend's delight at the dramatically lower rate of cervical cancer as a result of vaccination. She will be aware that we had a debate last week on immunisation around the world and its importance in eradicating some of the world's most terrible diseases, but she is right to raise again the importance of vaccination. All parents should look very carefully at NHS advice rather than some of the absolute misinformation that can be found online.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Yesterday afternoon, I received an email from Clydesdale Bank telling me that, without so much as a by your leave, it is going to shut its branch in Brora in Sutherland. This is yet another addition to a sickening litany of bank closures across the highlands. I know that I speak for many right hon. and hon. Members across the House when I say that we cannot go on like this; I cannot tell the House how upset my constituents are. Would the Leader of the House consider very strongly the possibility of a debate on the issue in this Chamber, because if we do not take action—if we do not try to do something—we will let down our constituents in every part of the UK?

Andrea Leadsom: I am well aware of the concern of many Members when there are bank branch closures in their constituencies; it is an issue for many people. The hon. Gentleman will also appreciate that banks are commercial businesses and the way that people are choosing to manage their financial affairs is changing. One step that the Government have taken is the access to banking protocol, which banks will consult broadly to ensure that they are not leaving people literally in the lurch. The work that the Government have done on investing in the post office network has been really important, resulting in 99.7% of the UK population now living within three miles of a post office branch.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Recent research has indicated that, if British households switched from eating meat for just one day a week, it would result in a reduction in carbon emissions equivalent to taking 16 million cars off our roads. Can we have a statement from the Secretary of State for the Environment on the importance of a healthier environment and healthier diets through less meat consumption?

Andrea Leadsom: As my hon. Friend knows, we are committed to ensuring that there is a fair balance between farming and climate change, which is why mitigating climate change is explicitly listed among the public goods in our Agriculture Bill. However, he should also be aware that, although food choices can have an impact on greenhouse gas emissions, at the same time well-managed livestock farming provides environmental benefits such as supporting biodiversity; importantly, protecting the character of the countryside; and, of course, generating important income for rural communities.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Last night I received a Facebook message from somebody I know. I just want to read out a little part of it, if I may: “Dear Paula, I was wondering if you have had any experience of people suddenly having employment and support allowance being suddenly stopped. I get ESA. I’ve been in the support group for a while due to long-term conditions with my arm, bowel and epilepsy following being attacked by a patient at the hospital trust where I worked. I get PIP too. I had a work capability assessment a few weeks ago. Yesterday I got a letter to say it’s been stopped and I’m okay to work. I’m beside myself. I can’t sleep. I have always, for years, scored 15 points and now I’ve got zero. But nothing has changed.” Sometimes I honestly wonder how this wicked Government can do this to people. This is someone working in our NHS who was attacked, and now their benefits have been stopped; she is suffering mentally and physically. May we have a debate on how we can bring this terrible situation to an end and treat people with the dignity that they deserve?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is raising a very serious constituency issue. As ever, I will be happy to raise that particular case if she writes to me after business questions. However, I have to make it absolutely clear that, since the personal independence payment was introduced in 2013, it has been there to ensure that people had more control over their own lives. Four million decisions have been taken and almost nine in every 10 PIP claimants are satisfied with the overall experience. What the Government are seeking to do is to provide as much support as possible, as flexibly as possible, to people who need personal independence payments. Obviously the hon. Lady is talking about a particular issue that must be looked at, and hon. Members often do raise particular issues, but we must not throw out the baby with the bathwater. The whole premise of the Government, in looking at benefits for people who need them, is to provide support for those people.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Change UK): It has been apparent for some months that it was almost certain that we would be fighting the European elections, but yesterday the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster confirmed it. As a result of the late confirmation, a large number of local authorities have failed to send out forms or adequately ensure that the millions of European Union citizens in this country entitled to vote will be able to vote on 23 May. May I draw the Leader of the House’s attention to early-day motion 2357, tabled by myself and Members cross-party?

[That this House calls on the Government to take immediate steps to ensure that all EU citizens in the UK who wish to vote in the EU elections are able to do so by making the additional form that EU citizens need to complete in order to declare they are not voting in another EU member state - the UCI form - available at all polling stations on 23 May 2019, by instructing all local authorities to write by first-class mail to EU citizens who miss the 7 May deadline to inform them they will still be able to vote by filling in a UCI form which will be available at polling stations and by directing local authorities to send polling cards to all EU citizens and not just those who have completed and returned the UCI form.]

The EDM asks the Government to instruct local authorities to allow EU nationals to have the polling card sent to them, whether or not they have filled in the additional

form, the UCI form, and to have copies of that form available in polling stations, so that they can sign it there and confirm that they are voting only in this country and not in another European country, thereby enabling EU nationals legally resident here, with families here and working here, to vote in these European elections.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is asking me a specific policy question that is clearly one for the Cabinet Office and/or for the Brexit Department. I would encourage him perhaps to lay a named question so that he can get a direct answer to his specific request.

Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab): One year ago this week, Scottish musician Scott Hutchison died by suicide. Scott had been very open in talking about his mental health struggles, and through that, and his music and lyrics, he brought comfort and support to people all across the world. This week, in his honour, his family launched a charity called Tiny Changes to support young people with their mental health. We know that young people are struggling more and more often with their mental health, and with the mounting pressures of modern life, it is unlikely to get any better. So will the Leader of the House join me in paying tribute to Scott, his work and his life and in thanking his family for their work? Could we please have a debate in Government time on young people’s mental health, so that we can come together and discuss this very important issue? Together we can make tiny changes.

Andrea Leadsom: I commend the hon. Lady for raising Scott’s story and I pay tribute to him and his family. It is just the most terrible thing when anyone takes their own life. I can tell her—I see she is quite moved—that a very good friend of my son also committed suicide, and he will also be taking action to try to raise money for those families who are struggling to ever get over this. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise this issue. The Government have the very first suicide prevention strategy, and we have many different measures that are being considered right across Departments to do what we can to try to prevent more suicides. She is absolutely right to raise this and I will see what can be done about a debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I call Dr Julian Lewis.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was not expecting to be called until the end, because I would like to raise with the Leader of the House the situation at Carriage Gates, which is not strictly a matter of the business of the House. I am concerned that the incessant loud noise, which is being made not in the context of specific demonstrations but at varying times, is taking us back to a situation prior to 2010. Not only does it cause distraction, particularly in Westminster Hall, but, much more importantly, it has a huge effect on the police who are guarding the gates and have to be on the alert, as we know only too well, against attack. There are byelaws about this. I do not care which side of the EU argument the shouters are on—probably both sides—but it needs to be stopped. I wonder what the Leader of the House can do about this matter because one of her predecessors, Sir George Young, proved very effective in tackling it with Westminster City Council.

Mr Speaker: Yes, that was in 2012—I remember it well.

Andrea Leadsom: I regularly meet the director of security in the Palace and the Director General to talk about the challenges we face when going about our everyday work. I have raised the demonstrations going on outside, but not specifically the noise. Since my right hon. Friend makes that point, I will undertake to raise that issue the next time I speak to the DG.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I have had two yellowing newspaper front pages pinned to the wall in my office for nearly two years now, with headlines saying, “Five years for monsters who harm animals” and “Five years’ jail for cruelty to pets”. A Bill was published and then withdrawn. My constituents and thousands of people around the country have run a fantastic campaign to ensure that those who are cruel to animals are punished with severe sentences, which they are not at the moment. Where is the Bill? No more talk—we must have it in Parliament.

Andrea Leadsom: I completely agree with the hon. Lady that cruelty to animals is utterly unacceptable. We are a nation of animal lovers and want to see perpetrators brought to justice. She is right that it is the Government’s policy to take action to increase maximum sentences for animal cruelty, and that Bill will be brought forward in an animals Bill in the next Session. In the meantime, the Government have improved animal welfare through many different measures, such as making CCTV mandatory in slaughterhouses. We are bringing forward a ban on the use of wild animals in travelling circuses. We have banned online and third-party puppy sales, and our world-leading ivory sales ban demonstrates our commitment to do everything we can to protect animals around the world.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure the Leader of the House recognises the importance of grassroots sports in promoting physical and mental wellbeing in our communities. Will she take the time to recognise the great work that the parkrun project does across all parts of the UK, and particularly in my constituency? The Springburn parkrun, which was set up in the wake of the Commonwealth games in Glasgow with some of the legacy funding, is celebrating its fifth anniversary this Saturday. Every week, people can go along at half-past 9 to run, and it is not against each other, but to improve their fitness and their time each week. Will she recognise that great initiative?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the value of community initiatives such as parkrun in keeping people fit and motivated, with a bit of social company. It is a fantastic thing to do, and I congratulate his constituents on their work.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): My 16-year-old constituent, Jackson Shepherd, has severe special needs, including learning disabilities, very limited communication and an inability to attend to daily needs such as washing and clothing himself. He is a student at the fantastic Riverbrae School for those with additional and complex support needs. However, his dad has been told that Jackson cannot claim universal credit because he cannot undergo a work capability assessment, as he is a student and therefore cannot work. Can we have a debate on this Government’s

policies on supporting young adults with additional and complex needs, to ensure that people like Jackson do not fall through the net?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises an important constituency issue, as he often does. I encourage him to raise it directly with Ministers, and if he wants to write to me after business questions, I can take it up on his behalf. He will be aware that the Government are determined to ensure that people with disabilities—in particular, young people—are able to lead fulfilling lives and achieve as much as possible. To that end, we are spending £55 billion a year on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions, which is up by more than £10 billion in real terms since 2010.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): The Ministry of Justice’s own policy framework states that all prisons should develop specific multidisciplinary pathways for pregnant and post-natal women. Birth Companions, a maternity rights charity, has raised concerns that current practices are falling short. Please may we have a debate in Government time to discuss maternity services before, during and post sentencing so that we can better improve life chances for mothers and their children?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises a very important issue, and one that is dear to my heart. It is certainly vital in the perinatal period that women, their babies and their partners are given the support they need to get every baby off to the best start in life. I am not aware of exactly where Government policy is on this, but I encourage the hon. Lady to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise the issue with a Minister.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Even if the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) had momentarily forgotten the brilliance of his inquiry, the rest of us, thankfully, had not.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Government have failed to increase stamp duty on purchases of properties by overseas buyers by 3%, instead cutting it back to 1%, which has resulted in less money being available for tackling homelessness. This is not just a rough deal on the homeless who have to sleep rough, but a rough deal on young people who want to buy houses that are forced out of reach by house price inflation. May we have a debate in Government time on the Government’s failure to join up housing policy, and its impact on our constituents and people who are facing homelessness?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman started off by saying something about a change in Government policy that I did not fully follow. However, I draw his attention to Treasury questions on 21 May, when he might like to raise his specific question. I can say to him that the Government are doing everything possible to eradicate homelessness. Our Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 means that everyone, not just those who are a priority, can get more support before becoming homeless, which is absolutely vital. There is also our rough sleeping initiative, working with local authorities with the highest levels of rough sleeping, which is demonstrating a 19% decrease in rough sleeping across the areas where it

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

is in place. The Government are absolutely committed to tackling this, but he should raise his specific point at Treasury questions.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Leader of the House has already talked about climate change this morning, and the Environment Agency has produced a report today about flooding. With rising sea levels and river flooding, 55,000 houses in the Humber estuary are at risk. May we have a debate about what new opportunities there are in tackling climate change and flood defences, and where we see it as an opportunity, not a burden, to develop the new industries that the Environment Agency says we need? For example, there is the proposal for a Hull lagoon from the Humber bridge to the port, which is championed by local businesses led by Tim Rix and which would help to protect the Humber estuary and regenerate the city of Hull.

Andrea Leadsom: As ever, I find myself wholeheartedly agreeing with the hon. Lady on a very significant issue. I have visited some of the most at-risk places, such as York, where the new flood defences have created jobs and opportunities for local businesses while at the same time protecting the city centre. I absolutely agree that we should be looking at opportunities to do more to think creatively about how we can protect ourselves from the risk of flooding. We obviously had Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions this morning, so I hope she was able to put her idea to Ministers then. If not, she might like to seek an Adjournment debate.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The Gillen review of the changes required to procedures and laws on serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland has just been published this morning. It contains over 200 important and radical recommendations that would bring our laws in Northern Ireland up to speed, and indeed get the productivity of getting such offences properly tried in Northern Ireland up to speed. What will be done? Can the Government arrange for those procedures to be implemented in the absence of devolution in Northern Ireland, and ensure that nothing is allowed to delay the implementation of the law changes that are required?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will know that it is absolutely the Government's aim to bring the main political parties in Northern Ireland together, with the UK and Irish Governments, to bring back a fully devolved Administration in Northern Ireland. That is an absolute priority for the UK Government. In the meantime, we obviously continue to talk about any essential measures that need to be taken. Ultimately, we want to see the talks that commenced on 7 May reach a fruitful re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Earlier this week I announced that I am pregnant with my second child. As both my husband and I are MPs, the decision to have another baby was made possible only because of the introduction of proxy voting, and I wish to place on record my thanks to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), to the Leader of the House, and to you,

Mr Speaker, for pushing that forward. Parliament has made much progress in recent years, but late-night votes and an archaic voting system that can mean MPs walking around in circles through the Lobbies for several hours on end can be off-putting. May we have a debate in Government time about how we can make Parliament a more accessible workplace?

Andrea Leadsom: I am delighted—congratulations to the hon. Lady and her husband. That is fantastic news, and we all share in wishing her a fabulous pregnancy with no sickness, tiredness, or anything of that sort. She is right to say that proxy voting was an important step as many more new families come to this place, and it is right for the diversity of the House of Commons that many more young parents are coming here as representatives. I commit to doing everything I can to make this place more family friendly. The issues of how we vote and the late timing are matters for the House, and I encourage the hon. Lady to seek either a Westminster Hall debate or a Backbench Business Committee debate so that all hon. Members can share their views. Surprisingly to me and to her, not all hon. Members share our view about making this place family friendly.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady will certainly get the Westminster Hall debate, and she should have a word with her hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) about the Backbench Business Committee debate.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Only yesterday, Clydesdale Bank announced that it would close its branch in Largs. That is the latest blow to my constituency, as yet another bank abandons our communities, leading to increasing concerns about financial exclusion, and all the implications that that poses for consumers, small businesses and the future of our high streets. May we have a debate in Government time about the social responsibility of banks, and a proper investigation into banking hubs for every community?

Andrea Leadsom: I am sorry that the hon. Lady is the second Scottish parliamentarian to raise a bank branch closure in their constituency during business questions, and I agree that bank closures are difficult for our constituents. She will be aware of the access to banking arrangements, under which banks must consult and demonstrate that there is no commercial value to be had from a bank branch, and that alternative arrangements are in place to suit the needs of the local community. In many cases those arrangements are provided by local post offices. The Government have invested £2.3 billion in the post office network since 2010, meaning that post offices are open for an extra 200,000 hours a week, with more than 4,000 opening on Sunday. Nevertheless, the hon. Lady makes an important point, and I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate on the issue.

Mr Speaker: I call Chris Bryant.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): You are generous, Mr Speaker, especially because I am a naughty boy and was not entirely in the Chamber when the business question started. I am grateful to you—thank you very much. Would the Leader of the House care to come and visit me in my constituency and perhaps stay overnight? [HON. MEMBERS: “Oooh!”] We have a spare room—it's

fine. She could then see the Cory Band, which is indisputably the best brass band in the country. It won the British open championships last year—it is the reigning champion—and last week it won the European brass band championship. While in the Rhondda the right hon. Lady could also come to the Rhondda Arts Festival Treorchy—RAFT—and see all the great acts that will be put on in the last week of June.

Andrea Leadsom: What can I say, other than that you were clearly tricked by the hon. Gentleman sneaking in under the radar, Mr Speaker? I hope you are not losing your touch. I find that invitation almost entirely irresistible, and I would be delighted to visit the Rhondda. May I commend the hon. Gentleman's local brass band, the Cory Band, and congratulate it on its superb achievements?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Offensive Weapons Bill seeks to strengthen legislation on weapons such as knives. The Bill is important, but friends in the Sikh community were concerned that it would impinge on their freedom to carry the kirpan, or ceremonial sword, which is an ingrained part of their religious practice similar to wearing a cross. There must always be a balance between freedom and public safety. I am delighted that the Government have considered that balance and amended the Bill to accommodate Sikh religious freedom. That positive result highlights the importance of considering freedom of religion or belief in all Government policy. Will the Leader of the House join me and others in welcoming that decision?

Andrea Leadsom: I am delighted the hon. Gentleman raises this issue. He is absolutely right to point out that the Government fully support religious freedom. The Government were pleased that the issue of wearing the kirpan was brought to their attention, so that the Offensive Weapons Bill could be amended and the protection of religious freedoms of the Sikh community ensured.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Those who claim asylum in the UK as third country applicants are currently waiting up to two or even three years for a decision. *The Guardian* reported last week that the third country unit was massively overworked and understaffed. May we please have a debate on the very real human cost of Home Office understaffing for those who rely on these decisions?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady raises a very serious issue, and I encourage her to raise it directly with Ministers. She will be aware that the UK has a very generous commitment to helping refugees who seek asylum. She raises the effectiveness of the arrangements around administering those cases. It is right that she should take that up directly with the Home Office. If she wants to write to me after business questions, I can raise it with them on her behalf.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): May we please have a debate on the application of section 4 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991? I understand that Ministers come and go, and that the Government are in a permanent state of reshuffle, but I personally do not think it is right that those who are sacked or forced to resign because of serious allegations get a five-figure pay-off funded by the taxpayer.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. I encourage him to raise it in a written question, so he can get a specific answer to his point.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Earlier this week, I received a letter from Father Liam McMahon, who is the parish priest at St Michael's on Gallowgate in Parkhead. Like many other ministers and those in the clergy, he is concerned about the changes to tier 5 religious worker visas. May we have a debate in Government time about early-day motion 2362, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), to ensure that the Home Office reverses these retrograde plans that will disproportionately impact parishes right across the United Kingdom?

[That this House notes with concern the decision of the Home Office to remove Ministers of Religion from the eligibility criteria for tier 5 entry visas to the UK; further notes the widespread disappointment about this decision felt by Churches and other faith communities which have previously been able to invite religious ministers from overseas, and particularly developing countries, to provide supply cover for religious services over the coming months; believes this will have a negative effect on the ability of priests and ministers in the UK to take a break over the summer, on faith communities who may experience reduced worship schedules, and on the supply ministers who have used the opportunity to gain experience in the UK and earn some additional income before returning to their home country; and calls on the Home Secretary to meet with representatives of faith communities to listen to their concerns and urgently review his Department's policy decision.]

I know the Leader of the House is sympathetic and a practising Christian. Will she be a voice in Government to U-turn on this ridiculous decision by the Home Office that will affect parishes all across these islands?

Andrea Leadsom: This issue has been raised a couple of times. Of course, we want to be able to facilitate visits by religious leaders around the world to talk to parishes here in the United Kingdom. There are arrangements—I am struggling to remember, but I think they can apply under tier 2 visa arrangements and that there are some pauses in place to ensure that those visas remain temporary. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman seeks an Adjournment debate, so that Ministers can set out for him precisely how visitors can apply for visas.

Buildings with ACM Cladding

12.3 pm

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the remediation of private sector residential buildings with aluminium composite material cladding.

In the wake of the tragic Grenfell Tower fire, the Government acted urgently to address the serious fire and public safety risks exposed by the tragedy. Throughout, the safety of residents has remained our priority. We have from the outset sought expert advice, which together with our own testing programme has highlighted the unparalleled fire risk posed by ACM cladding of the type believed to be present on Grenfell Tower. The Government are clear that the type of ACM cladding believed to be on Grenfell Tower, and present on hundreds of other high-rise buildings, is not safe. This type of ACM is exceptional owing to the high risk it poses as an accelerant of fire. It did not comply with building regulations and should never have been put up.

For many years, building regulations have included a requirement that exterior walls be constructed to resist the spread of fire. Since the Grenfell tragedy, we have taken action to put that beyond doubt. We have amended the law to explicitly ban combustible materials from use in the exterior walls of all high-rise residential buildings, as well as in hospitals, residential care premises, dormitories in boarding schools, and student accommodation over 18 metres. That ban applies to all new buildings in these categories and to those buildings when major works to the exterior walls take place. The long-standing requirement that exterior walls should adequately resist the spread of fire continues to apply to all other high-rise buildings, including commercial buildings, being developed or undergoing major works to exterior walls.

With the support of local authorities and fire and rescue services, we have identified a total of 433 high-rise residential and other buildings with unsafe ACM cladding. All these buildings have been assessed by fire and rescue services and interim safety measures are in place where necessary, and these measures are kept under review by fire and rescue services, but we recognise that residents will have true peace of mind only when unsafe cladding has been removed and replaced with safe materials. In those buildings owned by local authorities and housing associations, we are making strong progress. We have made £400 million available to pay for the remediation of ACM cladding, and remediation has started or been completed in 87% of social sector buildings, with plans and commitments in place to remediate all remaining buildings.

We have also seen some progress in the private sector. Some building owners have acted swiftly and responsibly to put plans in place for full remediation of the cladding on their buildings and committed to protecting leaseholders from bearing the costs. This progress has been supported by the work of a remediation taskforce chaired by Ministers. In addition, where necessary, the Government are supporting local authorities to use their enforcement powers to ensure that building owners take the required action.

That said, too many building owners have failed to take responsibility. Many building owners have been too slow to co-operate to enable the prompt identification

of buildings with unsafe ACM cladding and have since dragged their feet in planning for remediation. The result is that, almost two years on from the Grenfell tragedy, an unacceptable number of residents are still living in buildings that, while benefitting from additional safety measures in the interim, will not be remediated fully within an acceptable timescale.

Moreover, many leaseholders face unfair, and often substantial, costs. The Government believe this to be completely unacceptable. Leaseholders find themselves in this position through no fault of their own, and this is not morally defensible. The Housing Minister, my officials and I have all met residents affected by these issues and heard their personal concerns. We all appreciate their anguish and we pay tribute to their resilience and strength. I also want to acknowledge the continued work of Grenfell United, the UK Cladding Action Group and others. Many people told us they lived in constant fear—fear for the safety of their home; fear of the possibility of having to find tens of thousands of pounds for remediation; fear that they could no longer sell their properties and may have to forfeit them if costs are not met.

Where building owners have failed to step up, it is now imperative that the Government act. We must ensure the long-term safety of the people living in these buildings. The Government are therefore announcing today a new fund to unblock progress in remediating private sector high-rise residential buildings. First and foremost, this fund is about public safety. It will allow remediation to happen quickly, restore peace of mind and allow residents living in these blocks to get on with their lives. It will also protect leaseholders from bearing the cost. Building owners or those responsible for fire safety should prioritise getting on with the work necessary to make their buildings permanently safe. The new fund, which is estimated at £200 million, will cover the full cost of remediating the unsafe ACM cladding systems in privately owned high-rise residential buildings. This funding is being provided entirely for the benefit of the leaseholders in the buildings.

Important reforms of leasehold and implementing the Hackitt review's recommendations on the safety of high-rise residential buildings are already in train. I will update the House on implementation in the coming weeks. When the new system is in place, it will help to prevent leaseholders from being confronted with unaffordable one-off charges.

Several developers and freeholders have already agreed to fund the costs of remediation and not to pass them on to leaseholders. Many of them have already agreed to maintain their commitment. The owners or developers who have made those commitments include Taylor Wimpey, Legal & General, Mace Group, Lendlease, Barratt Developments and Aberdeen Standard Investments. I commend them for the responsible and moral position that they have taken.

The fund does not absolve industry from taking responsibility for the failures that led to the ACM being wrongly put on buildings. As a condition of funding, we will stipulate that building owners must pursue warranty and insurance claims and any appropriate action against those responsible for putting unsafe cladding on the buildings, with moneys to be repaid to the Government.

We will write to all potential fund applicants by the end of next week to start engaging them in preparation for formal applications. We will also make funding

conditional on the building owner or responsible person agreeing a contract to start remediation works within a set period. We will provide further details on the application process; I urge those who intend to apply to start developing ACM remediation proposals and costings so that applications can be made and processed promptly.

Everyone has a right to feel safe in their home. We want to see building owners acting to ensure that unsafe ACM is replaced without delay. That is why we are taking this exceptional step today. I commend this statement to the House.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. His announcement is welcome and needed; most important, it should start to relieve the worry of the thousands of people who live day and night in a high-rise block that they know is unsafe. But why on earth have they had to wait for nearly two years? For two years they have had their lives on hold. How long will the thousands more who live in tower blocks with suspect non-ACM cladding have to wait for Government action?

Like the Secretary of State, I pay tribute to those who, with Labour, have campaigned hard for the Government to act: Grenfell United, the UK Cladding Action Group, the Manchester Cladators, *Inside Housing* and hon. Members on both sides of the House. But after the solemn pledges made by the Prime Minister and other Ministers in the aftermath of the terrible Grenfell Tower fire, who would have thought that nearly two years later there would still be Grenfell residents in hotels and temporary accommodation, not permanent homes; that Grenfell-type cladding would still not have been replaced in almost eight in 10 blocks; that in over half of them, no work would have started at all; and that no comprehensive testing programme would have been done on the estimated 1,700 high-rise or high-risk buildings with dangerous non-ACM cladding? The Secretary of State says that the Government acted urgently. The sorry truth is that in the face of these post-Grenfell problems, the Government have been frozen like a rabbit in the headlights—too weak and too slow to act at every stage and on every front.

On the detail of the Secretary of State's announcement, is the £200 million new money from the Treasury to his Department, or will it be taken from other housing programmes? Is the fund simply a bail-out for block owners and developers who will not do their duty to replace dangerous cladding? How will he ensure that they pursue liability claims and repay the public purse? Will he consider emergency legislation to make block owners actually do this work and pay for it?

Is the fund enough? Per block, it seems to be only half the funding announced last year for the social sector. The Secretary of State says that the fund will cover the costs for 170 privately owned blocks that have Grenfell-style ACM cladding. Will he fund the costs for other blocks that are found to have similarly dangerous non-ACM cladding?

I have to tell the Secretary of State that warm words and fresh funding will mean very little to worried residents unless they know that the dangerous cladding on all blocks will be removed and replaced, and that as leaseholders they will not pick up the bill. Will he now set a hard deadline for that work, so that every block and every resident can be made safe?

James Brokenshire: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support for our announcement. It is right that the Government have acted, but I underline the fact that the primary responsibility rests and rested with the building owners and with those responsible. We have now stepped in because of the failures we have seen in the private sector, although we acknowledge and recognise the many building owners and developers who have done the right thing by stepping up and agreeing to provide or maintain funding to address the need for remediation.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about urgency and timing. We did act with urgency in terms of the advice given. Indeed, I indicated in my statement the challenges in identifying some of the blocks affected and the work that was done at pace with local authorities. In some cases, local authorities had to take enforcement action to enable us to survey and identify those buildings, working with the relevant fire authorities, to which I pay tribute for their analysis and advice, and with the expert panel that was set up to advise Ministers.

The right hon. Gentleman asked several questions about the nature and manner of my announcement. One question was about non-ACM cladding systems. He will know that a testing programme is under way to assess non-ACM systems. That work is already happening. Advice was provided by the expert panel in December 2017 and updated in December 2018. That has been the focus, but clearly we will act on information and evidence provided as a consequence of the further testing programme. However, I urge the right hon. Gentleman to be careful not to prejudge the outcome or the results that we expect in the weeks ahead.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about funding. We intend to manage funding for the policy through our existing significant programme budgets. To put that in context, if the full amount were used, it would represent something like 3% of this year's financial programming. We will keep the House updated through the supplementary estimate. The size of the new fund is informed by the public sector fund's utilisation and drawdown, by the financial support that has been provided by some of the developers and builders, and by the insurance that has been activated for a number of the buildings.

With respect to the follow-through, clearly we want action to be taken to continue with liability claims. That process will be managed as we work with each of the building owners. As I indicated, we intend to start the process by the end of next week, by writing to the owners of the buildings that have been identified based on the information that we have.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman asked about legislation. We have supported local authorities in their enforcement activity through the joint inspection team. We remain ready, willing and able to support local authorities in the enforcement activity that they may determine to be necessary, and we are clarifying rules, regulations and guidance to assist them in that regard.

Let me say to the right hon. Gentleman, however, that I am very clear about the fact that the current regulatory regime needs further significant change. That is why the Hackitt review was undertaken in the first place. In her report, Dame Judith Hackitt presented a very stark picture of the need for responsibility, for tougher sanctions and, indeed, for different regulatory

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arrangements. I propose to update the House on next steps in the coming weeks, because I hear that message very clearly, and I intend to act.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and thank both him and the Minister of State. I know that achieving this result has required significant legal complexities to be overcome, and I appreciate the fact that the Government have listened. This will come as a great relief to the residents of Northpoint, in my constituency, who, along with many others, have suffered stress as well as financial loss.

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the fund will cover all cladding systems which include ACM cladding? As he knows, some cladding systems consist of a mixture of ACM and other forms of cladding, and it is obviously right for all systems to be subject to this protection.

James Brokenshire: I commend my hon. Friend for his strenuous efforts on behalf of his constituents in relation to Northpoint. I understand the issue that he has highlighted. The fund is intended to provide capital support for the removal of ACM cladding systems, including insulation, as well as the removal and disposal of existing cladding, replacement materials and labour. As part of the process of writing to building owners and of the subsequent work, we will specify that in greater detail to give reassurance.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me advance sight of his statement. Any announcement of help for those affected by the Grenfell tragedy, directly or indirectly, must of course be welcomed, but as the second anniversary of the tragedy approaches, it is incredible that the public and MPs are still having to push for that help.

The first thing to establish is whether the fund will be enough to help those affected. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the £200 million that has been released will pay for work on all private towers, or are the reports that it will not be enough correct?

The replacement work has been described by the UK Cladding Action Group as a "cladding lottery", because it only covers ACM panels of the type that helped to spread the fire at Grenfell. Combustible non-ACM cladding, and other fire safety problems such as faulty or missing fire breaks in wall systems, will not be covered. What additional action can the Secretary of State promise affected residents to ensure that these safety measures are completed in a full and joined-up manner?

People have reported losing their life savings on interim measures, being forced to delay starting a family because of the financial uncertainty or turning to drink or drugs, along with serious mental health issues. Does the Secretary of State believe it is acceptable that freeholders and developers have been allowed to simply refuse to pay to make their buildings safe, and does he believe that if changes to the law are required to force them to take their responsibilities seriously, the Government will give that serious consideration?

James Brokenshire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming my announcement. I should, for his sake, make it clear that this applies only in England, because,

as he knows, responsibility for housing policy and building regulations is a devolved matter.

I have already responded to some of the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised. As I have said, the £200 million represents an estimate of the cost, based on the existing experience of remediation—some of the work that has already been done—and taking account of instances in which developers, or insurance, are already in place. It is there to provide capital support. It is because of the need for urgency that we are taking steps to ensure, as a priority, that there is no need to rely on interim measures, because of both the nature and the cost of such measures.

I absolutely endorse the hon. Gentleman's broader point about the need for developers and freeholders to stand up and do the right thing: I have stated that very plainly on a number of occasions, and I am hugely frustrated by the action—of lack of action—on the part of a number of those involved. He asked about changes in the law; that issue clearly flows from the Hackitt review, and, as I have said, I will update the House.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): I welcome the statement, but does the Secretary of State share my concern about the difficulties that the Department has had to surmount in order to be in a position to make such a statement, and about the fact that it was necessary in the first place? As he has said, many in the industry have acted responsibly and swiftly, but too many have not. May I encourage him, as he finishes—quickly, I hope—the work involved in responding to the Hackitt review, to apply that learning—the experience of just how difficult it has been for him and his Department to put this programme together—and to reflect in his response the fact that many residents have the same issues, day in day out, with the owners of the buildings in which they live? We should all bear in mind that while those owners are quite happy to take the gains that come with owning a building, they must also take the responsibilities that it brings.

James Brokenshire: I entirely agree with the points that my right hon. Friend has made. I think that she senses my real frustration and, indeed, anger at some of the practice that I have seen. We are taking this exceptional step because of the nature of the material with which we are dealing, but it has also shone a light on some of the wrongful and damaging practice that is out there, including practice in the construction industry. We are continuing to pursue those issues, and will follow through on them in our response to the Hackitt review.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): I very much welcome the money, although I have to say that the Department's idea of urgency is not quite the same as mine, two years after Grenfell. I think that the Secretary of State was wise to make his statement just under the wire, before the second anniversary of that disaster. If he will be writing to owners in the next week or so, he presumably already knows what steps he will be asking them to take to comply with the requirement to seek compensation from those who installed the cladding when that is possible. If he knows what steps will be taken, will he share that information with us, and will he also tell us who will decide whether those steps are sufficient?

James Brokenshire: In the case of an individual building, it will be up to the owners to set out what steps will be required. Obviously we will inform them of the nature

of the information that we require about, for instance, assessments and the various bids and tenders that we would expect to have been undertaken. The differences between individual buildings, the nature of the system and the extent of the ACM cladding on each building have been very much in our minds in relation to the operation of the public sector fund, and we will apply that experience to the operation of the new scheme. However, I understand that sense of the need for continued pace, given that where substantial works are required, planning permissions will be needed, and given the nature of some of the construction work that will be necessary. It is precisely that work in which we will be engaged.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I think my right hon. Friend is properly fulfilling the words that he uttered on 30 April 2018, when he said that leaseholders would not be left in the lurch. Members in all parts of the House will be grateful for that.

We fully understand why the Minister of State was unable to make a statement of this kind yesterday, at a meeting which was chaired by the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and attended by members of the UK Cladding Action Group and many other experts. I hope that what was said at that meeting will be passed on to the Department, because it is important for us to continue to make progress, and we are grateful for the lead that my right hon. Friend has given.

Let me also say to my right hon. Friend that it is vital that he, and his permanent secretary, acknowledge the role of those at Leasehold Knowledge Partnership, who were the first to identify the fact that there was no simple solution. It was they who caused the Government to ask the Law Commission to look into the problems of leasehold. I ask him to ensure that his officials and LEASE, the Government's Leasehold Advisory Service, respect Martin Boyd and Sebastian O'Kelly, without whom no Member of Parliament would have been able to get as far as we have, together, across the Chamber.

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend rightly points out the contribution of many people in the steps that have been taken and in providing the essential technical and other information to inform and assist in the taking of robust action where required, and we will continue to engage in that. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend: he has been a passionate advocate of the rights of leaseholders and others across the House, and that pressure and contribution has helped to make a difference.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): This bail-out for unscrupulous freeholders and developers is welcome, especially to leaseholders like mine at New Providence Wharf, so I thank the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues for the money, as will the UK Cladding Action Group, the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership mentioned by the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) and *Inside Housing*—this statement probably guarantees the Secretary of State a splash front page in its next issue, which can't do him any harm. The steps the Government have had to take show the weaknesses of the unregulated leasehold sector. Can the Secretary of State confirm that his Department will redouble its efforts to fulfil the promises of comprehensive leasehold reform as soon as possible?

James Brokenshire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and for his campaigning on these issues of fire safety, as well as on leasehold, over many months. Regardless of whether I look forward to coverage in *Inside Housing*, I recognise the work it has done in assisting and helping to shine a light on a number of these factors. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are programmes of work by the Law Society and other agencies, and the Law Commission's overarching work on leasehold is a separate programme that we intend to continue. We will continue to engage with the hon. Gentleman and others in relation to progress on that.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the Secretary of State explain how this welcome scheme will work in a couple of respects? Is the list of 433 vulnerable buildings going to be published? How will those who might be living in a building where no work has been done be able to access the scheme, and will any of the money be recoverable from the freeholders who refuse to do the work of their own volition?

James Brokenshire: We are aware of all the survey work and other steps that local government has been involved in, and I pay tribute to local councillors for their active engagement, alongside fire authorities, in enabling us to arrive at this position. As I have said, we want claims to continue to be made against those with responsibility and liability, whether through warranty claims or insurance, and to see that moneys are repaid. There are 175 private residential buildings and 159 social residential buildings where ACM cladding has been identified, and steps and interim measures will be in place to give assurance now. We will continue to engage with the authorities and building owners as we make progress in this regard.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Last March six buildings in the centre of Leeds were identified as still having dangerous ACM cladding. The freeholders of some of them have announced they would meet the cost, but for constituents of mine who live in buildings where that commitment has not been given, today's announcement will be very welcome, and I thank the Secretary of State for it. Can he clarify the following two points? First, will freeholders who have said they will pay for the work but have not begun it be eligible for the funding? Secondly, as the Secretary of State will be aware, many people have for months and months been paying the cost of waking watches, and those who have been most heavily penalised are those with freeholders who have not lived up to their responsibilities, which is why they are still paying for a waking watch. Who does the Secretary of State think ought to meet those costs? In my view, speaking on behalf of my constituents it should not be them, as this is an unjustifiable expense which is not their fault.

James Brokenshire: The right hon. Gentleman will have heard me say previously where I think moral responsibility lies. It should not be leaseholders who pick up the cost, which is why I am making the statement today in relation to the capital costs and making progress so that waking watches and other interim measures are minimised and foreshortened. On the question of freeholders, in essence the scheme is available to all private sector buildings that fall within its remit, potentially including those where commitments have already been

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made, but, as I have said, a number of those developers and building owners have said that, notwithstanding that, they maintain their commitment and we are trying to keep this simple and make sure we meet all legal requirements so that there is swift progress.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and his work and that of the Minister for Housing in securing this fund. This was a tough decision, but it is the right decision, and it seems to have gone even further than the Select Committee recommendation of a low-interest loan. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this is a grant rather than a loan and in no circumstances is it repayable by the long leaseholders?

James Brokenshire: I can give my hon. Friend that confirmation, and I pay tribute to him for his steadfast work on the Select Committee and outside in championing these issues. I also join him in paying tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing who has also been steadfast in advancing the issues of concern. We looked at questions such as whether a loan arrangement could work but ultimately, given the complexity, the time that would have been involved and the need for all sorts of different consents, and given that my priority is providing a sense of assurance for leaseholders and getting on with this, we decided to adopt this structure.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his announcement. We in Tower Hamlets have among the highest number of ACM-cladded blocks so it is very welcome, but it has taken two years and people fighting tooth and nail to get here, particularly the campaign groups as well as Members across the House. Although the amount of money is welcome, does the Secretary of State believe that it is adequate to cover the number of properties affected, and will he today commit to look at the 1,700 high-rise and high-risk blocks with dangerous non-ACM cladding so that their residents can sleep at night in peace without having to campaign for a further two years for us to get to this point again? I welcome the work of the Secretary of State and the Minister but we need urgent action on those outstanding properties too.

James Brokenshire: As I have indicated, through the inputs of the expert panel in relation to non-ACM systems, we have already provided advice to building owners, which was refreshed again last December. We have the testing programme that has commenced and we are looking at the results carefully. I do highlight the exceptional nature of the ACM material and the advice we have seen that underlines the exceptional steps I am taking today. I do understand the frustration, strain and stress that so many people living in these blocks have felt and continue to feel. On costs, we have assessed this on the basis of commitments, insurance and the experience in relation to the public sector fund, so it has been judged carefully but we keep it under review.

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. It is good news for the residents of Heysmoor Heights in Liverpool, a block owned by the offshore Abacus Land 4, where

the work has been done but residents have been charged for it. Will the Secretary of State ensure the residents are reimbursed for the amounts they have paid and that any debts some have accrued because they have been unable to pay are wiped off?

James Brokenshire: I hope that I can give some reassurance to the hon. Lady. The scheme is intended to cover situations where remediation work to remove ACM cladding and replace it has already been done but those costs have been passed on to the leaseholders. That is why I made the point that this issue is about public safety but also the residents or leaseholders themselves. I hope that gives reassurance, but I and the Minister for Housing will be happy to remain in contact with the hon. Lady to ensure that the information is properly provided and we see that followed through.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State clarify whether this money is being made available to compensate those freeholders who wilfully refuse to spend money on remedial action to remove ACM cladding unless they are compensated for the leaseholders' share of the cost of carrying out the work? In other words, are we compensating the worst actors in this situation?

James Brokenshire: It is worth explaining to the hon. Gentleman that, as a matter of law, responsibility and liability effectively fall on the leaseholders themselves—court cases have demonstrated this—and the aim of this scheme is to protect those leaseholders. We want to ensure that we make progress and deal with the public safety issues that I have already described. Yes, we are obviously working with those building owners as a point of contact, but that does not in any way cut against the other points that I have made about those who are responsible, about liability, about insurance and about other factors, which we are obviously building within the scheme as well.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I welcome this announcement and echo the words of support that the Secretary of State has expressed for Grenfell United, the UK Cladding Action Group and others who have campaigned on this issue. Will he clarify one point in relation to his statement? He said that the funding would be conditional on the building owner

"agreeing a contract to start remediation works within a set period."

Can he say what that set period will be? Can he also tell us what will happen if they do not do it within that set period? Would he perhaps be willing to name and shame those who are unwilling to take their responsibilities seriously?

James Brokenshire: I entirely understand the right hon. Gentleman's point. He has expressed the frustration that so many of us feel. There are companies that have done the right thing, and I have named a number of companies that are still fulfilling and standing up behind the commitments that they have already made. Equally, however, there are those that have not done so. He asked about the condition. We are trying to find a way of acting as a lever or catalyst. We can say, "Okay, you have made an application and accepted those works, but we need to have a means of staying in contact to get an update to ensure that the work is actually being

done.” From me, what matters is seeing that the action is followed through and fulfilled. It is difficult to give the right hon. Gentleman a set period, because of the different nature of the works required on each building. Different cases will require different works, but the purpose behind the condition is to ensure that those buildings are remediated.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am not sure that the Secretary of State responded to the last question that the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), asked him, which was whether there was a hard deadline by which all the work had to be done and all the cladding removed from private and social buildings. If there is no such deadline, why not?

James Brokenshire: I thought I had responded to the question on timing. We know from experience that the remediation and construction works could take many months in some cases, so it is difficult to set a specific period. Each building and each set of circumstances will be different, and the nature of the works required will therefore be different in each case. However, if the hon. Lady is saying that we need to act at pace and with a sense of urgency, I entirely agree with her. That is why we have sought to construct the scheme in this way, and we will follow through to ensure that action is taken.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): It is almost two years since the horrifying and deadly Grenfell Tower fire, and I find it unacceptable that almost eight in 10 of the other blocks across our country identified as having Grenfell-style cladding have not had it removed and replaced. Why have the Government taken so long to act, after their solemn promise to the nation? Will the Secretary of State now set a deadline by which all blocks have to be made safe? And importantly, if this money is to come from the existing budget, will he tell us what the Government will not be doing?

James Brokenshire: On the latter point, I have already indicated how we intend to manage this, and we will keep the House updated through the normal supplementary estimates process. The hon. Gentleman talks about his frustration—it is also my frustration—that so many private sector freeholders have just not acted. We needed to take action to identify the enforcement action that councils needed to take to determine whether the material was on those buildings. I understand his frustration and the strain that this has placed on so many people living in those blocks. That is why we have taken this exceptional action today; ultimately, the responsibility should reside with the building owners to take the steps that they have failed to take thus far. I judge that today’s action is absolutely necessary because of the pace that we have not seen from them.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Public safety should always come first, and the Secretary of State’s announcement today is welcome indeed, but why is it that, two years on from the Grenfell Tower tragedy and despite the assurances given at the time, not one single penny has been forthcoming to make safe the 213 tower blocks in Birmingham and their 10,000 households? Crucially, this is despite the fact that work has been recommended by the West Midlands fire service

on the installation of sprinklers. Will the Secretary of State do what he has quite rightly done in relation to the residents of private tower blocks, and will he agree to meet a delegation of Birmingham tenants from those 213 council tower blocks?

James Brokenshire: I would underline the support that we have given to public sector buildings, the £400 million fund that was committed last year and the progress that is being made on the removal of ACM cladding from buildings on the public sector estate. We are learning from that process in terms of the implementation and the steps that I am announcing today. The hon. Gentleman highlights broader fire safety measures, and building owners obviously have responsibilities in that regard. I note that he has raised the issue of sprinklers the past. We are looking at that in the context of new buildings through what is known as approved document B. Sprinklers can clearly be effective in number of cases, and we have worked with councils and others to discuss funding flexibilities to deliver on that.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I find it very difficult to squeeze out a thank you for this statement. What a mess this has been! What a rotten time people have had! For two years, many people in this country have had a miserable existence, not knowing what will happen and not knowing how much debt they are getting into or whether they will be able to repay what they have borrowed. When we google “building regulations”, up pops the Department. This Government are shilly-shallying. I do not have one of these buildings in my constituency, but we have them in Yorkshire. The fact is that this Government have looked for scapegoats all the time. They blame the construction industry, the local authorities and the freeholders. The Secretary of State has been doing it this morning. All those people thought they were complying with building regulations; they thought they were complying with the law as it stood. Then we had the dreadful disaster of Grenfell and of course the door opened to disputes. The lawyers came in, and that is always bad news. Ordinary working people have suffered for two years, and the Secretary of State does not get much credit from me this morning.

James Brokenshire: I absolutely understand the pressure and strain that so many people have felt they were under, but actually we have taken steps to work with fire authorities and local authorities in this regard. The hon. Gentleman makes a number of assertions, and he almost seems to suggest that those who wrongly put up this ACM material in the first place and who have wrongly failed to act have no responsibility at all. I encourage him to read the Hackitt review. Yes, it sets out in great detail where the law needs to be changed, and I have accepted that. I have said that we will take further steps that regard, but there is equally responsibility placed on the construction sector and the private sector. I strongly encourage him to read that report.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): This announcement is long overdue, but it is nevertheless welcome. On a number of affected sites in my constituency, such as the Durkan-owned Babbage Point development in west Greenwich, the building owner has the necessary planning permission but is dragging their feet, with the significant cost of a permanent waking watch being

[Matthew Pennycook]

passed on to leaseholders. I noted what the Secretary of State said about the funding being conditional on works beginning within a set period, but may I press him on the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn)? What more is the Secretary of State willing to do beyond to appeals to morality to ensure that private building owners, not leaseholders, bear the full cost of the interim fire safety measures that have been necessary, in many cases, because building owners have not acted promptly?

James Brokenshire: The key thing is obviously to make quick progress, and I note what the hon. Gentleman says about that building. Part of the response involves continuing to work with local authorities on enforcement action where different building owners are not taking the steps they should in a timely fashion. I will certainly be interested to receive any more details on that specific case. There are legal liabilities regarding where responsibilities rest, but I want to see progress being made quickly. If there are examples of building owners dragging their feet, we want to hear about them so that that we can work with local authorities to see that action is taken.

Backbench Business

Acquired Brain Injury

12.51 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes the report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on acquired brain injury and supports its conclusions; and urges the Government to work through all of its departments to ensure that those who have sustained brain injuries are guaranteed full neuro-rehabilitation as needed.

I rise to speak in support of the motion in my name and those of my hon. Friends, including those on the other side of the House—I see the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) taking his place now.

Sometimes a brain injury is really obvious—jagged bone where the skull has been fractured or penetrated—but often the sheer force of the soft tissue colliding at speed against the hard inside of the skull bruises the brain, leading to a contusion or a haemorrhage that is outwardly invisible. Likewise, blunt trauma, where the head smashes into a windscreen or the road, means that the brain is pulled away from the opposite side of the skull, leading to even worse damage. The same can happen on the rugby, football, or hockey field, in the boxing ring and on the racecourse. Repeated incidents, even minor ones, can lead to chronic traumatic encephalopathy or what is often known as “punch drunk syndrome”.

Injuries can also be caused by stroke, tumours, infection, carbon monoxide exposure and hypoxia—oxygen starvation. These are hidden injuries with complex and fluctuating life-changing effects that strike close to the heart of what it is to be human, to be conscious, to be alive and, in many cases, to want to be alive.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I am sorry that I cannot stay for the whole debate but, prompted by my hon. Friend’s excellent work in this area, I recently visited the Second Chance Headway Centre in Wakefield, which supports people with brain injuries. I was struck by the spectrum of conditions that the centre deals with and by the dedication of its wonderful staff and volunteers. I encourage all Members to visit a Headway centre in their constituency, and I want to make the House aware that it operates a free helpline, which is driven by nurses, that people can call for advice.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that many Members in the Chamber today and others, including Ministers who are unable to participate in the debate due to their ministerial responsibilities, have also visited Headway groups in their constituencies. I have been to the group in Cardiff, which does a magnificent job. This is also about those who work in the NHS and alongside many of the voluntary organisations that do magnificent work. For many people, the work is thoroughly rewarding, because somebody can be taken from complete dependency on others to needing much less frequent support through neuro-rehabilitation, enabling them to stand on their own two feet and have the quality of life that they had before.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend commend the vocational rehabilitation provided to 10 of my constituents by Momentum Skills in Newcastle? The organisation asked me to pass on its massive support for the “Time for Change” report and its recommendations.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend has done a lot in this field herself. She has met with that group, which has been to see us here in Parliament, and I hope that they will be taking part in our lobbying event in a couple of weeks. Next week is Brain Injury Awareness Week, which is why this is such a timely debate. Tomorrow, I am going with the hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) to visit the National Star College outside Cheltenham, which does an awful lot of work.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning the damage that long-term exposure to carbon monoxide can have on the brain. He knows that I was one of those who organised the seatbelt legislation 25 years ago. One of the really worrying things that the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety found last week is that we are getting relaxed and that people are beginning not to wear seatbelts and not to put their children in vehicle restraints. If that continues, people are in terrible danger of serious brain injury or death.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One reason why carbon monoxide exposure matters so much to me is because it involves an element of social justice. Children from poorer backgrounds are four times as likely to have a significant brain injury before the age of five as those from wealthier backgrounds. We do not fully understand why as yet, and we need to do more work on that. However, it is also true that elderly people, who maybe cannot afford to have their boiler checked as often as others or may have landlords who do not check their boilers as often as necessary, may be suffering low levels of carbon monoxide poisoning over such a long period that they are not even aware that they are being poisoned. The memory loss, the fatigue and the problems they are having may be associated with their boiler rather than with anything else. We need to look further at legislation in that area.

The thing about brain injury is that it is often internal and completely unseen. It can add a whole new layer of stigma because people can often misjudge a sufferer standing in a queue in front of them or coming to work with them as being drunk. However, the reason why the person is slurring is because they have had a brain injury. That is why I and others—I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Blaydon (Liz Twist) and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings—wanted to set up an all-party parliamentary group on acquired brain injury to look at the issue, which is a hidden epidemic. Every 90 seconds, someone in this country is admitted to hospital with an acquired brain injury.

The APPG produced a report because we wanted to see more evidence. The Select Committee on Health produced a report in 2001, and some of its recommendations were implemented, but many were not. We wanted to go further, so we produced the “Time for Change” report, which calls for real investment in neuro-rehabilitation. We have major trauma centres that have saved so many lives—I pay tribute to the Government for the brave decision to take them forward—but it is depressing that a quarter of trauma centres still have no neuro-rehabilitation consultant. That means that people sometimes fall between two stools when they leave the acute setting and go back to their home and to their community.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): A great friend of mine suffered a brain aneurysm, and she may not have survived were it not for the Royal London Hospital and its support. My hon. Friend makes a good point about the need for that wider specialism in other hospitals and for transition support to provide much-needed rehabilitation.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If there is one thing that I have learnt from my experience of melanoma this year—incidentally, the thing on the back of my head is not a brain injury; I am still getting over the melanoma being cut out—it is that I, as the patient, wanted to go to the real expert, and I would travel as far as I needed to do that. Sometimes in politics it is easy to join the bandwagon when people say, “No, everything’s got to be intensely local,” but the decision on major trauma centres was a brave one taken by this Government. The Conservatives are not a party that I support, but it was the right decision for saving people’s lives. We can now save people’s quality of life as well.

The APPG also called for proper return-to-school plans for every child with acquired brain injury, training for teachers, prison officers and benefits assessors, and proper protocols shared across all sports for concussion in sport.

The effects of a brain injury can be profound. Some sufferers have severely impaired physical mobility, and there can be major behavioural challenges. I have heard of patients losing all sense of inhibition, suddenly becoming tactless, using crude and abusive language, divulging private information and becoming impulsive, irritable and aggressive; or, on the opposite side, completely passive, unresponsive and lacking initiative. Others become obsessive, repeatedly checking their possessions or becoming profoundly self-centred.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. I have experienced some of the characteristics he mentions within my family—my auntie experienced a riding accident and my cousin experienced a motorcycle accident, and they both suffered brain shears. I also understand it from the experience of constituents.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although trauma centres are very successful in trying to get the right expertise in the right place, they are required throughout the UK? Outreach is also required for subsequent rehabilitation, especially in rural constituencies such as mine.

Chris Bryant: That is one of the key points that everyone on the all-party group wanted to make. It is all very well saving someone’s life but, because we have seen so many miracles done by good neuro-rehabilitation in the community, we need to make sure it is available where people live. Otherwise we are condemning people to a half-life existence when we could restore real quality of life—they might go back to work and be fully independent.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say it is a matter of getting social care to work with NHS and getting all the different organisations to work as a whole. That is why we hope that the Government—there are signs of this, but we would like to see more signs—will

[Chris Bryant]

not work in silos of departmental and organisational thinking. We have to think across the whole, because this affects nearly every Government Department.

Many patients lose their executive functions, so they find it next to impossible to plan, make decisions, monitor what they are doing or control their emotions—that can make it difficult even to cook for themselves. In particular, a brain injury to the frontal lobes during the teenage years, when that part of the brain is still developing, can turn a charming, ambitious and able young person into an out-of-control youngster. All too often, if the brain injury is missed or misunderstood, they get into trouble, they are excluded from school and they fall into the criminal justice system. I read Edward Timpson's report this week. It is an important piece of work, but it is a shame that it does not mention brain injury at any point. I will be writing to him about that to see whether it is another element that we need to address if we are to stop exclusions, which are currently so prevalent.

Even a minor brain injury can lead to headaches, dizziness, fatigue, depression, irritability and memory problems. Sometimes the effects last long after the injury, and sometimes they do not even appear until some time after the injury, which makes them particularly difficult to spot.

Partners and family members have a tough time, too. The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) will know from his own family how complicated it is to make sure that people get the support they need. Loved ones have the terrible fear of the unknown. What is going on inside their loved one's head? Will the anger and frustration they seem to be suffering get stronger, or will it ease off? How much will they be able to recover their former abilities and personality? And how hard will they have to struggle to get the support they need?

In too many instances, families and patients are being pushed from pillar to post when it comes to benefits. Listen to what happened to Jordan Bell, who had a motorcycle accident some six years ago, when he was 17. The accident left him in a coma for six weeks and in rehabilitation for six months before he went home. He had to learn to walk, talk, eat and socialise all over again. I am glad to say that he has made a remarkable recovery and is now a father, but he lives with significant, serious and completely unseeable impairments.

Jordan's father describes dealing with the welfare system as

“the most demoralising and depressing experience for us all.”

This is a professional family. The initial application for personal independence payment took six months, with interventions from the family's MP. David Bell writes:

“A year or so after our son's condition had improved we contacted the relevant department to advise them that he was in our judgement no longer entitled to some elements of the PIP. We were ‘quietly’ advised not to inform them of the changes at all, but as we are honest people we felt duty bound to inform them of our son's improvement. The advice given to us was correct; instead of adjusting the PIP in what would have been a sensible way the PIP was cut entirely. This then set in motion another six months of huge effort and stress and again the involvement of our MP to get the PIP reinstated. We eventually succeeded. But two years later it was reduced again to nothing.”

I cannot emphasise enough the stress this process puts on people with ABI.

One woman told me:

“I know I should use all my energy to try and get my brain back together. But I end up spending all my energy on forms”—filling in forms and fighting bureaucracy. An unresponsive, intransigent welfare system is effectively preventing people from healing. I beg Ministers to take this issue seriously and to make sure that all PIP advisers are trained in the fluctuating and unseeable nature of brain injury. After all, one common feature is that patients become over-keen to please people. Often, they will tell the assessor everything they think the assessor wants to hear, because that is part of the condition.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Notwithstanding what I will say later, in casework I find that a surprisingly high number of disability living allowance claimants are having the mobility element carved away as they move to PIP, perhaps because, as the hon. Gentleman says, they have exaggerated their ability to get from A to B or to move into work.

Chris Bryant: That specific point has not been raised with me in relation to brain injury because it is one of the seeable bits. It is the unseeable bits that are particularly difficult for PIP assessors and other assessors to get right, which is why it is important that they all have proper experience and training in assessing brain injury.

I do not want to take too much time because I know that many others want to speak, but I will refer to a few more elements, the first of which is the prisons system. All the latest research shows that a very high percentage of inmates, both male and female, have had a brain injury. One survey shows that 47% of inmates at Leeds Prison have had an ABI, and Huw Williams's work shows that more than 60% of prisoners at Exeter Prison have had a traumatic brain injury. In both surveys, the majority of injuries occurred before the prisoner's first offence, suggesting that the brain injury may be a key factor in why they offended in the first place. If we really want to tackle their reoffending, we will have to deal with their brain injury, too.

Research at HMP Send and HMP Drake Hall also finds that the most common way for women inmates to acquire brain injuries is through domestic violence—45% of injuries. Again, we may be criminalising people who are actually victims. We need to get this right. If we really want to tackle reoffending, we must do a better job of recognising and treating brain injury. That means screening all new prisoners, training prison staff, providing proper neuro-rehabilitation for all prisoners with a brain injury and making special provision for women that recognises the likely different causes of their injury—particularly domestic violence.

I will not say much about education, because I know other hon. Members will. The Government have been good in responding to our report in detail, but the section of their response with which I am most dissatisfied is on education. There is a hidden problem across our schools estate, and we will store up problems for the future if we do not take this issue seriously. In particular, I urge the Government to reconsider our recommendation that acquired brain injury should be included in the special educational needs and disability code of practice.

The final area is sport. I make it clear that sport is good for people's health, and I do not want to prevent anyone from taking part in sport. I do not want all our

sportspeople and youngsters to be mollycoddled and wrapped in cotton wool, but the record on sports concussion is shockingly bad, particularly in football. I am no football expert.

Paula Sherriff: You don't say.

Chris Bryant: All right. I am no expert, but I know about concussion in football. The last season has been especially bad. Mohamed Salah, Jan Vertonghen, David Ospina, Anthony Lopes and Fabian Schär have all been involved in high-profile, very dubious decisions by the on-pitch medics. UEFA rules since 2014 seem clear:

"In the event of suspected concussion, the referee stops the game to allow the injured player to be assessed by the team doctor. In principle this should take no more than three minutes, unless a serious incident requires the player to be treated on the field of play or immobilised on the field for immediate transfer to hospital".

Honestly, three minutes is nowhere near enough to be able to judge whether somebody has suffered a concussion or any other kind of brain injury. Moreover, FIFA, UEFA and the Football Association have different definitions of concussion and, unlike rugby—where it is now standard that a player should be off the pitch for 10 minutes and can be replaced—football allows no subs for concussion, so all the incentive is to get the player back on and playing as fast as possible and in less than three minutes.

Let me be very clear to the football authorities. Football is failing its players. It is giving a terrible message to youngsters, parents and amateur coaches. Those authorities are putting players' lives at risk. If they do not get their house in order, they will face massive class actions in the courts and we will have to legislate to protect players from what is, frankly, an industrial injury.

I want to end by talking about my own patch. I am delighted that south Wales will soon have a new major trauma centre at the University Hospital of Wales, but it would be cruel in the extreme to save people's lives without ensuring that we can guarantee their quality of life. So we must make sure that when the centre opens there are proper neuro-rehabilitation services in Wales and that there is continuity of care once people leave hospital.

There is another issue for us in south Wales. In 2009, Kyle Beere was a typical healthy, intelligent, active 12-year-old—a bit too interested in fishing for my liking, but none the less. That November, he suffered a massive brain haemorrhage that left him fighting for his life. With no paediatric rehabilitation service in Wales, Kyle had to travel to Surrey for treatment. He is grateful for his treatment and his family is working all God's hours to ensure that he gets all the support he needs. But I would dearly love there to be paediatric rehabilitation services in Wales.

Many medical miracles have been performed over the years, and I pay tribute to the doctors, nurses, scientists, pharmaceutical companies and staff who have constantly experimented and reviewed their work to see whether they can do more. I pay tribute to Chloe Hayward and everybody involved in the UK Acquired Brain Injury Forum. But we need a political miracle now.

The Health Committee produced a great report in 2001, but many of its recommendations have never been implemented. That cannot happen this time—please. We need a champion in Government to instil a real

sense of urgency into dealing with brain injury: someone who can bring together all the different Departments and make them work together to deliver a quality of life that is more than just a collection of vital functions. I dearly hope that that champion will be speaking from the Dispatch Box in a few minutes.

1.12 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and to endorse and amplify his remarks about the Minister. Many people achieve office in this House, but few are more deserving of that opportunity than the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy). We are delighted to have her with us today. We will be even more delighted when she answers some of the questions posed by the hon. Member for Rhondda and gives us an assurance that the Government will continue—for they have begun well—to take this subject seriously and will act on the recommendations in this excellent report, which would not have happened without the initiative, enterprise and energy of the hon. Gentleman. His commitment has been exemplary.

The work of the all-party parliamentary group on acquired brain injury is illustrative of this House doing what it does best: coming together, highlighting a subject, and bringing it to the attention of the wider world and of those who exercise power. We have, I believe, done a good job, but it is only the beginning of a journey. The destination we seek is our recommendations being enacted in full. Perhaps I am being a little ambitious, but at the very least the Government have taken a renewed and reinvigorated interest—I would not for a moment suggest that they were not interested already—in this subject, which affects so many people.

Perhaps that is the place to start. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the definition of brain injury, but I want to speak about the scale of the problem. The number of families affected by acquired brain injury, which, as the hon. Gentleman described, includes anything from traumatic events through to brain tumours, is immense. Hospital admissions for head injuries number 162,544—one every three minutes. ABI admissions have increased by 10% since 2005-06. Although men are 1.6 times more likely than women to be admitted for head injury, the incidence of female head injury has increased by 24% since 2005-06. Families across our nation and in all our constituencies are affected. The challenges are profound, for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman described.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I, too, welcome the report. May I add to my right hon. Friend's list what I have discovered in my constituency? Even babies can acquire brain injuries from contracting meningitis, or during childbirth. I hope he will join me in encouraging the Government to consider that issue as well.

Sir John Hayes: I will—very much so. I have been terribly unlucky, by the way, having suffered a severe head injury as a result of a road traffic accident and, like the hon. Member for Rhondda, contracted bacterial meningitis. We both speak with some authority on this subject.

The patterns that those families endure are similar, one to another. Initially, of course, there is shock—a sense of disbelief—and the question that most people pose in these circumstances: "Why me?" Then there is a

[*Sir John Hayes*]

gradual realisation of the depth and scale of the effects of acquired brain injury, and an unhappy initial concentration on what the person can no longer do, followed eventually by a reconcentration on what they can do. Most families follow that pattern when they suffer this kind of event, and that is why all that is done beyond the treatment of the initial trauma is so critically important.

Neuro-rehabilitation is vital because of the dynamic character of these conditions. Most people who acquire a brain injury will change. Many will recover fully and some will recover partly, but all that takes place over a long period and is particular to each case. There is an unpredictability about the effects of acquired brain injury; it can affect physical capacity of course, psychology and cerebral function, as well as personality. Families dealing with that must cope with those kinds of changes, which can be terribly frightening for the individuals concerned and those who love them. The point is that a difference can be made by the quality of care that they receive during that rather difficult journey.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I add one more category to those listed by my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant)? I am talking about service personnel who were blown up in Iraq and Afghanistan, some of whom, although apparently uninjured as a result of the great advances in vehicle technology that enabled them to survive improvised explosive devices, are believed to have been misdiagnosed with post-traumatic stress injury, when in reality they are suffering from mild traumatic brain injury. I believe that only two scanners in the whole country are capable of identifying mild TBI. There is not yet an adequate programme to make sure that the condition is discovered before irreparable damage is done.

Sir John Hayes: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that point. The hon. Member for Rhondda talked about the understanding that we need in the welfare system and the expertise that we need to acquire in dealing with the repercussions of a traumatic event. Often, misdiagnosis is part of that problem. Because of the characteristics of acquired brain injury that I described earlier—the changes in personality and the effect on cerebral function—misdiagnosis is all too easy. Part of our mission in bringing the all-party group's report to the House's attention, and doing so again in today's debate, is to get all of Government, including the Ministry of Defence, working together to understand the breadth and scale of the problem. That kind of intergovernmental approach is essential to the recommendations of our report, and I shall say more about it in my concluding remarks.

Before I do that, I wish to say a little about the difference between the initial responses to acquired brain injury, whether acquired through a traumatic event such as a road traffic accident—indeed, many are acquired that way, which is why so many young men are affected—or through the kind of illness that the hon. Member for Rhondda spoke about, such as a brain tumour, meningitis or some other disease. By and large, the initial response is, as is so often the case in the NHS, routinely excellent. People are treated quickly and highly effectively. It is what happens afterwards that is more variable in its effectiveness.

When people leave hospital, invariably having been treated extremely well by our superb NHS, whether their subsequent treatment is effective is a matter of some uncertainty. It can be, and often is; indeed I pay tribute to the good work of Headway—I am a patron of Headway Cambridgeshire and have been for many years—and the other organisations that play a part in supporting families, spreading understanding and sharing good practice, but it is to some degree a lottery. It is partly about where someone lives and how effective the local agencies are; it is partly about how well Government Departments and local government work together and how meaningfully they address some of the challenges that are the inevitable consequences of these kinds of injuries. The all-party group's report deals with them and the hon. Member for Rhondda highlighted some of them. There are educational effects and effects in the workplace and in socialisation; perhaps there is even the risk of criminality as a result of the consequences of a brain injury. It is the business of neuro-rehabilitation, which we emphasise so strongly in the report, that lies at the heart of what we believe the Government need to do to improve the outcomes for the people and families concerned.

When I was a Minister, which I was for a long time but not for long enough, many people in the House tell me—it is not for me to say, of course—I found that perhaps the greatest challenge Ministers face is in dealing with matters that cut across Departments. It has become almost routine to talk about Departments working in silos, but it is certainly true that the character of the vertical structure of the way we run Government and organise ministerial responsibilities makes it quite difficult for Departments to interact, or sometimes even to interface. On this subject, perhaps as much as on any subject that I know of, it is critical that Departments do just that. We speak in our report of the Departments concerned, and my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) mentioned another, the Ministry of Defence. I urge the Government to continue to explore how we can take a cross-departmental approach. We have had strong support from the Cabinet Office, but I hope that the Minister will take that further forward.

Mr Sheerman: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about cross-departmental working. I am obsessively concerned with road deaths and road injuries; does he accept that getting the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education and the Department for Transport together to push for proper head and brain protection for cyclists, motorcyclists and people who drive cars is very difficult?

Sir John Hayes: Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The hon. Member for Rhondda spoke of, for example, sports injuries. The response we have had from Departments has been mixed. It is certainly true that they have all responded, but it is fair to say that some have done so with greater enthusiasm and clarity than others. The convivial and collaborative nature of this debate forbids me from being more critical than that, but the Minister will want to look at those responses, as we have, and at how those Departments that have been rather slower to take their responsibilities seriously can be brought up to speed.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) is right that cross-departmental working is vital. It is important that we also look at local government and

other Government agencies and organisations. Given the breadth of local government responsibilities, of which housing is a good example as well as education, which the hon. Member for Rhondda spoke about and which is critical to our report, it is really important that local government is involved in this work, too. It is therefore not only a lateral challenge but about connecting the local approach to the national one.

Furthermore, it is important that we recognise the dynamic character of individual needs. Governments are quite good at disabilities that are fixed. People have dreadful things happen to them and either acquire disabilities or perhaps start life with disabilities, and the Government can be quite effective and the national health service is highly effective in dealing with those kinds of challenges, but dynamic disabilities are different again, because of course by its nature that dynamism means changing needs and that requires changing provision. It might be in respect of benefits—the hon. Member for Rhondda mentioned support for benefits—or simply a matter of providing additional resource to an individual to allow them to get back to work or to return to education. It might be a matter of ensuring that the teachers, employers and others associated with an individual are well equipped with an understanding of what that dynamic disability might mean and might lead to. It is vital that the Government appreciate that many people have changing circumstances that require a changed approach.

Others wish to contribute, so I shall end by highlighting some of the things we said in the report and to which we would like the Government to respond. First, simply raising awareness is vital, and I hope that the report and this debate have done that. Secondly, I have spoken about neuro-rehabilitation and the need for a joined-up approach across Government. Thirdly, I wish to amplify an excellent point made by the hon. Member for Rhondda about education: it is really important that acquired brain injury is included in the special educational needs and disability code of practice. Fourthly, in the justice system, it is vital that all agencies that work with young people—including schools, psychologists, psychiatrists, general practitioners and youth offending teams—should ensure that the needs of the brain injured are individually and carefully assessed.

I could highlight many other things—our recommendations are broad, and I hope deep, too—but I shall end by quoting G. K. Chesterton, who said:

“How you think when you lose determines how long it will be until you win.”

When someone loses as a result of an acquired brain injury perhaps some cerebral function or the ability to mix and work with other people, or has some permanent disability, how long it is before they again see themselves as someone with a chance to win can be determined by what we here do, and on how the Government allocate their time, energy and resources to fight for, care for and campaign for people so affected.

1.30 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): First, I congratulate my dear friend the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on securing today's debate.

Every year, an estimated 350,000 people are admitted to hospital in the UK as a direct result of an acquired brain injury; to put that figure into perspective, that is

one person every 90 seconds. Whether that is due to illness, accident or some other form of trauma, the severity of that injury and consequently the rehabilitation they require varies considerably. For those with severe brain injuries, the long-term issues can be vast, affecting their personality, relationships and behaviour. It is quite obvious that early diagnosis and better access to timely and effective rehabilitation will greatly improve a patient's chance of eventually regaining their independence, but it is essential that we also look at the wider long-term complications of acquired brain injury and particularly at the associated problems that patients face.

At a recent session of the all-party parliamentary group for gambling-related harm, I met George. Back in 2009, George was a typical 23-year-old young man with a bright future. He had a decent job, a supportive family and a strong network of friends. It was on a night out with those friends that his life changed forever. In an unprovoked attack outside the nightclub where he had been spending the evening, George was punched with such force that he suffered lasting trauma to the left side of his brain. After spending several weeks in a coma and months in hospital, George was left with significant psychological, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physical impairments.

As a result of the severity of his injuries and the complexity of his ongoing disabilities, George was eventually awarded significant compensation, but this only led him to further problems. A friend introduced George to online gambling, something he had no previous interest in, but he now had the time and the money. George very quickly became addicted, making frequent and significant deposits with a wide variety of online gambling platforms. The result is that George has lost all his compensation, as well as money obtained by taking out additional loans and credit cards. At one point, he gambled and lost—this is breathtaking—£67,000 in just 40 minutes. He is now at least £15,000 in debt and, with no income, has no hope of meeting these liabilities.

George is not alone. Research has identified that brain injury survivors are 27% more likely to develop problem gambling or addiction than the general population, and that risk is found particularly among people with frontal lobe damage. Headway, the brain injury association, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, is doing a fantastic job supporting people like George, but it has highlighted that much more needs to be done within the gambling industry to protect these vulnerable individuals.

Survivors of a brain injury are prone to impulsive behaviour, lacking in reasoning skills and often socially isolated. Add to this in some cases the fact that they are suddenly in possession of a large sum of money that they are not necessarily capable of controlling independently, and it is not difficult to see how quickly and easily addiction can develop. The gambling industry needs to offer more and to work alongside brain injury specialists to provide support for individuals. The Gambling Commission has said it will be strengthening the requirements of licences to better identify customers and make self-exclusion schemes more effective, but this is not enough on its own.

Brain injury survivors such as George have already suffered so much, with their bright futures indefinitely stolen from them because of the trauma or illness they have experienced. They continue to suffer daily from the lasting effects of their injury as well as the associated anxiety and emotional difficulties. From an early stage

[Carolyn Harris]

in George's addiction, the gambling platforms were made aware of his vulnerability, but despite this knowledge they continued to allow him to gamble on their sites, robbing him of his much needed compensation, which was intended to give him a stress-free existence after his injury. Brain injury survivors are vulnerable, and at the moment the gambling industry appears to be exploiting that vulnerability.

It is not just about gambling. The consequences of brain injury affect so many people in so many ways, and we have to start looking more closely at this issue. We need better diagnosis, better care, and rehabilitation support, and I am very pleased to be a vice-chair of the APPG on acquired brain injury that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda has established and chairs with such great passion, and I congratulate him.

1.35 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris).

I note and welcome the valuable work of the all-party parliamentary group on acquired brain injury, including its most recent report. I agree that Governments together need to lend their support and implement, where reasonably practicable and borne out by evidence, the measures that will bring about improved neuro-rehabilitation for those with acquired brain injury. About 1.4 million people in the UK are living with a brain injury. According to Headway Ayrshire and as has been mentioned, every 90 seconds someone in the UK is admitted to hospital with an acquired brain injury, and in 2016-17 some 1,816 people with a diagnosis related to acquired brain injury were admitted to hospital from the Ayrshire and Arran area within which my constituency lies. These are large figures and very worrying statistics.

It has been acknowledged that more persons are surviving trauma to the brain, which may occur after birth or because of disease, an accident, sport, military service or a criminal act. Let me stop for a moment on the question of accidents. Having spent 31 years in the fire service and attended numerous needless road accidents, I commend those who created, invented and install airbags—we have no measure of the number of brain injuries that they have prevented—and the Governments who introduced the compulsory wearing of seatbelts and of crash helmets. The number of people saved from accidents by that is wonderful. I will leave this hanging for a moment, but would it be possible and worth considering the compulsory wearing of safety helmets for cyclists? I am sure that that would reduce brain trauma injuries in the future.

Those people's survival is to be welcomed, although regrettably some could have a degree of disability and might have a different persona, which can prove difficult for all to cope with. The individual and their families undoubtedly need an informed and readily available bespoke support package. The onus is on us to enable these individuals to regain their dignity, which they so richly deserve, and to have an active role in our society, which is their society as well.

To date, rehabilitation provision for in-patients and those returning to the community appears to have been sadly lacking, or, when it is provided, of varying standards and not always in line with those narrated by the

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, NHS England's best practice tariff and the all-important person-centred rehabilitation prescriptions. Those prescriptions are so important to that individual, their family and their carers.

I support the desire for a specialist acquired brain injury rehabilitation consultant who would guide, oversee and co-ordinate matters. Oversight and co-ordination appear not to be as good as they could be. That is not to detract from the excellent work of charities mentioned in the Chamber this afternoon, such as Headway Ayrshire, which is part of Headway, the brain injury association, raising public awareness and working to improve life after brain injury by providing simple things like information on where people go for help. When someone puts their hand out for help, someone has to grasp it, and in many ways Headway does that, providing advice and support to the person, their family and their carers. Having previously sat on that charity's local board, I have seen for myself how it is able to benefit my constituents and many throughout the UK in other branches of Headway. I thank Headway—its staff, volunteers and those who raise money for it—and welcome the contribution and support it gives individuals.

In 2017, the Scottish Government's community justice funding enabled Supporting Offenders with Learning Difficulties, also known as SOLD. SOLD was able to assist those with alcohol-related and acquired brain injuries out of the dreadful cycle of reoffending. The prison community often does not understand these issues.

Sir John Hayes: The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) made an incredibly important contribution—as my hon. Friend is doing—highlighting that many people become involved in alcohol, gambling or some other pursuit, which would never have happened had they not had their brain injury. The Government need to look at that aspect of the issue, because the consequences of brain injury can be as unpredictable as that.

Bill Grant: I thank my right hon. Friend for that welcome intervention. It is easy to identify someone with a physical injury—the leg in plaster or the arm in a sling—but an injury to the brain is not visible, and we need to be aware of that.

Scotland has seen the development of a brain injury e-learning resource, created under the umbrella of the Scottish Acquired Brain Injury Network, with funding and technical support provided by the national services division of the NHS. Glasgow University's excellent Centre for Rehabilitation Engineering also undertakes work on the neuro-rehabilitation of hand and arm functions, neuropathic pain and the possibilities of retraining the central nervous system after spinal cord injury or a stroke. I should also mention a facility from which I benefited: the Douglas Grant rehabilitation centre, which is operated by NHS Ayrshire and Arran. The centre gives confidence back to people who have been subjected to brain injury or nervous system injury. It also gives them back their ability to find their own way in life, and great credit is due to the staff there.

As was mentioned earlier, the effect of sports injuries involving concussion is not quite fully understood, but it is better recognised, particularly in rugby, but such injuries can also happen in football. There has been

great success in football of late. Dare I mention Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool? Perhaps clubs should invest some of their money protecting their valuable players—not for today or tomorrow, but for later in their life—from the consequences they may suffer. Football still has some way to go on that front.

We may still need to educate the educators to understand the hidden disabilities and lifelong consequences for young people with acquired brain injury. Medical science is leading to a better understanding of ways to address rehabilitation, and organisations are seeking to communicate what is available. However, it is vital that this work is co-ordinated, and that a holistic treatment plan and the functioning needs of acquired brain injury patients are considered and acted on promptly. This should not be delayed, waited for or pushed down the line; we have to respond timeously.

Some patients may reach a plateau, but for others sadly the condition may be progressive, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach for victims of acquired brain injury. We need to continue to build on the Government's good work in achieving and maintaining specialist centres of excellence and enhanced community support services for persons with acquired brain injury, their families, and—let us not forget—their carers.

I ask the Minister to look favourably on further measures to support those with acquired brain injury, their families and carers, and to ensure that the Departments of all Governments communicate with one another to make contact for these service users easier. Communication and form-filling may be extremely difficult for people with acquired brain injury, as their concentration levels are often depleted. Ease of application—a simple thing—would be a great step forward, with Departments sharing information, instead of individuals repeatedly filling in forms and going back to repeat the process several times. It is, indeed, time for change.

1.44 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for opening the debate in such an excellent manner and the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) for helping to secure it.

Acquired brain injury is often a hidden disability. It is so hidden that, before this all-party parliamentary group inquiry, I had failed to recognise that people I know—family members, friends and colleagues—have an acquired brain injury. Some people may have outward, visible signs of the trauma that they have been through, but for many there are no outward clues. That can mean that, instead of people recognising the disability and responding in a helpful or understanding way, they may be impatient or downright rude, or try to rush those with acquired brain injury. This may not just be the case for people we bump into; it could be the officials of one Department or another who really do not get it. For example, assessors for personal independence payment or employment and support allowance may not have sufficient understanding of the effects of acquired brain injury and fail to recognise that what may appear as a reasonable response can actually hide the reality of the disability.

It has been a real privilege to be involved in the inquiry and the report, “Time for Change”, to reach so many people affected by acquired brain injury, to hear their personal stories, to hear about the positive impact

of effective neuro-rehabilitation and, sadly, sometimes to learn where such rehabilitation has not gone so well and people are struggling to cope. At the presentation of our report last year, we watched a very moving film showing people suffering from acquired brain injury describing their experiences. I found it a very moving experience that really brought home the difficulties that people can face.

The practical effects of acquired brain injury affect many areas of life, and our evidence sessions covered neuro-rehabilitation, education, criminal justice and sport-related concussion and touched on the welfare benefits system. The launch of “Time for Change” was well received, and was attended by Ministers, the shadow Secretary of State for Health and many other Members of Parliament. Most importantly, some of those who have acquired brain injury told us their personal stories. Our report made a number of recommendations in each area that we studied and, most importantly, called for Departments to work together to improve services and join things up. It was clear to us, as I am sure it will be to the House, that this is not just a health issue to be left to the Department of Health—although neuro-rehabilitation and physiotherapy, along with many other health services, are of huge importance in recovery and development—but one that needs to be joined up across other Departments.

If we are to make the real change that we have called for, we have to link up what happens in health with what happens at school, in the Department for Work and Pensions and in so many more Departments. Since the report was launched, there have been meetings with a number of Ministers, including the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office and the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, to name but two. The Government have now responded to our report, with the Department of Health pulling together responses to our recommendations from other Departments. I will refer to one of those Departments in particular—the Department for Education—and introduce a new area that was not covered in our report but that has been mentioned today.

It becomes clearer and clearer the more we look at it that acquired brain injury and its impact spread into so many different areas of everyday life, but I will focus on education and children. “Time for Change” called for some very specific measures. As we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda, this condition affects many more people in disadvantaged areas than elsewhere, so it is really important that we get to grips with it. Our recommendations were fairly straightforward. Acquired brain injury should be included in the special educational needs and disability code of practice. All education professionals should have a minimum level of awareness and understanding about acquired brain injury and about the educational requirements of children and young people with this condition—for example, with the completion of a short online course for all school-based staff.

Additional training should be provided for the named lead professional who supports the individual with acquired brain injury and for special educational needs co-ordinators. We recommended that the acquired brain injury card for under-18s produced by the Child Brain Injury Trust should be promoted in all schools, hospitals and local education authorities. Many children and young people with acquired brain injury require individually tailored,

[Liz Twist]

collaborative and integrated support for their return to school and throughout their education. As agreed return-to-school pathway is required—led and monitored by a named lead professional—to provide a consistent approach and support for the individual, their family and their teachers. An enhanced education campaign should be implemented in schools to improve awareness and understanding of sport-related concussion, with the support of Departments.

During filming for the launch of the report, I had the chance to talk to a young man from Scotland who had returned to school following an acquired brain injury and who told me about his experience of doing so. Simple things were not happening, like making sure that he had off-white paper because the white paper was far too bright for him to be able to take in. There was also the impact of noise affecting his concentration. They were all quite small things, in themselves, that were supposed to be planned for but actually did not happen. That brings it home to us that it is those small things that can make a big difference to children.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend is making a really important point. There are two other areas where we could do more in exactly the same way. One of those is in prisons, where toning down some of the sounds and noises makes it much easier for those with brain injury, and the other is in our supermarkets. It is great that Morrisons, certainly in my patch, has an hour at the beginning of the day when the lights are a bit dimmer. It would good if all supermarkets had a similar sort of event.

Liz Twist: I thank my hon. Friend for those remarks; I most certainly agree. As I say, we just do not think about these things sometimes, and they can have such a huge impact in improving things for people with acquired brain injury.

I am afraid that the Government's response in this area was rather disappointing. As in earlier answers to parliamentary questions, the Department for Education seemed to just restate the current responsibilities of schools and governors for SEND—special educational needs and disability. Our inquiry showed that there needs to be a greater understanding, very specifically, of both the presence of an acquired brain injury in young children and the practical steps needed to help staff to support these children with what is often a hidden disability. We also need greater co-ordination between health and education professionals to support children returning to school after a brain injury.

We have recently had much discussion in this Chamber and in Westminster Hall about the funding pressures on schools and the impact that that is having, particularly on special educational needs. We really have to bear that in mind. It is not enough to restate the law and the theory—the thinking—behind special educational needs and education, health and care plans, and then leave it to staff and governors who are increasingly under pressure just to hold things together at school. I would have hoped for a more positive response in this area. I hope that Education Ministers will look at it again and address the need for more practical steps to ensure that pupils have what they need to develop and be supported at school.

Sir John Hayes: The hon. Lady is making powerful points. The key is that these plans have greater specificity and quantification so that the development of the response to someone's needs could be as particular as it needs to be. That means quantifying exactly what happens once the needs and the response to them are drawn up.

Liz Twist: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for those comments. I most certainly agree that we need to have very specific proposals on how we can support people and to make sure that the support is actually put into place as well. As we know, there can sometimes be delays in achieving the ECHP, so I hope that more work can be put into that as well.

The Child Brain Injury Trust, which does excellent work in this area, has issued a call for action that includes some quite practical steps. It tells me that professionals across the field of acquired brain injury educational psychology are working hard to achieve the changes needed to support children in education following an acquired brain injury, but this requires all parties to listen and to implement the recommendations of the "Time for Change" report.

An acknowledgement of the support and interventions needed for paediatric acquired brain injury is required to limit the long-term societal costs and impact that this disability can have. Of course, it affects society as a whole, not just the individual. We want to give people the best chance in life, and that is why it is particularly appropriate to look at how we can support children who have an acquired brain injury. There needs to be improved training for newly qualified teachers—currently, acquired brain injury is not covered in that training—and a national campaign of recognition that acquired brain injury affects an additional 40,000 children and young people every year and has a significant impact on society.

The Child Brain Injury Trust says that acquired brain injury continues to be misdiagnosed and misunderstood, and our current system, and lack of knowledge and support, is letting down thousands of families. Funding is required for whole-family support. We need improved training for educators and youth justice teams, because over 60% of young people in custody report prior head injury. As other Members have mentioned, many young people affected by acquired brain injury are excluded from school due to their "inappropriate behaviour" and then go on to commit crime. Therefore, better knowledge of the condition and improved support has the potential to save society huge sums of money otherwise needed for youth justice.

The Child Brain Injury Trust calls for involvement and commitment from the Department for Education to support and fund some of these recommended initiatives. As I said, I hope that the Department for Education will take a more active part in looking after these young people and look again at its response to see how it can be improved.

The other area I want to touch on, which has already been mentioned by a number of Members, is acquired brain injury and carbon monoxide poisoning. This is not something that I had thought of myself. It shows, again, how many areas of our lives and our environment affect people and can cause acquired brain injury. I am a member not only of the APPG on acquired brain injury but the APPG on carbon monoxide, and earlier

this year we had a special roundtable meeting chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda. One of the difficulties is recognising when people are suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning, especially the impact that that can have on the brain. The shortage of support is particularly difficult for people with an acquired brain injury caused by carbon monoxide poisoning, as they are less likely to receive specialist treatment if they experience low-level carbon monoxide exposure that results in more subtle neurological effects. To address this, the APPG on carbon monoxide recommends that NHS England develop a specialist clinic for people with long-term neurological effects caused by carbon monoxide exposure. This will help to plug the gap in care provision and enable future studies that will innovate treatment methods.

We must also remember that, as the Government said in their November 2018 health and social care policy paper, prevention is better than cure, and preventing carbon monoxide poisoning will also prevent some of these acquired brain injuries. The APPG recommends that the Government introduce preventive measures, including mandating carbon monoxide alarms in all tenures. I know that the Government are already looking at this in certain tenures, but it should be across all tenures. Carbon monoxide monitors should be provided for those in first-time pregnancy. We must tackle substandard housing that increases the risk of carbon monoxide exposure. We also recommend that Public Health England and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office do more to raise public awareness of carbon monoxide, to encourage risk-lowering behaviours at home and abroad. The special roundtable meeting that we had was very productive. We had a high number of medical people there who were recognising this problem that perhaps the rest of us had not recognised until now. We need some practical steps to improve that.

I have mentioned the Child Brain Injury Trust's recommended actions, particularly on education. There is so much more that I could say, but much of it has already been said, so I will only mention a few things. We are seeing more people survive severe trauma, and we must give more effective support after they recover from their immediate injury, to help them develop their life.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. I have personal experience of this through my brother, who unfortunately had a very severe accident, which left him brain-damaged. Owing to the determination of my parents and family, who took the time to care for and look after him, we were able to give him some sort of an independent life, which is very important. He is happy and safe with his carers, friends and family. Does the hon. Lady agree that more needs to be done to support the families of those with ABI, to give them hope that there can be more than Sunday visits to a designated place—there can be a home life as well—and there is a chance of a semblance of normal life for people with ABI? Intensive care packages are essential to rehabilitation, and funding must be available for them. It is so important to give people who have acquired brain injury a normal life, if at all possible.

Liz Twist: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I certainly agree that we must give more support to the carers and families of young people or adults with

acquired brain injury, while allowing the person who is directly affected to have as full and good a life as they can.

I want to mention the “One Punch” campaign. We are becoming increasingly aware of the impact that one punch on a night out, perhaps after a lively evening, can have. It can be devastating, and I am glad to see campaigns around the country aiming to ensure people are aware of that. We have talked about how sports must keep up the level of support and awareness and, if in doubt, sit people out. That is really important. We have also heard about the huge impact on our prison community. We must develop a response to that, so that we can take account of acquired brain injury and how it affects people's behaviour and development.

Headway has made some recommendations. It says:

“Brain injury can happen to anyone, at any time. Living with the effects of a brain injury creates challenges in almost every area of life.”

That is so true. Headway is calling on Members of Parliament to recognise and support the needs of service users, families and carers, including greater understanding of the complexity and hidden effects of brain injury; wider recognition of the symptoms of brain injury, to ensure rapid and accurate diagnosis; access to timely, specialist rehabilitation and support services; an end to lengthy waits for social service assessments for support funding; changes to disability benefit assessments, which currently fail a large number of brain injury survivors and their families—Headway has a campaign called “Right First Time”—and more effective data gathering across the NHS, to provide clearer evidence of the needs of survivors, around diagnosis, acute care, longer-term rehabilitation and support to regain independence. Acquired brain injury is life changing, and we must do everything we can to support people across all spheres of life.

2.3 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I praise the remarkable work of the APPG on acquired brain injury for its dedication to this issue and for securing this particularly important debate. Research from Headway, the brain injury association, shows that every 90 seconds someone in the UK is admitted to hospital with an acquired brain injury-related diagnosis. That is approximately 350,000 people a year. If this debate lasts for an hour and a half, another 60 people will have been struck by brain injury while we are in the Chamber. The majority of those people will need at least some form of short-term support or long-term rehabilitation to help them rebuild their lives, re-learn lost skills and regain a degree of independence.

Excellent work is done in the charity sector to support people with acquired brain injury. I am sure that many colleagues across the House will want to join me in congratulating Headway on reaching its 40th anniversary this year. I am proud to say that the charity is based in my constituency and led by my friend and colleague, Peter McCabe, as chief executive. For four decades, it has been supporting brain injury survivors and their families and carers, to ensure that lives saved by significant advances in neurosurgery are lives worth living.

When a brain injury strikes, it is usually without warning. Put simply, it can happen to anyone, at any time. The support provided by Headway starts from the moment brain injury strikes and continues for as long

[*Siobhain McDonagh*]

as it is needed. With the introduction of major trauma centres, the chances are that a patient with a significant brain injury will be quickly transferred to a unit that is better equipped to provide specialist emergency care. That can be many miles from the family home. I am sure we can all agree that, if a loved one were involved in an accident or suddenly became seriously ill, we would want to be at their bedside, but for some people—particularly in low-income families—that can be a challenge if the patient is transferred to a unit many miles away.

That is why I would like to raise the importance of the Headway emergency fund, which provides grants to families to ensure that they can be by the bedside of a loved one in a coma. To date, the charity has distributed more than £369,294 to 1,783 families across the UK. In addition, families can receive emotional and practical support to help them to cope with the overwhelming situation and to make sense of what is happening. They can also rely on the charity's nurse-led helpline, which has seen an increase in demand of 131% over the last 10 years.

Given that there will be many people watching the debate who are working on this issue, I would like to raise the Headway brain injury identity card, which is endorsed by numerous agencies in the criminal justice system, including the Police Federation and the National Police Chiefs' Council. The House has previously discussed the high prevalence of brain injury among the offender population. This new initiative from Headway is helping the police to identify brain injury survivors at the earliest opportunity, to ensure that they receive appropriate support.

We should all be proud of our national health service, particularly when it comes to emergency and acute care, but a life worth saving has to be a life worth living. Many of my hon. Friends here today will be aware of the excellent work being done by Headway groups and branches in their constituencies. Whether through rehabilitative therapies to improve speech and language skills or facilitate a return to work or education, or social interaction to prevent isolation, the work being done in our local communities by these groups and branches can be a lifeline to families affected by brain injury, helping people to rebuild their lives and become less dependent on costly state support.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I add briefly to that catalogue of virtues the fact that Headway has been reaching out to parliamentarians like ourselves? The reason I am here for this debate is that Jo Hillier of Southampton Headway got in touch with me and asked me to be here. That is why I am learning so much more about this condition than I would otherwise have had the possibility of knowing.

Siobhain McDonagh: That is my experience as well. Had Peter McCabe not called me, I might not be here, and I would know so much less about the volume of people who experience brain injury and the sort of problems they and their families and carers have.

We are very grateful for Headway's intervention. However, Headway cannot do this alone. Local charities are under incredible pressure. Funding cuts are causing harm to the lives of some of society's most vulnerable people,

who are being cut out of society due to a lack of access to vital support services. For many people, Headway provides a route back to independent living, further education or employment. The reality is that, aside from Headway, most people—particularly those who cannot afford private healthcare—will receive insufficient support or rehabilitation after leaving hospital. Unless action is taken to enable people to access the vital support needed to ensure that these services survive, more and more people will be cut out of society and taxpayers will be left footing the bill for the longer-term care of those without the means to care for themselves. Considering that another four people will have been struck by brain injury during my speech, there simply is no time to delay.

2.10 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for bringing forward this debate and I compliment all the speakers on their contributions. It would be churlish of me not to say a word of congratulation to the Minister on her appointment. It is a delight to see her in her place. I am going to give the House something of a personal account, which I will try to keep fairly brief. I hope that I can draw from that personal account a number of conclusions and suggestions.

Yesterday and today, several Members have remarked on the fact that this is the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Scottish Parliament. In early 1999, I was canvassing in north-west Sutherland. I always start canvassing early, but don't tell the SNP. I pulled up at a phone box at Inchnadamph—this was back in the days when we had phone boxes even in remote parts of the highlands—I tried to ring home and there was no reply. So I carried on. When I got home at 5 or 6 o'clock that night, I discovered that my wife was in hospital—at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness.

My wife had been due to drive to Inverness to get the messages, as we say in the highlands, but found—as it turned out, very luckily—that the car had a flat tyre, so she caught the bus to Inverness. Having got her shopping, she was at the bus stop waiting to come home again when she took a massive epileptic fit. She woke up in Raigmore Hospital. Very shortly afterwards, when the staff took an X-ray of her head, they discovered that she had an extremely large meningioma, which is a form of tumour. Luckily, it is a benign tumour, but they reach some size. Within weeks, she had an operation to remove the meningioma. Unfortunately, in the recovery ward shortly after her operation, she took a further brain haemorrhage and had to go straight back into surgery. She was then in intensive care, but she did survive. I want to say that, for my family, for me and for my dear wife, it was an incredibly difficult time. How my eldest daughter, who was then aged 17, got through her studying for her highers, I will never know. I always think that my three children were in fact braver than I was; I put that on the record.

I want to say something else for the sake of the record. Reference has been made to the NHS and just how good it is. The then consultant neurosurgeon at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, where my wife was operated on, was Mr David Currie. He and his team, as well as the nursing staff, were absolutely astonishing. I owe them and my wife owes them absolutely everything.

They may think it was churlish for me to carry on canvassing to be an MSP but, when my wife could speak, which was not for a few weeks, I said, “Look, it’s only March and the election isn’t until May, I think I’ll pull out”, and she said, “Don’t.” She said it very quietly—she could only speak very softly. She said, “You must carry on. I think you might win.” And so I did. So there is a happy end to the story.

My wife is left somewhat disabled—she has a weak left leg and she has lost the use of her left arm—but, as we always say in my family, she is alive. She remains better than I am at the crossword. I cannot tell hon. Members how annoying that is, but that is just the way it is. She suffers from mild anxiety about things; much comment has been made about the side effects of this sort of surgery. However, I am intensely grateful to the NHS.

There are one or two conclusions that I would draw in this short contribution. The first is that we could see that Mr David Currie, the consultant neurosurgeon, and his staff—I admit this was 20 years ago—were stretched. Mr Currie always said to my wife for some years afterwards, “You see these white hairs. I got these operating on you for the second time.” But they were pushed. They were working extremely hard, but we could see they were pushed.

Secondly, as I have said already, we could see the sheer importance of the NHS and what a great British institution that is. I think, rightly, all parties in this place cherish and nurture it. I have to say, as an aside, that when I hear some of the comments coming across the Atlantic from the United States about how they do not want anything like the NHS, I think that they are just plain dotty. It is something of which we are very proud.

A third point arises from this experience, which was difficult. I admit that it was 20 years ago but, when my wife came out of hospital and came home, there was the business about what occupational therapy and physio help she could get, what was the social work package and how that was going to be handled. I think things have improved since then—I give credit to the Scottish Government for that—but how this is put together is very traumatic for the patient and for the patient’s loved ones. I was 44 and my wife was 42, and we had a family in their teens. An event such as this is a crisis and a change that you can hardly understand at the time. But, as I say, life goes on and we are where we are.

I have a habit of talking about disability issues because of my wife. One of the reasons why I volunteered—I was probably completely insane—to go on the small Committee charged with building the Scottish Parliament was that I could see that the old temporary Parliament at the top of the Mound in Edinburgh was utterly unsuitable for disabled people. Because of my wife’s experience, I got involved in what was known as the Holyrood project. It damn nearly lost me my seat at my second Scottish election because it was a very controversial issue, as I am sure the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) will recall.

I have mentioned several times in this place the issue of getting disabled people back into work. At a time, whatever happens with Brexit, when we must play to all our strengths—we must play every card we hold—we have a lot of people who have been ill or are partially disabled who have great abilities that they could contribute

to the functioning of the United Kingdom and to forging a new and better future for the United Kingdom. It remains a challenge for Governments of all colours to harness those people. If nothing else, it makes them feel that they are contributing to the country and it makes them feel useful and that they are important. Self-esteem and the esteem of your peers is incredibly important to happiness and to quality of life.

I want to take up the point, which I think was made by the hon. Member for Rhondda, that notwithstanding the desirability of local delivery of services, there is something to be said for amalgamation when it comes to something as crucial as neurosurgery. At the time of my wife’s treatment, there were four neurosurgical units in Scotland and Mr David Currie was the sole consultant neurosurgeon at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. Had the four units been put together as one, there would have been better peer working and peer support. I think the hon. Gentleman made the point that, when it is something as traumatic as neurosurgery, people do not mind travelling. From the northern highlands, it did not really matter to me whether it was Aberdeen, Edinburgh or Glasgow—I just wanted my loved one to get the best possible treatment. I know it is always the case that we will get a local campaign saying, “No, no, no—not this”, but I think we can draw a line on some services, where centralisation for the maximisation of making people better is important. We should not lose sight of that.

A meningioma is a tumour that can kill you. It is a meningioma whether people live in Scotland, England or Wales—anywhere at all. I therefore appeal both to the Scottish Government and the UK Government for maximum co-ordination across borders on health delivery, the health service and making people better. I would hate to think that a line drawn by people on a map would in any way get in the way of that because this is about saving lives and making people better, which is surely one of the most important things.

I am going to end, as is my wont in this place, with a very short anecdote. I was lucky in May 1999. I would not say if they are sad enough, but if Members have a dull moment they can look at this week’s edition of *Holyrood* magazine and remark how young I looked then; I have aged terribly badly since then. I did win my seat. *The Times* decided to do a vox pop of my new constituents only a few days after I was elected. It asked one lady from the village of Kildary in Easter Ross, “How do you feel about Jamie Stone being elected to be an MSP for this constituency?” She replied, famously, “Well, at least it keeps him off the street.” When I read that to my wife in her hospital bed, she roared with laughter and I knew then that she was better.

2.19 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I am delighted to take part in this important, wide-ranging, informative and consensual debate, and grateful to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for securing and opening it. I thank the all-party parliamentary group on acquired brain injury for its considered work, and the United Kingdom Acquired Brain Injury Forum for its report. The hon. Gentleman covered much of the ground in his opening remarks, which included a thorough summary of the subject. He reminded us that ABI affects nearly every Department and has a major impact on the families and support networks of those affected.

[*Martyn Day*]

On behalf of my colleagues in the SNP, I welcome the publication of the report and congratulate the APPG on its amazing work. I encourage anyone who has not read the report to do so. The infographic on ABI key facts is an eye-opener; it informs us that 1.3 million people are living with traumatic brain injury-related disabilities, at an estimated annual cost of £15 billion. The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) covered many other facts in that report. I recommend the report for that graphic alone, but the whole publication is fantastic and contains lots more information. Indeed, it may even underestimate the position, because much of the published information relates to traumatic brain injuries, not just to ABIs; none the less, it puts the scale of the problem in perspective. We have heard a number of case studies today, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) for his personal anecdotes, which helped to bring this subject home. I cannot help but think, “There but for fortune,” as such a thing could happen to any of us at any time.

I have suffered two head injuries in my lifetime, thankfully both fairly minor. Once I was hit by a golf ball—I was not even on a golf course at the time, which proves that such a thing can happen anywhere—and the other time was when as a child I was hit by a swing. I had listened to my mother who told me not to run in front of swings, but let me state for the record that it is equally dangerous to run behind them—that might save someone else from getting a knock. Thankfully, I was left without any lasting effects, but I know of constituents who suffered injuries that appeared to be no worse than the ones I incurred, but that had long-lasting effects that were traumatic to see.

In Scotland we are committed to ensuring that those with disabilities such as ABI get the support and care they need to live as independently as possible. The report is a welcome addition to that debate. It brings together key findings in a range of sectors, looking specifically at the impact that an acquired head injury can have on a person’s interaction with many different services. ABI can be caused by a variety of events and have a variety of implications. It is important that specific pathways are available to those who have suffered ABI and have had to go through the pain and trauma of coming to terms with the impact of that injury on their day-to-day lives. Fundamentally, this is about ensuring that people with disabilities can live as independently as possible. Our vision in Scotland is that children and adults with acquired brain injury should have equal access to highest quality brain injury care, regardless of where they live.

It is estimated that ABI is the most significant case of disablement for people of working age in Scotland. We know that around 40% of working age disabled adults are in employment, compared with more than 80% of those without a disability. Our key ambition is to reduce that gap. Many of those with ABI have complex rehabilitation and support needs.

Before I go on to mention some of the national services available in Scotland, I wish to pay tribute to some of the local work undertaken in my area by CRABIS, the West Lothian Community Rehabilitation and Brain Injury Service. CRABIS is funded by NHS Lothian and West Lothian Council, and it provides

multi-disciplinary assessment and rehabilitation within the home or community settings—that is important—to those over 16 who have an acquired brain injury. The CRABIS team comprises occupational therapists, physiotherapists, clinical psychologists, speech and language therapists, and rehabilitation assistants. The model they use is being looked at by other areas within Scotland as good practice.

At national level, the Scottish Acquired Brain Injury Network—SABIN—was established in 2007 with the key objective of enabling improvements in and access to services in Scotland for children and adults with ABI. It comprises service user representatives, healthcare professionals, service providers and voluntary sector groups. SABIN published the traumatic brain injury in adults standards, which ensure a joined-up approach to immediate and long-term care for people with an acquired head injury. To achieve those aims, it works with partners to bring together healthcare professionals, service providers, parents, carers and voluntary sector groups who support brain-injured patients. SABIN undertakes events and workshops to raise awareness, including the Brain Detectives event for children who have a relative with a brain injury, which provides education on the effects of such injuries.

Last year, Scotland’s first major trauma centre opened at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. It will treat the most seriously injured patients in the north of Scotland, and is the first of four major trauma centres to open as part of Scotland’s trauma network, with further centres due to open in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. A number of speakers have raised the point that in the case of such a traumatic event, people do not mind travelling—I certainly would not mind that should anything happen to me or one of my loved ones. The network will ensure that each year Scotland’s 6,000 seriously injured people get the best possible care and chances of recovery, wherever their location. The new centres will host dedicated trauma services, including rehabilitation support to help patients with significant injuries to recover more quickly. Backed by £15.2 million investment so far, the new Scottish trauma network will also include the Scottish Ambulance Service and existing trauma services.

I could, of course, touch on many other aspects, given the wide-ranging impact of ABI on services and public agencies, many of which—including education, the criminal justice system and health—are devolved in Scotland. I will therefore conclude with an issue that remains largely reserved: welfare benefits. The disability employment gap that I mentioned compounds the problems for those with ABI when interacting with that complex service. I echo the report’s call for less frequent reassessments and for assessors to be trained to understand the problems faced by those with ABI. I hope the Minister will cover that point when she sums up the debate.

2.26 pm

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I thank all Members for their contributions to an excellent debate, as well as the Backbench Business Committee for selecting this important subject. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and for Blaydon (Liz Twist), and the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), who tabled the motion before us. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda for his extensive work to raise awareness of acquired brain injury. I acknowledge

the important work of Headway and the United Kingdom Acquired Brain Injury Forum, and I pay tribute to the excellent APPG for its sterling work to improve our understanding of the wide impact that ABI can have. Its comprehensive report, “Time for Change”, sets out a range of recommendations for the kind of support and rehabilitation that must be made available. I found that excellent report immensely interesting and informative, and I will now go on to champion awareness of acquired brain injury.

As the term suggests, acquired brain injury applies to injury caused to the brain after birth, and it can happen to anyone at any time. All Members have constituents who live with the consequences of ABI. A brain injury can happen in an instant, but its effects can be devastating and lead to lifelong challenges. The effects of ABI vary; those affected may suffer from headaches, dizziness, memory loss, extreme fatigue and depression, as well as diminished co-ordination and motor skills, irritability, and inability to concentrate. The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings reminded us that we must be aware of the dynamic nature of the condition, and we heard about the wider impact of ABI when my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) spoke about George’s experiences and the wide impact that ABI has across all walks of life.

Improvements in medical procedures and acute care have led to improved survival rates for those who acquire an injury to the brain. That is welcome, but it brings its own challenges and places further pressure on already overstretched health and social care services. Early and continued access to specialist rehabilitation has been shown to optimise the chances of recovery and to be extremely cost effective. As for many health conditions, however, the number of available beds across the UK is inadequate. Service provision is variable; consequently, long-term outcomes for brain injury survivors are compromised. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda powerfully reminded us, this is all about quality of life, and it is cruel to save lives without the following support and rehabilitation.

Many Members spoke of the scale of the problem, and many people—including me before this debate—have little awareness of ABI, even though the numbers affected are so great. Currently, 1.3 million people in the UK live with ABI, which has rightly been described as the invisible epidemic. Some 900,000 people attend A and E with a traumatic brain injury every year, and every 90 seconds someone is admitted to hospital with an acquired brain injury.

It is estimated that 24% of children have some sort of brain injury, compared with 1% who have autism. ABI in children is often misdiagnosed as autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The point about misdiagnosis across the board was made effectively. A particularly good example was the misunderstanding of cases involving servicepeople. The combined cost of brain injury, including health and social care costs, disability support, lost work contributions and premature death, is estimated to be £15 billion a year, which equates to about 10% of the NHS budget. This is an issue of such seriousness and magnitude that it cannot and should not be ignored.

In September 2018, the APPG report called for reform in all areas and Departments. This is not just a matter for the Department of Health and Social Care, although that would be a good starting point. As the report so

rightly demonstrates, this should be an issue for the Department for Education, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Work and Pensions, too. The report recommends change in several key areas. A national review of neuro-rehabilitation is required to ensure that service provision is adequate and consistent throughout the UK. We have heard Members describe current provision as a lottery. All affected individuals should be given a rehabilitation prescription, and there should be a significant increase in the number of neuro-rehabilitation beds. We heard about excellent trauma centres, but would it not be wonderful if an ABI consultation could be available in each of those units?

On education, Members expressed disappointment that the Timpson report made no mention of this issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon talked about small details, such as adjusting lighting or the colour of paper, that could be embedded in education. That would require all education professionals to have a minimum level of awareness and understanding about ABI and the educational requirements of children and young people with the condition. It is essential that special educational needs co-ordinators are given special training and that it is embedded in all SEN provision.

It was shocking to hear about the record of football in this country, and that, as a football nation, we have so little regard for sports-sustained concussion injuries. There is much work to be done in that area. Sport, Government and professional clinical bodies must work collaboratively to improve health professionals’ knowledge of concussion management.

Criminal justice procedures, practices and processes need to be reformed to take into account the needs of individuals with ABI. My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda made the powerful point that ABI could be at the root of some crime and that, in the instances of female victims of domestic violence, we may be punishing victims. An assessment carried out ahead of imprisonment and sentencing would be useful in getting to the root cause of the problem, and would hopefully prevent further crime and further custodial sentences.

All benefits assessors in the DWP should be trained to understand the problems that affect individuals with an ABI. The story of Jordan Bell and his experience of filling in forms and the exasperation with the bureaucracy of the system was powerfully told. Those issues need to be addressed by the appropriate Department.

Much has been done to prevent ABI. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) talked about the benefits of seatbelts and airbags in reducing such damage. Comments were made about the considerable work of charities, but we cannot rely on charity to deliver on its own.

As this debate is being held under the aegis of the Department of Health and Social Care, may I ask the Minister, in the first instance, to focus on neuro-rehabilitation? NR can avoid or minimise disability and optimise recovery. Early access to NR is critical and there is substantial evidence that demonstrates NR is both clinically effective and cost-effective. Outcomes for those affected would be significantly enhanced if every individual was given an NR prescription that specified the individual’s specific needs and a care pathway. Will the Government ensure that every individual with an acquired brain injury gets just that? Will the Minister commit to introduce a neuro-rehabilitation consultant

[Julie Cooper]

in every major trauma centre? The UK is facing a shortfall of 10,000 beds for neuro-rehabilitation services. Will the Minister commit to addressing that issue? Will she ensure that all health professionals in the community in primary care and secondary care are trained to recognise the symptoms of ABI?

We heard the powerful personal story from the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), which reminds us all about the impact on the families of ABI sufferers. So many people find themselves in a frightening situation. They need structured and planned support that is assured wherever they live. Significant mention has been made of the great work Headway does, but, as I have said, addressing ABI cannot be left to the work of charities.

Will the Minister commit to work with her colleagues across Government Departments to implement the recommendations in the APPG's report on education, justice and welfare? As the debate has shown, there is support for action in all parts of the House. The report's recommendations cannot be ignored, but must be regarded as the beginning of a journey. In the words of the all-party group, it really is time for change.

2.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Seema Kennedy): It is a real pleasure to respond to this excellent debate on behalf of the Government. I would like to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for securing the debate. I commend him for the all the work he has undertaken as chair of the all-party group on acquired brain injury. He began by giving us a very vivid description of the physical impact of brain injuries, and went on to describe a whole gamut of mental health and emotional effects they have on people—and, of course, their families. He set me a challenge and I shall endeavour to meet it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) spoke with his usual eloquence. He reminded us about the scale of ABI, and emphasised the complexity of the issue and how it touches on many areas. The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) told us all about George, reminding us that ABI can have extremely unexpected and devastating effects on the people who live with it and their families.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), with his long career in the fire service, saw many people who had an ABI. He set us a very interesting challenge about having compulsory helmets for cyclists. I will take that point away and speak to my colleagues in the Department for Transport about it. The hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) outlined how people “just don't get it”. That is a very important point, and it shows how important it is that we are debating ABI here today. She made a point about carbon monoxide poisoning, and I am due to have a meeting with the hon. Member for Rhondda on that very issue.

The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) told us that the excellent charity Headway, which was mentioned very many times during the debate,

is based in her constituency. She reminded us that a brain injury can strike any of us at any time. We also heard from the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone). He spoke very movingly, as he did in the debate last year, about his wife's experience and his. All I can say is keep going on the crossword.

Brain Injury Awareness Week is from 20 to 26 May. I welcome the time Parliament that has set aside to discuss this issue. Prevalence estimates for ABI are problematic to make, but it is likely that the number living with ABI is definitely over half a million and could be as high as 1 million. The total cost of brain injury in the UK is estimated to be at least £1 billion per year. Charitable organisations such as Headway and the UK Brain Injury Forum, as well as other local and national groups that hon. Members have referred to, are highly valued by those affected. They raise awareness and provide help to those with the condition, as well as to their families and carers, and I want to put on the record our appreciation for everything they do.

As we have heard, in 2018 the APPG held a wide-ranging inquiry into the causes, impact and treatment of ABI. My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), to whom I pay tribute for the energy he brought to this matter, agreed to respond to that report, and my Department co-ordinated with officials across Whitehall to deliver that response on 19 February. In responding today, I will draw on key areas of the response to set out the relevant activity that is under way.

Sir John Hayes: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, and I know she will address these matters with her usual acumen and assiduity. I spoke about dynamic disability and the pace of recovery, but will she take into account the fact that aligned with that is the subtlety of the effects of brain injury? Sometimes a person may be deemed to have recovered completely and to have returned to normal—whatever normal is—but their manner, meter and mood might have changed and their sense of appropriateness might have altered, and that has effects in education and employment, in particular, as well as in personal relationships.

Seema Kennedy: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely important point, showing that this is an issue not only for the health system and my Department but for others across Government.

While the majority of rehabilitation care is locally provided, NHS England commissions specialised services for patients with the most complex levels of need. For people who have ABI, neuro-rehabilitation that is timely and appropriate is an important part of their care. Access to high-quality rehabilitation improves outcomes for patients and can save money. The shadow Minister mentioned rehabilitation prescriptions. RPs reflect the assessment of the physical, functional, vocational, educational, cognitive, psychological and social rehabilitation needs of a patient and are an important element of rehabilitation care. The APPG report was clear that all patients with ABI should benefit from an RP.

NHS England's major trauma service, where acute phase rehabilitation begins, sets out that patients should be reviewed by a rehabilitation consultant. The shadow

Minister asked about this. The development of major trauma centres, which the hon. Member for Rhondda supported, has improved recruitment to this specialty, while the national clinical audit of specialist rehabilitation recommended that all trauma networks review access to rehabilitation consultants and make improvements. Patients should have either a rehabilitation consultant or an alternative clinician with skills and competencies in rehabilitation to provide an initial formulation and plan to complete and perform the initial RP. At discharge, all patients should have a patient-held record of their clinical information and treatment plan from admission as they move to specialised or local rehab.

The “National Clinical Audit of Specialist Rehabilitation for Adults Patients with Complex Needs Following Major Injury”, published in 2016, found that on average 81% of patients had a record of a rehabilitation prescription. The audit recommended that MTCs take action to improve compliance. The audit report appears to have had a significant impact. The latest data, from the last quarter of 2018, from the trauma and audit research network shows that the national average rose to a 95% completion rate for RPs. This is good news. NHS England has worked with patients, clinicians and charities to improve the RP design and set new standards for communication and involvement of patients, families and carers. It is hoped that the new RP will support the development of a rehabilitation dashboard to monitor the performance of the system. Audits play an important role in helping services to improve. The report also recommended that all organisations within a trauma network work together to review capacity.

The majority of rehabilitation care is commissioned and managed locally. To support commissioners to plan services for local populations, NHS England has produced a document, “Principles and Expectations for Good Adult Rehabilitation”, that describes what good rehabilitation looks like. Additional guidance covering adults and children sets out a commissioning model and the evidence base for delivering high-quality rehabilitation services.

The hon. Member for Rhondda mentioned that ABI spans many Departments, and I shall take away all the comments that concern my ministerial colleagues and will ask them to respond. On support for children with ABI in school, the special educational needs and disabilities system is designed to support all children and young people with additional needs. The arrangements for SEND are intended to support joint working between health, social care and education; multi-professional assessment of a child or young person’s needs involving relevant experts; and the development of an individual education, health and care plan to meet those needs. This should provide a basis for the sharing of information and expertise to ensure the needs of children and young people with ABI are supported in school.

The hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) mentioned the ABI card. The Department for Education has said that promotion of the card is a matter for individual schools, but as far as my Department is concerned, Professor Chris Moran, a national trauma director, said that he would be happy to promote the card in trauma networks, working with the Brain Injury Trust. The statutory guidance on supporting children with medical conditions at school covers a range of areas, including the preparation and implementation of school policies

for supporting pupils, the use of individual healthcare plans, consulting with parents, collaborative working with healthcare professionals and staff training. The Department for Education continues to work with organisations such as the Health Conditions in Schools Alliance to help to raise further awareness of the duty on schools.

On prisons, there is an increasing body of evidence linking ABI to offending behaviour. NHS England’s liaison and diversion service has collaborated with Headway to develop workshops to improve awareness and identification of ABI in vulnerable offenders and the support available. The “train the trainer” workshops were designed so that attendees could return to their services and cascade workshop learning to their colleagues. Representatives of all NHS England-commissioned liaison and diversion services attended. Over the past two years, the Ministry of Justice has also piloted approaches to improve screening and support for prisoners through new link worker roles at six sites on the male secure estate. I take the point about female offenders and will speak to the relevant Minister. There was a pilot at a female prison between 2016 and 2018, but I will take away the point about the female estate.

I want briefly to touch on the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chair of the Defence Select Committee. The veterans trauma network delivers comprehensive medical care to veterans, including those suffering from brain tumours, and, as he knows, the Prime Minister opened the successor Defence centre to Headley Court last year. We do not recognise his statistic that there are only two machines, but I will take that away and report back to him.

Dr Julian Lewis: I was not talking about tumours; I was talking about traumatic injury caused in explosions. My understanding is that only Nottingham and Aston Universities have the special types of scanners that can detect that particular injury. Will the Minister check that point and consider a screening programme for such people?

Seema Kennedy: I will happily take away that challenge from my right hon. Friend and will write to him.

The hon. Member for Rhondda spoke passionately about sport, although he claims not to be a sportsman. It is important that we do more to reduce the risk of ABI in sport. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport asked Baroness Grey-Thompson to carry out an independent review of the duty of care that sport owes to its participants; her report dedicated a chapter to safety, injury and medical issues. National governing bodies are responsible for the regulation of their sport and for ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to protect participants from harm. The DDCMS expects everyone in the sports sector to think carefully about the recommendations in Baroness Grey-Thompson’s report and in the all-party group’s report. Progress has been made over the years, for example through the Rugby Football Union’s Headcase campaign and action by other groups.

It is important that the welfare system appropriately supports people with ABI. Work capability assessments for the employment and support allowance are conducted by healthcare professionals for the Centre for Health

[Seema Kennedy]

and Disability Assessments. Case discussions about claimants with ABI form part of new entrant training for all healthcare professionals who undertake such assessments. They should all have access to a self-directed learning module on ABI, which was updated in 2018 and quality-assured by Headway.

Since September 2017, those who are placed in the ESA support group and the universal credit equivalent, who have the most severe and lifelong health conditions or disabilities and are unlikely ever to be able to move into work, will no longer be reassessed. Changes have been introduced so that existing claimants with the most severe lifetime disabilities whose functional ability has remained the same are more likely to have their evidence reviewed by a Department for Work and Pensions decision maker, and not need a face-to-face assessment with a healthcare professional.

I hope that this debate demonstrates how seriously the Government take the issue and the devastating impact that it can have on people's lives. We are committed to ensuring that people are better protected. I look forward to responding to further debates.

2.50 pm

Chris Bryant: I will be very brief, because the next debate is also very important. I was delighted with the speeches of all hon. Members; my only complaint is that my constituency is not “Rhonda”, but Rhondda—if everybody could practise that before our next debate on acquired brain injury, I would be very grateful. I am conscious that lots of people have been watching the debate, including clinicians at the clinical neuropsychology department in Oxford and at the Child Brain Injury Trust.

There are some issues still to be tackled, including armed forces personnel, cost recovery caps for insurance companies, school exclusions, and training and recruitment to get more people working in the area. I very much hope that the new champion, who did magnificently in this debate and will do even better in the next one, will ensure that we can have a cross-departmental meeting with all Ministers who have responsibilities in the area.

Question put and agreed to,

Resolved,

That this House notes the report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on acquired brain injury and supports its conclusions; and urges the Government to work through all of its departments to ensure that those who have sustained brain injuries are guaranteed full neuro-rehabilitation as needed.

Death of John Smith: 25th Anniversary

2.52 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the 25th anniversary of the death of John Smith, former leader of the Labour Party.

I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for granting Chamber time for this special debate on a motion in my name and in the names of right hon. and hon. Friends across the House. The 25th anniversary of John Smith's untimely passing is a fitting occasion to commemorate and remember a man who lit up this place, lit up our politics and lit up the lives of so many. I am sure that many hon. Members across the House will wish to share their stories and memories today.

This Sunday will mark the 25th anniversary of John Smith's death. When I suggested this debate to his wife, Baroness Elizabeth Smith, I was not expecting a response from so many colleagues wanting to contribute or merely tell me their own stories about John. Many MPs, from all parties, have come up to me and said, “I can't be at the debate, but let me tell you about the time—” or “I know where I was when I heard the news that John had died.” After 25 years, that is a measure of the man himself: he was admired and respected across the House.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Many of us have memories of John Smith. I remember that when I was a London taxi driver, there was a memorial service to him in Methodist Central Hall, just across Parliament Square. I could not finish the day without parking up and going inside to join in. He was a remarkable speaker—a magnificent orator, whom I managed to hear on several occasions. In my opinion, he will go down as one of the parliamentarians who can be described as a great Prime Minister that this country never had.

Ian Murray: I hope that when my hon. Friend went into the memorial service, he stopped his meter—I know that John, as a traditional Scot, might not have done so.

Some of the stories about John can be repeated in public, but—with his wonderful wit and Scottish humour—there are some that are perhaps best not written into *Hansard*. I do not think that anybody would contradict the assertion that he was the best Prime Minister that this country never had. As a young Andrew Marr wrote:

“The greatest political tribute to John Smith is the simplest one: had he lived, he would have become Prime Minister.”

It is no exaggeration to suggest that his passing changed the course of British history. He was referred to as “Labour's lost leader”, the man who made the Labour party electable again.

As well as being a formidable and committed politician of extreme intellect, transparency, decency and straightforwardness, with a sense of fairness and a willingness to fight for those who were not able to speak up for themselves, John Smith was a committed family man, with his wife Elizabeth, whom he met at Glasgow University, and his three daughters, Sarah, Jane and Catherine. The country may have lost a Prime Minister in waiting, but they suffered the heaviest and most

heartbreaking loss of all—the loss of a husband, a father and a part of their lives that could never be replaced.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): When I heard of the death of John Smith, I was at the Scottish Tory conference—as a journalist, I should point out, not as a member of the Tory party. I remember that the whole conference came to a grinding halt. Everyone there was stunned and greatly saddened. I thought that that reflected very well on John Smith, and, in fairness, extremely well on the Tory party.

Ian Murray: I shall come to that later in my speech. Journalists get all the best gigs, I am sure—such as the Tory party conference.

I was saying that John Smith's family had suffered the most heartbreaking loss of all—the loss of a husband, a father and a part of their lives that could never be replaced. I feel that acutely, because I lost my own father at a young age. I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in wishing my own mum, Lena, a happy 70th birthday for yesterday. The Labour Party would have a new leader to replace John and the country would have that Labour Prime Minister whom it so desired, but it is not possible to replace a father and husband.

I never met John personally, but I feel, as others will surely feel today, that he was always part of my political life. His family still live in my constituency, and constituents often stop me in the street and get on to the topic of John. He was one of theirs, and they are not going to let people forget that any time soon. They all recall his funeral service at Cluny parish church in Morningside. The building sits on a small embankment close to where John lived. The film footage shows the red brick punctuated by the black of mourners moving slowly and sombrely past into the church. The deep national shock was there for all to see.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) cannot be here today owing to a long-standing engagement in her constituency. She was John's deputy, the politician who took over the reins of the Labour party and the person who had the most difficult job in the House, that of leading the tributes to John when he died. She did it brilliantly and with her usual grace, clarity and kindness. She was devastated that she could not be here today, so she asked if I would read out something on her behalf, and I am very proud to do so:

“25 years ago, the profound shock of John Smith's untimely death was felt across the country and this House, which only convened for tributes to be paid, led by the then Prime Minister, John Major, before adjourning.

It was also the Scottish Conservative party's annual conference—as we have heard—and

“Ian Lang, the Secretary of State, announced the news and adjourned the conference immediately.

In the Labour party and wider Labour movement the sorrow was profound. I recall a senior trade unionist telling me that he was listening to the tributes in his car, and found himself crying so much that he had to pull over and stop the car.

Party leaders, presidents and prime ministers from across Europe demanded to be allowed to come to the funeral and pay their respects. None were officially invited but they all came anyway at what ended up as almost a state funeral. Yet, in the end,

it was not a sombre occasion—appropriately, because John was not a sombre man. It was his lifelong friend Donald Dewar who said in his address, ‘John could start a party in an empty room—and frequently did.’

Yet his outstanding characteristic was his determination to, as he put it, ‘speak up for those who can't speak up for themselves.’”

I do not really want to do a biography of John, but his character was undoubtedly shaped by his upbringing and early life. John was of radical Presbyterian stock, born on the west coast of Scotland on 13 September 1938. “John Smith”, he once said “is the commonest name in Scotland. A robust character is needed to overcome that.” His grandfather was a herring fisherman, and his father was the schoolmaster at the local village school.

At 14, John attended the grammar school at Dunoon. He was academically very successful and began to organise on behalf of his beloved Labour party. From school, he went to Glasgow University, where he cut his teeth, sharpened his elbows and honed the skills that would take him to the Bar and then to the Dispatch Box. He remained at university for seven years, reading for degrees first in history and then in law. He became a first-class debater, as many of the Glasgow university alumni at that time did, helping his university side win the *Observer* mace competition, but his greatest passion lay in politics.

At just 21, he was adopted Labour candidate for East Fife, which he fought unsuccessfully, and, despite another couple of failed attempts, became the MP for North Lanarkshire in 1970. Legend has it that he won enough money on predicting the results of the 1966 general election in Scotland to be able to quit being a solicitor and train for the Bar; I am not sure whether that is true.

As a new MP in this House in 1970, it was said that he ruined his chances of early promotion by defying his Whip and voting for entry into the EEC in 1971; I certainly know what defying my party Whip on Europe feels like so can concur with that. He remained a staunch pro-European and internationalist his entire career. Breaking the Whip must have been difficult for John, because he was a party man and believed in discipline, which would prove to be useful in his later political career, but he also believed in the common market and working together, and history repeats itself all too often in this place.

John had a glittering parliamentary governmental career as a Minister in employment, trade and energy until the long 18 years of Labour in opposition. He was shadow Chancellor from 1987 until he became Leader of the Opposition, following the 1992 general election and the resignation of Lord Kinnock. But despite his glittering parliamentary career, John always put his constituents first. Mike Elrick, who worked for John, said that John always emphasised that he had constituents who needed him to fight their corner and he had no intention of letting them down.

The people who knew him best were the wonderful people who worked for him, such as David Ward who is here today. I asked David what it was like to work for him and he had story after story of what a pleasure and how much fun it was. As almost every tribute has mentioned and will mention, he was a witty man, with a warmth and kindness. But David tells a story, published in Mark Stuart's book “John Smith: A Life”, that emphasises John's devastating humour, which was used to deadly effect in parliamentary debates. John was a

[Ian Murray]

brilliant debater capable of superb one-line put-downs to Conservative MPs brave enough to intervene on him. When John was on full song, he relished the chance to cut his opponents to size. Such was his fearsome reputation that it became obvious that Tory Whips were discouraging their MPs from interrupting him in debates. In response, Labour Back Benchers used to taunt the Tories to stand up.

John was spontaneously quick-witted but he also worked very hard at jokes prepared in advance. A great example is the “Neighbours” skewering of Nigel Lawson in this Chamber in June 1989, when Lawson was Chancellor, over the role of Margaret Thatcher’s economic adviser Sir Alan Walters. Lawson and Walters were at loggerheads over Tory policy on Europe—that sounds familiar—and that was causing huge friction between No. 10 and No. 11, which is also hugely familiar. In opening an Opposition debate, John sang a brief section from the theme tune from the television programme “Neighbours”, playing on these tensions; I am not going to sing it this afternoon. This hilarious mocking of the Chancellor culminated in John calling on him to go “before he was pushed”, and 24 hours later the Chancellor resigned.

David Ward said that they were working on the speech the day before the debate and, while John and David were drafting the text, another member of the team, Ann Barrett, was watching the BBC to make sure John got the lyrics to the theme tune right. After that, they seemingly rehearsed the theme song with everyone singing along late into the evening. David said he was worried that anyone wandering past the leader’s office would have been forgiven for thinking everyone had gone stark raving mad.

But I wonder what John Smith would have made of today’s greatest issue, Brexit. Today is Europe Day, and he was a great internationalist. For one, he would not have gambled on calling a referendum and he would have challenged the constant downplaying of the importance of the UK as an integral member of the EU. What would John have thought of the Brexit shambles engulfing and paralysing our politics? It is worth examining what he would have done, and David Ward looks at this in an article published in today’s *New European*. We know that John voted to go into the EU. He fundamentally believed that giving up some national sovereignty to gain some sovereignty back would allow a great degree of control over the international companies and the global issues of the future. Working together was the only way to solve the global problems.

And here is a greater lesson for Europe now: the way John Smith handled the tricky problem of Europe. Instead of a leader trying to force his opinion on the party—history may be repeating itself in the Labour party today—he asked the party to force its view on the leadership. There are important lessons to learn from his handling of the European issue during his all-too-brief tenure as Labour leader. The party could have been equally as divided as the Conservatives. Dissidents led by former Cabinet Minister Peter Shore—including a notably serial rebellious Back Bencher and challenger to his leadership, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), the current Leader of the Opposition—were irreconcilably opposed to Britain’s membership of the European Union, but John minimised

internal dispute by taking the unprecedented step of allowing the parliamentary Labour Party, rather than the shadow Cabinet, to determine its policy on Maastricht ahead of crucial votes.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate and for the way in which he is presenting his arguments in favour of John Smith. I should like to take him back to the way in which John Smith conducted himself in the Chamber. Although he was robust in his parliamentary style, he was always respectful. This reminds me of a conversation I had with Jimmy Gordon—now Lord Gordon—who said that it was because of the respect John Smith had for others that he had not come across one person with a bad word to say about him. Would the hon. Gentleman like to reflect on that?

Ian Murray: That was a super intervention. I think that that was the measure of the man himself. I am sure that, if we were all a bit more like John Smith, this place would be more pleasurable and our politics would be more as they should be.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend might not know that I used to work for John Smith, and I will be speaking about him in the debate later. John did not suffer fools gladly. If you crossed him in a bad way, if you let him down or if you did not come up to scratch, you got the hard word—and if he gave you the hard word, you deserved it.

Ian Murray: I am sure that my hon. Friend has no direct experience of that and that he has just been told about that approach taken by the former leader of the Labour party.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I think that I am the only one here on the Conservative Benches today who was here on the day that John died. I remember being in the Department of Social Security, where I was a Minister, and I remember how shocked everyone was. We learned quite quickly that he had passed away, before it could be publicly announced. I remember the shock among Labour friends as they began to appreciate what had happened, and I would like the hon. Gentleman to know that Conservative Members who were here felt exactly the same as our colleagues in the Labour party. In that spirit, I would say to him that, while he has painted a picture of a robust and quite partisan politician, I cannot personally remember being on the wrong side of one of John Smith’s tirades. That is probably because I was one of those who took the advice of the Whips and did not intervene on him. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he was able to combine passion with courtesy, and that if there is anything that we are missing at the moment in the difficult debates we are having, it is the ability to combine our passion—whether for our party beliefs or for Europe—with the courtesy that this House and this country need? John Smith’s example should take us forward into the future.

Ian Murray: The right hon. Gentleman’s intervention speaks for itself. If the House will indulge me, I have not yet had the opportunity to say publicly that he was a fantastic Minister in the Foreign Office. I sit on the

Foreign Affairs Committee, and he was always courteous and straight with us. He was a super Minister, and I hope that he ends up back on the Front Bench as soon as possible.

John Smith's self-confident approach won a clear majority among Labour MPs for ratification of the Maastricht treaty. Crucially, that left the Conservatives looking fatally divided and Labour clear in its support of a radical and progressive agenda for a reformed European Union that put jobs and people first. I just wish that we could have that approach today. I am in no doubt that he would be deeply saddened by Brexit, angered by the lies told during the referendum and dismayed by the Prime Minister's approach. I think that today he would endorse exactly the position taken by his former deputy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South. She unequivocally and persuasively believes that any version of a Brexit deal passed by this place should be put to a confirmatory public vote. We all listened intently to her superbly argued speech in this House during the indicative vote process, and many would conclude that John Smith would have agreed with every word she spoke. That is where our politics is lost today. Smith's politics were based on persuasion and taking people with him, by force of argument, to do what was in the national interest. I believe that our politics has lost that principle at the moment, as the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) said.

Then there is John's beloved Scotland. What would he make of it all today, as a passionate believer in devolution? It is 20 years this week since devolution was introduced. The Scottish Parliament is his legacy. John firmly believed that devolution was the settled will of the Scottish people, but that independence would be disastrous. He would see it as even more of a folly than leaving the European Union. John made his political name by being fully immersed in his time at the Cabinet Office to do devolution. Many thought that it was a poisoned chalice, but he came out of it incredibly well. In a touching twist of fate, the first sitting of the new Scottish Parliament took place on the fifth anniversary of his death in 1999. I wonder what John would think of what is happening in Scotland today, where his idea of devolution to make Scotland the best place it can be is being used as a tool to by nationalists to rip the UK apart. Scotland lost giants like Smith, Dewar and Cook. We could be doing well with them in Scottish politics today.

Key to the devolution reform was, John believed, the conscious devolution of power to the nations and regions of the UK, and the first step was the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. He was a convert to devolution in the 1970s, not because he saw it as a means of killing "nationalism stone dead", but because he saw it as a means of addressing a democratic deficit, bringing politicians closer to the people and making them more accountable for their actions. A Scottish Parliament, he believed, was essential to the democratic governance of "our nation", by which he meant the United Kingdom, not just Scotland. In John's view, it was "unfinished business". Devolution was in the interests of the UK, not just Scotland, and a key part of the democratic renewal of the British constitution and its civil institutions. We maybe need a new Smith approach for the 21st century devolution settlement across the whole United Kingdom.

John Smith leaves a lasting legacy despite dying at just 55. Yes, he is the best Prime Minister we never had and an inspiration to us all, but his legacy also includes the Smith Institute, fellowship programmes for leaders of the future, and the John Smith Centre based at his own University of Glasgow. The centre has now established itself as a leading institute for academic rigour, advocacy and opportunity. It is part think-tank and part defender and advocate for the good in public service, and it exists to lead by his values and his example. There is also the annual John Smith memorial walk. It is a legacy he would be proud of.

Many in the Labour party would refer to themselves as Blairites or Brownites. In fact, many refer to each other in such terms—some positive and some negative. I have never been comfortable identifying with either of those blunt terms, but I am comfortable with being a self-declared Smithite, and on this anniversary we should all be a bit more like John and a bit more Smithite.

Andrew Marr concluded his obituary to John by saying:

"He is the lost leader of a lost country. Had he lived, he would have entered our lives, affected our wealth, altered our morale, changed how we thought about our country, influenced the education of our children. His grin would have become a familiar icon, his diction the raw material of satire. At however many removes, and however obscurely, his personality would have glinted through the state and touched us all. For good or ill? The question is now meaningless. That Britain won't happen."

In his final conference speech in 1993, John concluded with this:

"For I tell you this: there is no other force, no other power, no other party, that can turn this country round. It is up to us, all of us, together. This is our time of opportunity: the time to summon up all our commitment; the time to gather round us all our strength. And, united in our common purpose, it is the time to lead our country forward to the great tasks that lie ahead."

As we commemorate the 25th anniversary of John Smith's death, let us remember the words that have become his epitaph. The night before he died, he spoke at a European gala dinner in London. When he spoke these now immortal words, he did it from the heart and with his usual passion. They are something that I have always used to guide me in politics, and perhaps we should remind ourselves of them every day as we navigate our own paths in this place. These were the last words he said in public and some of the last words that many of his closest friends ever heard him say. As all our thoughts this weekend will be with Elizabeth, Sarah, Jane, Catherine, the wider family and his friends, we simply say:

"The opportunity to serve our country—that is all we ask."

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): In commending the hon. Gentleman's excellent speech, may I say for the sake of wider consumption and for those who pay attention to our proceedings here that the lack of hon. Members in the Chamber at this particular moment is absolutely no reflection on the way in which this debate is perceived by hon. Members in general?

Listening to the hon. Gentleman, I had a tear in my eye. I remember very well exactly where I was when I heard the news about John Smith. I can confirm what the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

Ross (Jamie Stone) said about the Scottish Conservative party conference, which was immediately suspended on that day. Perhaps I am somewhat biased as a West of Scotland, Church of Scotland, Scots lawyer, albeit a Conservative, in my absolute respect and liking for John Smith. I had the opportunity to speak to him reasonably often, and I held him in the highest regard.

What the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) said about the lessons we can learn, 25 years on, from the way in which John Smith conducted his political life and political relationships is a very strong message indeed. I simply repeat that the fact there is not a very large number of Members here to reiterate that message does not mean it is not held in very great honour. The memory of John Smith in this place will go on and on.

3.16 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Thank you for your very moving words, Madam Deputy Speaker. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) for his magnificent tribute to John Smith.

I rise as a Scot, indeed a Scottish Conservative, to honour one of our finest countrymen. When John Smith died, this country lost a leader of integrity and a leader of faith. His socialism was strongly rooted in his Christian faith, and he proposed a politics that, in his words, could

“replace cynicism with faith, despondency with expectation, despair with hope”.

This uplifting vision of political service—indeed, service to others—is rooted, is it not, in the principle of love, the greatest of all the godly virtues? It speaks to our day, and indeed to all the days we have faced or will face in this House, or wherever we may be.

The service of the best of our parliamentarians, and John Smith is certainly in that number, reminds us that we serve not to gratify our pride or vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion, but, in the words of the Speaker’s prayer that we have the privilege of hearing every sitting day:

“laying aside all private interests and prejudices keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind”.

John Smith, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh South said at the close of his tribute, sought and asked for the opportunity to serve our country, which is all he wanted. In truth, it should be all we want. He sought to serve, as many hon. and right hon. Members do, and the country is the poorer for his tragic and untimely loss.

John Major described John Smith from the Dispatch Box as

“an opponent, not an enemy”—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1994; Vol. 243, c. 430.]

—would that our politics reflected that spirit—and he paid tribute to his pragmatism and fair mindedness. John Smith knew that some things were more important than politics. The national interest and the interests of the people of our country always came first for him.

As has already been said, the legacy of John Smith is celebrated, and should be celebrated, in the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the devolution settlement. It is 20 years since the establishment of Holyrood,

which is now a vital part of the daily political life of Scotland. It is accepted by all, including people like me who campaigned and voted against its establishment. I was on the wrong side then, but there is no zeal like that of a convert—and a convert I am.

As a Scot and a Unionist, I feel that we must work hard to ensure that the Scottish Parliament fulfils its promise of a Scotland at ease with itself, united together and well governed, with a Parliament that makes a real difference to the quality of the lives of its people. But I have to say that I believe there is unfinished business in relation to devolution. In my mind, that is captured in my experience as a newly elected Member of Parliament for a Scottish constituency when I have come up against the culture and mindset of Whitehall.

The better governance of Scotland, I believe, will also require further change at the heart of the UK governmental system. There are yet missing constitutional pieces that undermine and have the potential to damage fatally the unity of the United Kingdom. I regret to say that, too often in Government Departments, there is a prevailing culture of “devolve and forget”. For the Union to flourish, its influence must continue to be felt as a power for good in the lives of people in all parts of the United Kingdom. John Smith knew that only too well, as a Scot who understood that the United Kingdom is at its best when it pulls together in the same direction and when people work together for everyone’s benefit.

John Smith’s resting place is on Iona, where the light of Christianity first came to Scotland. It is a fitting place. On his gravestone are engraved these words:

“An Honest Man’s The Noblest Work of God”.

That is truly fitting. John Smith’s politics were honourable and honest.

There is much we can learn from John Smith’s life and legacy—from a man seen as an opponent and not an enemy; a man who could see beyond politics towards a higher goal of a better country and a better world; a man who strove to give a voice in this place and elsewhere to those who are voiceless. I am only too well aware that in this House we stand on the shoulders of giants. Those who came before us are always with us, and always will be.

3.23 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate today. I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) on securing it and on his wonderful opening speech. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr).

I did not work for John Smith for a huge length of time—for about a year before he died. One of the truisms of life is that we do not know what we have until it has gone. Many people felt that about John Smith after he died. I remember well the tributes paid in this Chamber by MPs from both sides on that day and how moving and genuine they were.

It could be said that the podium at our conference or an outside event was not John’s natural habitat, but this Chamber was—particularly at the Dispatch Box, when holding forth in debate. He enjoyed it, the challenge and the back-and-forth. He loved to take interventions, like notes in a song to guide the rhythm of his speech. He would challenge the opposition. Having a master of

parliamentary debate at the Dispatch Box cheers the troops. It gave heart to the MPs sitting behind John to see him perform in parliamentary debate.

He came up with some memorable lines. I remember him giving John Major a very hard time when things were going wrong—the grand national had failed to start, hotels were falling into the sea, and he called him:

“The man with the non-Midas touch”.—[*Official Report*, 9 June 1993; Vol. 226, c. 292.]

For all the barbs, there was always a glint in John’s eye as he faced the person opposite.

John’s funeral was at Cluny parish church, and I had some part in organising it. It was a combination: it was a private family occasion but turned into something like a state funeral. We all remember the words of his lifelong ally, Donald Dewar, who said:

“The people know that they have lost a friend”.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): My right hon. Friend may recall that one thing that happened at that funeral and that was subsequently replicated for Princess Diana’s funeral was that the service was broadcast to nine cathedrals throughout the country. People turned up in their thousands to attend at all those different cathedrals and sing the same hymns at the same time.

Mr McFadden: That is an eloquent reminder of how deeply his death was felt in the country.

A debate such as this is also a moment to consider what John Smith stood for and what he would make of today. When we think about what he stood for, we think of words such as decency and community, which for him was not just a word but something with real meaning—the basic building block of the good society—and we think about the term social justice. One of his main initiatives as Labour leader was to establish the Commission on Social Justice, chaired by Sir Gordon Borrie and staffed by a bright young man called David Miliband. That body was charged with coming up with a platform of ideas that would challenge poverty and inequality, promote social justice and opportunity and, crucially, do so with policies that were properly costed and not dependent on some mythical magic money tree. Responsibility was written through its remit, as well as ambition.

The reason why responsibility was so important was that John understood the importance of trust in politics—of winning the public’s trust—and the truth is that in the early 1990s Labour had a trust problem with the public. We had lost four elections. The trust issues related to things such as taxation, our perceived weakness on defence, and a doubt that we could be responsible in power. He wanted to take away any fears about backing Labour, so those issues of responsibility and trust were hugely important.

The Commission on Social Justice did not issue its final report until after John had died, but many of its recommendations were enacted by the Labour Government that followed. The highly respected Resolution Foundation has recently done some interesting research on the impact of those policies on, for example, child poverty. The research showed that during those years child poverty was reduced by significantly more than was thought at the time, and that—without being too partisan today—it has gone up by more than we first thought in

the years since 2010. Those achievements on child poverty had a lot to do with the legacy of John Smith. It was about the difference between winning and losing elections and the difference between governing and protesting, and that difference was felt in the families of some of the poorest households in the country.

John Smith was a champion of the national minimum wage at a time when the cause was not fashionable and there was no consensus, even within the Labour movement. It is great that there is consensus now across the parties in favour of the national minimum wage, but it is one thing to accept consensus and another entirely to create it and John Smith played a great role in creating consensus on the national minimum wage.

John was also a party reformer. When I worked for him, he was engaged in a titanic battle with some of the major trade unions in the Labour party on the principle of one member, one vote. He had to face down accusations that if this reform went through, it would mean the end of the union link and a break in the relationship between the Labour party and the unions. That was not true, but it was what opponents of the reforms he was advocating maintained at the time. It took great bravery to carry that battle through. It was not a battle that he always relished, but it was one he was determined to win, and in the end, he did.

John was a passionate supporter of devolution. He believed that there should be a Scottish Parliament and he never believed that that should mean breaking up the United Kingdom. His belief in devolution sat alongside a belief that we have far more in common throughout the United Kingdom than anything that sets us apart.

John was an internationalist, a passionate pro-European who broke the party Whip to bring the United Kingdom into the European Community within months of being elected as a young and no doubt ambitious MP. The reason he was so passionately in favour of that was fired by social justice: he understood that in a world of international capital, there was a social justice benefit to be gained by controlling markets internationally, and that no country could do that on its own. He would have been very clear in his rejection today of the right-wing nationalism that has driven the Brexit agenda, but he would have been just as clear in his rejection of the ossified fantasy of socialism in one country that drives support for Brexit in some corners of the left, too.

John was a believer in strong defence, a supporter of the nuclear deterrent and a supporter of NATO. He understood the post-war Labour Government’s achievement in creating a system of collective defence. He would never have found himself parroting the lines of the country’s enemies or attacking NATO as an aggressive or expansionist organisation. That was his politics. That was his democratic socialism. The tradition that he represented was the internationalist social democratic tradition in the Labour party. Of course, those were different times. It was just after the end of the cold war, and South Africa was emerging from apartheid. There was a middle east peace process that people could really believe in, about which he was passionate.

I believe that the causes that called John Smith are still relevant today: the battle for social justice, the battle against poverty and inequality, the battle for community to mean something, the battle for the United Kingdom’s European identity, and the battle for strong defence and keeping people secure—for collective security.

[Mr McFadden]

These things are all relevant today and, in line with his tradition, there are still people prepared to stand up and fight for them.

3.33 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): It is of course a pleasure to speak in this debate on Europe Day about my dear old friend John, and I say that with humility. David Ward, his special adviser, is here, and one of the Deputy Speakers, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton), knew John well. Many of us worked with him, and you could not work with him without saying that you loved him. I knew him from about 1979, so for about 15 years. We were always in opposition; it is terrible that John never got that chance to be Prime Minister. When I got in, what I realised about this man who had asked me to join his team was what a rumbustious character he was.

I did not know anything about Scottish politics, and when I joined his team I suddenly realised that there were all sorts of internal wars in Scotland that I did not know about. I soon worked out who John loved, loathed and disagreed with, and it seemed that it all went back to time immemorial—or at least to their student debating days. I mean, it was no secret. Look at the quality of the speakers in those days, when I was first in the House: Robin Cook, Donald Dewar and John. I will not go into too much detail, but I will say that there was a very close friendship between Donald Dewar and John Smith, although the same could not be said about his relationship with Robin Cook, which was very deep in some student disagreement they had in the past.

John was a rumbustious character. He was larger than life and an amazingly vibrant speaker. I remember the day we were in here and the Conservative Government were near collapse. It was Black Wednesday—we had come out of the exchange rate mechanism—and he filleted the Chancellor of Exchequer. He did him over in a way that only a brilliant speaker can do.

I used to be a university teacher when I worked for a living. Some university teachers who come here were probably very good lecturers, but cannot speak in the House of Commons; I may be among them. But I know a lot of lawyers who come here and cannot keep the attention of the House. Their skills are about the courtroom, but they cannot do it in here. John Smith could do it in here—absolutely forensically and funnily. In a sense, it reminded me of Harold Wilson's reputation. John actually turned down Wilson's first offer of a job, which was unheard of. Wilson offered him a job in the Scottish Office, but he refused because he did not want to be branded just as a Scottish politician. Of course, Wilson was wonderful at interjections; he loved them. Whether in a public meeting or in the House, everybody knew that in his prime he was brilliant at repartee. John was even better—absolutely brilliant. As the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) said, people were told not to intervene on him because it was like offering human sacrifice in a debate. It was a rollercoaster working for John because he lived well and loved to party, but his work rate was enormous.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman talks about the fact that John Smith was a fantastic parliamentarian. There is often an issue with

some politicians being very good parliamentarians, but not very good constituency Members of Parliament—having difficulty interacting with their constituents. However, former local councillor Peter Sullivan, who I spoke to about John last night, said that he was incredible on the doorstep, and that he would often take too long speaking to some of his constituents, even when it was clear that they were not going to vote Labour. Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the fact that John Smith was not just a brilliant parliamentarian, but a very astute and caring local constituency Member of Parliament?

Mr Sheerman: I certainly do not disagree with that. He seemed to operate brilliantly at every level. He had the common touch. When we took people in to see him, he always knew how to communicate with them, whatever their background. As I said in an intervention, he would sometimes give people a steely look. When he first met me, he said, "I don't know what to make of you. You're MP for Huddersfield, but you don't have a Yorkshire accent. I don't know where you're from," which was quite perceptive of him. But we worked well together.

John was looking at new ideas all the time. He and Giles Radice asked me to be, I think, the very first person to work in the Department for Education on the employment side, so that we could develop a proper youth policy that covered not just conventional education, but training, job opportunities and so much else. I am a Co-operative Member of Parliament, and John was deeply interested in co-operatives. The interest in the Co-operative Development Agency and all that was down to him. He was passionate about it, and chaired the international co-operative movement for some time. Whatever he looked at, he had the passion and ability to push on.

John was also what we always need in this Labour movement of ours—a talent spotter. I remember when he had been at the Beaconsfield by-election, he came bustling back into the Commons and said, "It was a hard day and we're never going to win Beaconsfield, but there's a brilliant new candidate there—Tony Blair, his name is. I think we've got to get him a safe seat somewhere." He was a talent spotter, even in terms of seeing new Members of Parliament coming in, identifying their skills and giving them a hand.

He was a bruiser, absolutely—you should not cross him. If you crossed him, politically or personally, he did not forget easily. When we had an attempt by Militant—a left-wing Trotskyist group—to take over the Labour party, he led the fightback, with Roy Hattersley, Gerald Kaufman and other giants of the Labour party who identified the problem and formed a new group called Solidarity. I think that our Chief Whip would probably have painful memories of the battles of those days. When that triumvirate said, "We're not going to take this," John Smith was central to the fight to keep the Labour party as a central, democratic socialist party. We all owe him for the fact that he did that.

I think there was a bit of a myth after John died that he was almost a saint. John Smith was not a saint, I can tell you. He was not a bad man, but he loved life. He and Elizabeth were a great host and hostess at a party. We would never forget the lovely feeling of inclusion that the Smiths gave whenever they entertained.

When John became ill—when he had his heart attack—many of us were absolutely terrified. We were really, really concerned. We knew that we had to support him. There was a sort of little mafia. We used to co-ordinate to make sure that he got home at a reasonable time—that he did not stay in the House precincts too late and got his taxi back to the Barbican, where he lived on the 35th floor. I took on something of a role, because he lived in No. 352 and I lived in No. 92. Gwyneth Dunwoody lived in No. 112, so there was a kind of political and parliamentary presence. It was sometimes a very good excuse for me to say to John, “I’m going home—shall we share a cab?”, which we sometimes did.

Sadly, I was in my flat in the Barbican on that dreadful morning when someone rang me from John’s flat and said that he had collapsed in the shower. By the time I got out into the reception area, John was being brought out on a stretcher, very ill indeed. It was a very sad moment. I had a feeling of lost, missed opportunity for this person who had such a range of talents, passion and moral purpose. He wanted to change the world for the better—and to do it now. He was intolerant of waiting too long before the changes in low pay and the minimum wage—all those things—could be achieved.

I remember John fondly and dearly. I hope we can keep that spirit alive. He was not a saint, but a passionate, moral man who wanted to make change. He also wanted to have good politics—yes, to have a good fight and really scupper someone in this place, but to go outside and have a civilised relationship afterwards.

The quality of John’s life and the sort of environment he engendered was something all of us can learn from. I have never spoken on any occasion about John Smith. I loved him dearly. He had a huge influence on my life, and for Elizabeth and his daughters we should say today how much we appreciated what he did in touching our lives.

3.44 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am grateful and honoured to be called to speak briefly in this debate to pay tribute to John Smith. I am pleased to follow the very personal testimonial of my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman).

We have heard some moving speeches, but we have also heard about John’s humour. In case colleagues have not seen it, there is a great compilation of clips on Twitter of John Smith at the Dispatch Box tearing the Tory Front Bench apart. I mean no disrespect to the present Tory Front Bench, but it is so funny that even Lord Heseltine is laughing, and he is the butt of most of the jokes, which shows that it is really worth watching. It was posted by David Ward, and I have retweeted it, so colleagues can find it easily.

I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for affording this time, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) on securing the debate and on his excellent speech. I did not know John very well. I was chair of the London Labour party for nearly 10 years, from 1988 until 1997, and I only met him on a few occasions. Neil—now Lord—Kinnock saved the Labour party from the hard left and turned around our fortunes, making us a serious party again. John Smith, as leader after Neil, consolidated that process and set us on course to win the 1997 general election.

In the 1980s, the capital was not a happy place for our party. *The Sun* branded us the “Labour loony left” or, more precisely, the “London Labour loony left”. But through the support of the national leadership and the great efforts of professional staff like Terry Ashton, Margaret—now Baroness—McDonagh, David Evans and David Wilkinson, and hundreds and thousands of councillors, activists and volunteers, London became Labour heartland again. John Smith drove that progress, and one of his first regional visits on becoming leader was to London, which was not always a popular place for Labour leaders to visit in those days.

John’s belief in Europe is chronicled in today’s *New European* by his former head of policy from 1988 to 1994, David Ward, who is here listening to the debate. David has supplied me with a reminder of John’s legacy, some of which has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South and others. The John Smith Trust runs the fellowship programme, which promotes good governance. It is very positive to see that the Foreign Office is funding the trust, which I hope will continue.

One spin-off from the trust is EASST—the Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport—which was founded by Emma MacLennan and other trust alumni. Emma, who is married to David Ward, was Labour’s social security and taxation policy officer during John Smith’s time as shadow Chancellor and leader. EASST promotes road safety in former Soviet countries and saves lives there. More recently, John’s legacy includes the John Smith Centre at Glasgow University, promoting leadership in public service. Kezia Dugdale has just been appointed its first director, and I wish her well. Both those important programmes keep alive John’s strong commitment to democracy and public service.

As we have heard, some of John’s policy legacies were the national minimum wage, which he strongly supported as both shadow Chancellor and leader; constitutional reform and devolution, including on freedom of information, the Ministry of Justice and Assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and internal party reforms, including one member, one vote and electoral college revisions, as mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), a fellow Holyrood boy from Glasgow.

John was known for his commitment to social justice, and his strongest belief was that social justice and economic efficiency went hand in hand, hence the Commission on Social Justice. I am told he believed that party politics was like an aeroplane—you need a wing on the left and a wing on the right, and if you don’t have two wings, the beast won’t fly. Sometimes we forget that in modern party politics, in both the main parties.

John Smith’s incredible wit and debating skills in the Chamber led him to being credited, as we have heard, with provoking the resignations of Leon Brittan over Westland and of Nigel Lawson over Sir Alan Walters, Mrs Thatcher’s economic adviser.

On “Desert Island Discs”, John’s luxury item was a case of champagne. He told Sue Lawley that when he had drunk it, he would send a message in a bottle asking for more champagne. He was tickled to receive correspondence from a member of the public rebuking him for being so stupid for not knowing that you cannot put corks back into champagne bottles. Apparently, he loved that letter.

[Jim Fitzpatrick]

I would like to conclude, like my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South, by quoting from John Smith's last leader's speech to the Brighton Labour conference of 1993. This passage is perhaps a little more tribal than my hon. Friend's, but this is a measure of the time and of his incisiveness. John said:

"Today I offer the British people a better way and a clear choice: a choice between Labour's high skill, high tech, high wage economy, and John Major's dead-beat, sweatshop, bargain basement Britain; a choice between Labour's opportunity society which invests, which educates and which cares, and the sad reality of neglect, division, and rising crime that is Tory Britain today; a choice between Labour's commitment to democratic renewal, rights, and citizenship, and John Major's centralised, secretive and shabby Government."

In conclusion, we were robbed of a great Prime Minister. Britain would be a different place today if John Smith had been given the opportunity to serve and to lead our country. It is 25 years on, and I sincerely thank my hon. Friend and his supporters for giving the House the opportunity today to remember John and to pay a fitting tribute.

3.51 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak. I follow some very moving and thoughtful contributions from Members who were obviously touched greatly by John's influence in their lives. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) for bringing forward this debate at such a pivotal moment in our political history. We can learn a lot from our political traditions, particularly those that John Smith epitomised, as we think about how to address the great challenges that face us today.

Although John Smith was born in 1938, some 51 years before I was born, his influence still affected me in some small ways. Reflecting on his death in May 1994, when I was just five years old and at primary school—primary 1—one of my earliest political memories was the grief that swept through my house. My parents were crying, and I remember that very vividly. I have only some faint memories of politics in the 1990s, and one of the earliest ones was John Smith's death. Another one was Labour coming into government, and perhaps Princess Diana's death. These were the things I remember from my childhood as the pivotal episodes of the 1990s in politics that influenced me as a small child.

John Smith's death definitely struck a chord from a very early age because, after so much despair at the loss of the 1992 election, my parents had invested in the hope that Labour might finally come to power and achieve the changes, as it was seen at the time, to liberate our communities, which had been ravaged so terribly by Conservative party politics. There was a great deal of hope, and of lost hope in that moment, and that was definitely impressed on me from a young age. Tam Dalyell wrote about how he remembered it as similar to the death of Gaitskell in 1963 aged just 56. That was a similar episode of great potential and a great future Prime Minister lost to this country, and the potential of what that history could have entailed and what it could have meant had it not been altered in such a terrible way.

The key lessons from John Smith's political tradition and his political behaviour are that he was suspicious of factional demagoguery and of opportunist political spivs who crafted their values in managerialist speak. However, he was also very intolerant of his party being in impotent opposition. He yearned for Labour to return to government, and that was evident in his speeches and the way he addressed this House. In truth, he was a complex mixture of different things that influenced him as a person. There was the ruthless Glasgow University debater, which is a great tradition; the Edinburgh lawyer, which is another great tradition; and the emotional west highlander. He came from a very beautiful part of the world.

In Tam Dalyell's obituary, there is a reference to Calum MacDonald who was Member of Parliament for the Western Isles at the time of John Smith's death. He observed:

"That John Smith was a West Coast Highlander by birth and background came across strongly in three ways. First, that socialism for John was not about dry theories on narrow sectional interests, but about values, principles, and moral beliefs. Second was his great democratic and egalitarian quality—that he could relax with absolute ease in any circle of people. And third, the sense he gave of being a man with a healthy 'hinterland'—a man with a passion for politics but also with strong roots in his family, in Scottish society, and the land that he came from."

John Smith's presence was often felt. I went to Glasgow University, and one of the first things I did was join its union. Anyone who joins Glasgow University union cannot miss John Smith, because he is there facing every student who walks into that building as a wonderful bronze bust that stares from the top of the stairs of the debating chamber, and simply says on it "Friend of the Union". That is what encapsulated the spirit of John Smith.

Working-class people often go to Glasgow University, which is quite unusual in Britain because most of its students are home students and tend to come from the city. It has a fine working-class tradition, and because of that debating chamber where—like so many politicians from across Scotland—John Smith cut his teeth, he came to this House without fearing it and with a healthy understanding of how it works. Working-class people who went into politics cut their teeth at the Glasgow University union, which to this day is still the greatest debating union in the world. John Smith did a great deal to achieve that. He won the *Observer* mace for the union in 1962 and was convener of debates. He formed that great tradition along with Donald Dewar.

My maths teacher at school, Mrs McKee, used to tell me about going to see John and Donald who were a great double act in the chamber of Glasgow University. She recounted a particularly memorable occasion in November 1963, when the debate had to be suspended because someone burst in and said that John F. Kennedy had been assassinated. It is interesting how those great swathes of history can touch each other in such ways, and perhaps the great figures of that period influenced John's politics, just as he in turn influenced us. That is the great thing about institutions such as university unions. They build a great community, and even though I never knew John and he died when I was a small child, I still sensed the golden thread that runs through those institutions and inspires those who come after. That is a real sense of immortality. A person dies once when they physically die, but they would die a second time if their memory was lost, and keeping that memory and understanding alive is critical.

Until recent years, the university union held a biannual dinner and debate in honour of John Smith, and I remember that Tom Clarke, the predecessor of my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney), came to speak to us. He spoke movingly about John being such a lovely man and someone who did not suffer fools gladly. He was also a great friend to people across political traditions and divides. He was not sectarian or petty. He was certainly tribal and firm in his beliefs, but he maintained friendships despite that. We should remember that important point in our current politics.

After his election in 1970, John did not necessarily pursue those things that would lead to progression in the political hierarchy, and in 1971, he voted, along with 68 Labour colleagues, against the Whip on joining the common market. He told the Commons that day that

“economic forces must somehow be brought under popular control and be fashioned towards social and political ends that the people determine”—[*Official Report*, 26 July 1971; Vol. 822, c. 131.]

We should remember that fine sentiment today as we consider our future relationship with the rest of the world.

In 1974, when Labour was on the cusp of coming into government and defeating the Heath Government, John made another watershed decision that might come across as counterintuitive. He said that he did not want to take up the post of Solicitor General for Scotland, because he did not want to be typecast in Scottish affairs and as a lawyer-politician. Perhaps I made a fateful decision when I decided to become a junior shadow Minister in the Scotland Office, but I am proud to have done so in the tradition of John Smith, who was a predecessor of mine and a shadow Scotland Office apparatchik.

John was quickly forgiven and joined the Department of Energy. Cutting across political traditions, he served under Tony Benn who was then Secretary of State for Energy. Benn tasked him with setting up the British National Oil Corporation in Glasgow. Today, it is an office building used by Santander, which encapsulates what Labour was trying to achieve in the 1970s and how it was turned over by Thatcherism. He set up a great institution, which was a vision for mobilising the great resources of North sea oil for the common good and the greater betterment of the nation. Sadly, his vision and the BNOC-Britoil building were dismantled and that tradition and opportunity was lost, but that was another example of John's vision.

John was promoted to Minister of State under Michael Foot to pilot the Scotland devolution Bill through the Commons. Like Benn, Foot was full of praise for Smith's loyalty and expertise. His excellent personal relations with Benn and Foot made it much more acceptable that a tough right-winger should become a Cabinet Minister from 1978. From 1979, until his appointment as the leader of the Labour Party in 1992, he won every shadow Cabinet election.

On his advocacy of devolution, despite much criticism and opposition within the Labour party, John said:

“It is the Labour Party which has campaigned to get a Scottish Assembly established. No other political party has pioneered the way in which this Labour Party has.”

Indeed, he had disdain for the intransigence on the constitution of both the Conservative party and the nationalist traditions on this question. He recognised

that the United Kingdom has great benefit to Scotland, but that it is over-centralised. He sought to create a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh that would give better government to Scotland, while strengthening the United Kingdom. Then, as now, that is the preferred view of most of the people of Scotland, as regularly tested in opinion polls both before and since the 1997 and 2014 referendums. However, he also recognised that not responding imaginatively and vigorously to the need to reform the constitutional structure of Britain would create such tensions from a notion of a democratic deficit and regional imbalance that would only serve to render the fracturing of the United Kingdom altogether as the more likely outcome.

John Smith said in 1992 that there were two forces sawing away at the legs that support the Union: one was the nationalists, who wished to destroy the United Kingdom; and the other was the stupid Conservative party, whose members blundered on oblivious to the consequences that their arrogant actions were having for the future integrity of the United Kingdom. That was borne out in the Conservative party's opposition to the creation of the Scottish Parliament. And of course the SNP boycotted the Scottish constitutional convention and opposed devolution at the 1997 general election. It is nice to see that John's understanding of the problem and its solution was proven right by history. There is now much consensus on how he saw the future develop.

John was very proud of the Labour party: proud of its name and proud of its history. He was confident of the contribution it could make to the future progress of our country. He was also proud of Scotland, saying: “as a Scot myself, representing a Scottish constituency, born and brought up in Scotland, living and wishing to continue living in Scotland, a member of a Scots profession, with children at Scottish schools, and having roots too deep in Scotland to wish to ever sever them, I think I am as entitled as any separatist to speak for my fellow countrymen.”

In the particularly vicious discourse that prevails in Scotland in the wake of the 2014 referendum, those sentiments ought to be heard far and wide across Scotland.

On the Labour party, John said it was:

“a united and a determined party, impatient for the responsibility of power. Let us communicate our resolve, our ambitions, our values, to the people. For they are ready, they are so ready to listen to the message of hope and of confidence which Labour proudly proclaims.”

Sadly, death robbed him of the opportunity to serve, but the Labour Government of 1997 delivered his unfinished business of home rule. His friend from his days on the floor of the university union to the Floor of this House, Donald Dewar, said at the opening of the Scottish Parliament, almost 20 years ago to the day:

“A Scottish Parliament. Not an end: a means to greater ends.”

As John Smith said,

“What's the point of being in politics, if you can't speak up for the people who can't speak up for themselves?”

That was the greater end to which John Smith sought to achieve a Scottish Parliament. In his maiden speech, he spoke up for his constituents from mining communities about how poverty was affecting them. That must be our task today: to demonstrate the same courage in speaking for the interests of people who cannot speak up for themselves across our constituencies and countries and to share John Smith's optimism for what public service can achieve so that we can realise our capacity as

[Mr Paul Sweeney]

a nation and a society to set our own objectives and to set about achieving them in a spirit of resolute determination. May he rest in peace.

4.4 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney). I add my thanks and congratulations to the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) on having the foresight to recognise that this was an occasion that many of us in the House would want to mark.

Twenty-five years ago, I was a young TV reporter standing in a car park in Aberdeen with a camera crew waiting to interview Tony Blair. We knew that John Smith had had a heart attack that morning and we hoped that Tony Blair's delayed arrival would bring a statement that all was fine and that John Smith would recuperate and be back soon. Sadly, by the time Tony Blair did arrive, we knew he had a very different outcome to relay to us. My thoughts that day, as on this day, were not merely about politics. I come from a family of three girls who lost their dad to a sudden heart attack at 44, and my thoughts were, and still are, with his girls. I am sure that the hon. Member for Edinburgh South would agree that, wherever Scottish politicians gather, at some point we get to talking about John Smith and what might have been—the country that might have been, the Labour party that might have been, how devolution might have developed differently, how the Labour Government might have acted differently—but we must always remember those lives most closely affected by losing him.

I do not claim to have known John Smith well, but when I was a young reporter he always gave me time and treated my often naive questions with respect, and he never ever patronised me—something we should all think about as Members. I particularly remember one evening when I was a reporter at Radio Clyde and had to phone him about the latest speculation about whether Neil, now Lord, Kinnock, was about to step down as Labour party leader. Once he had dismissed it as nonsense and said there was no way he would comment on such a ludicrous suggestion, he spent about 20 minutes, maybe half an hour, just chatting with me, putting me right about the situation and telling me what was actually going on in British politics and what I should be aware of. I came away from that conversation, which he did not have to have with me, better informed, and from then on in my career, I had much greater insight into and respect for British politics. I was not the only one, and I do not think it was just because I was a graduate of Glasgow University. I was not the only journalist in Scotland who had for John Smith the sort of respect and admiration the rest of us can often only aspire to. Other Members have spoken about the grief felt across Scotland among politicians. I cannot speak for the politicians of that time—I was not one of them, I was a journalist—but every single one of us felt that day that we had lost something that we perhaps had not valued enough. We saw him as a politician committed to an ideal but with a tolerance, understanding and commitment to people and communities that we would do well to emulate here.

I remember another occasion when I was sent to a pub in Airdrie—if memory serves—on the occasion of John Smith's first response as shadow Chancellor. I was sent out to get public reaction to what the local MP was going to say, and I came away with a picture of a man regarded in his constituency as "one of us", as somebody who understood his constituency and spoke for his constituency. He knew exactly what they wanted to hear and what they needed. I contrast that with the detached, two-dimensional picture that politicians often can project today. Maybe we need a little more of whatever it was that John Smith had, because he had something special that gave him a place in the hearts of journalists, politicians, the community and everybody in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East spoke about his parents. I remember my mother, a Tory, being distraught on the day John Smith died, because she respected him as a man who lived his politics. A politician to respect is one who enacts their politics in everything—no matter how small—that they do every day. That is what matters.

Looking back over the years, I remember a fantastic evening at the docklands in 1997: Labour's daybreak party to celebrate what many of us, Labour or not, regarded as a turning point for the country. I remember how much John Smith's presence was missed that night, as I suspect it has been missed in some way by Members in this place every day for the past 25 years.

I end by thanking the hon. Member for Edinburgh South again. As I got more involved in politics and decided to stand for this place, I kept in mind—even though I am not a member of the Labour party—that phrase of John Smith's from the evening before he died. All of us who are in this place or who aspire to this place would do well to take it as our guiding principle: what we have here, and what we aspire to, is simply the opportunity to serve.

4.11 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) for securing this debate. We are here to pay tribute to one of my predecessors, John Smith, on the 25th anniversary of his death. As a Member of Parliament, first for North Lanarkshire and then for Monklands East, John represented communities that are now in my constituency, including Carnbroe, Shawhead and Whifflet. He served North Lanarkshire and its communities with distinction in this House and I know that he is held in high regard locally.

When I learned that this debate was to take place, I spoke to another great parliamentary champion of North Lanarkshire, Tom Clarke, who I know is watching today and who was a good friend of John Smith's. These are his reflections on John as a politician and as a friend:

"John Smith and I first met when he was an outstanding debater at Glasgow University and I was a Young Socialist. We were friends for a very long time. John could have a short fuse at times, but I had never known him to hold grudges. His great gift was his ability to relate warmly with people, whatever their background. He was as at home with miners and steelworkers when they were fighting to save their industries as he was when he met with international leaders.

I was fortunate in being able to be with John for two days before he died when we attended and gave evidence to the Boundary Commission which was considering proposals for our neighbouring constituencies. There was very little that we did not discuss.

I retain the view that while he took his role seriously, the post he held rested lightly on his shoulders and he was looking forward to the challenges of serving as Prime Minister. It remains one of my greatest regrets that history denied him that opportunity.”

I thank both John and Tom for their tireless service in this House on behalf of the people of North Lanarkshire.

John had a distinguished political career and was regarded as a fine parliamentarian. As a Minister in the Labour Government of 1974 to 1979, he was responsible for the initial Scottish and Welsh devolution proposals, as we have heard. He continued to champion the cause of devolution throughout his career; I think he would be proud that this week we are marking 20 years of devolution in Scotland and Wales.

Many commentators have speculated on what a John Smith-led Labour Government would have achieved in the UK. We know that John championed a national minimum wage at a time when it was not popular with some sections of the trade union movement. We know that his Government would have ensured that the richest in our society paid their fair share to support our public services. Indeed, it was John who advocated a 50p tax rate for the highest earners when he served as shadow Chancellor during the 1992 general election. He once said, referring to high tax payers,

“One should shoulder that obligation as part of one’s citizenship and be proud of it.”

We also know that his Government would probably not have led the UK into the disastrous Iraq war.

John Smith’s legacy lives on to this day. It is a fine tribute to him to be here today and to mark those 25 years. The John Smith Trust, formed in 1996, continues his work in promoting good governance, social justice and the rule of law by helping to develop the next generation of leaders committed to making a difference in their countries and societies. I reflect on the fact that many people across the United Kingdom still regret that John Smith was never able to serve as Prime Minister. As I said in my maiden speech—I have heard it said again today—he was one of the best Prime Ministers that this country never had.

I remember the day of John Smith’s death. I was working as a postman at the time and I remember his death because we had suffered for so many years under the Thatcher Government. I was a young man, working, and I was devastated that day, just like everyone else. I had just become a trade union representative. I stood in silence when I heard the news. I think that the whole country did, such was the mark of the man who was John Smith.

I am committed to following in the footsteps of both John and Tom Clarke, representing the people whom they once represented here in the mother of Parliaments. It is an honour and a privilege to do so.

4.16 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Change UK): I vividly recall the morning the BBC announced that John Smith had been taken ill. I had a meeting with Liz Pearce, who had been my general election agent and who was a councillor. She had just won us our first position in Redbridge, where we were going to form a Labour administration. Liz worked for me, and we had to have a discussion about the implications of that win for our relationship and whether or not she could continue to

work for me. I was expecting it to be a difficult discussion. Then the message came through that John Smith had died. We cancelled our discussion immediately. We could not talk; we could not think. I remember coming here later. We always remember occasions which have such a huge, traumatic impact.

I knew John Smith reasonably well. I knew him when I worked at the Labour party headquarters, in the policy directorate and then in the international section. At the time of the 1992 election, I was the head of that section. From time to time, I would arrange for him to meet incoming delegations. There were good discussions with the Social Democratic Party of Germany about how to modernise the policy of the Labour party.

John Smith, although he was the shadow Chancellor, was much more than that. Neil Kinnock was trying to save the Labour party and bring us back from the abyss of the terrible period that we had suffered, to expel the Trotskyites and modernise the Labour party to make it electable. Although Roy Hattersley, now Lord Hattersley, was the deputy leader, many Members of Parliament said to me that the real deputy leader was John Smith. It was crucial that both wings of the party, the centre left and the centre right, worked together in that modernisation project.

Other Members have already said how important John Smith was in relation to many of the policy reforms of that period. He was also clearly politically principled and brave. The shadow Budget that he published just before the 1992 election, which has not been mentioned yet, was controversial. Some people said—wrongly, in my view—that that was the reason why we did not win the 1992 election, but I remember a conversation with a woman in a queue at a bus stop when I was campaigning for election in ’92. I was fighting a very marginal constituency—we were number 61 on the list and Labour had to win 62 seats to be the biggest party. To cut a long story short, I got here and many others did not. This woman had a pram and young children, and I said, “So are you going to be supporting Labour? You’ll get £6 more; we are very concerned to help people like you.” She said, “No, you’ll just take it away from me in tax.” I asked, “Do you pay income tax? Are you working?” “No,” she said; nevertheless she was convinced she was going to lose it. That is the problem we had sometimes in politics—how to cut through the misunderstanding.

I remember the debates around Maastricht when I came into Parliament in ’92. I remember the discussions we had after Neil Kinnock stood down and John Smith had been elected at a special conference by 90% of the vote for leader against Bryan Gould. Bryan Gould was my constituency neighbour in Dagenham, and I was under some encouragement and pressure from some people locally to support my constituency neighbour, and I did, for deputy leader, but I had no doubt who was going to be the best leader.

John Smith played a brilliant tactical game in those Maastricht debates. He was able to embarrass and undermine the John Major Government on so many occasions. We had one occasion when there was a tied vote and the then Speaker gave the casting vote in favour of the Government, but the next day it was realised that there had been a miscount and the Government had won by one. We have had similar scenarios recently, but fortunately, so far as I am aware, the vote was accurately counted on that occasion.

[Mike Gapes]

We had a genius and a real intelligence in our leader at that time and we were surging ahead. Labour in opposition in 1994 was 20 points or more ahead in the opinion polls, going into European Parliament elections in 1994, Labour was going to do incredibly well. This was in the pre-proportional days, and we won all 10 seats in London. The campaign and platform was established under John Smith, but it was Margaret Beckett who took us into those elections because tragically we no longer had John.

The party then moved to a younger generation, and the modernisation project, started by Neil Kinnock and continued by John Smith, was then continued under Tony Blair. That led to not one, not two, but three general election victories, and all the great achievements of that Labour Government, which, sadly, are not recognised enough by some in the Labour party today. I am not going to make a speech attacking the current leadership of the Labour party; I have done that before and will not do so today. I will simply say that John Smith, on this Europe day, would have read the election manifestos for the European elections with some degree of concern. He would have wanted a passionate case to be made for remaining in the European Union and for reforming it, as he argued, in speeches that have been quoted today, when he broke the Whip all those years ago, and as the Labour party argued, under his leadership, in the 1994 European election campaign. A moderate, mainstream and—in Labour terms—centre-right political leader, he was passionately pro-European, and in those days, that led to a significant electoral victory in those European elections. Let us look back 25 years to what could have been, and then look at where we are today.

John Smith had some very nice human qualities. I remember sitting in the House of Commons Library late one night in 1993; there was almost no one else there, but suddenly I saw the Leader of the Opposition walking around looking for a book. We have not often seen Leaders of the Opposition of any party doing that in recent years—[*Interruption.*] I do not mean reading books; I mean walking round the Library in a normal kind of way. Also in 1993, John organised a reception in his room for all of us who had been elected a year earlier, on 9 April 1992. I was not there at the start of the reception because I had to rush from hospital, where my wife had given birth to our daughter. I remember this vividly, because when I arrived, everyone applauded me when it was announced that I had become a father that day. That is a strong personal memory for me.

I also recall John saying, in that discussion with all of us who had entered Parliament the year before, “You have all got to learn how this place works. Spend your time understanding parliamentary procedure. Understand how Committees, questions and early-day motions work. Get to know what you will be doing here. I am not going to make any of you members of my shadow team. I want you to get an understanding of this place over the next few years. Some of you will be Ministers when we have a Labour Government, but I will want people who really understand how this place works.” What a contrast that is to the things that have happened since then.

John Smith was a great parliamentarian. He loved Parliament and he loved the debates. He is, and will be, sorely missed.

4.28 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and to contribute to this debate, not just on behalf of the Scottish National party but on behalf of my constituents, many of whom were also John Smith’s constituents. I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) on securing the debate. I supported his application for it, and I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for granting this time in the main Chamber. The hon. Member for Edinburgh South spoke eloquently, although I did not agree with everything he said, as I am sure he will understand. However, there is no doubt that he did John Smith’s memory justice. My thoughts, like his, will be with John’s family this weekend. Others who made moving speeches in the debate—those who knew John and those who did not—also did his memory justice. They all made their tributes well.

I did not know John Smith. Many people remark that I must have had a very tough paper round, but I hope it is self-evident that I did not know him—I was eight years old and growing up in Orkney when he sadly died. Although I did not know him, in preparation for today’s debate I have spoken to people, locally in my constituency and nationally, who did. The great sense that I get not just from this debate, but from the people I have spoken to is of someone who was clear about what he believed in and had the talents to realise his ambitions, but who was humble enough to be inclusive and egalitarian.

Peter Sullivan became a Labour councillor in the Cairnhill area of Airdrie—now the Airdrie Central ward—when John was the local MP. I spoke to Peter last night and, despite the fact that they had disagreements, like so many others Peter spoke of someone whom we would all wish to see leading in politics today. He said that John was a humble man without being a humble person in that, despite his undoubted abilities, he never sought to demean or make anyone feel small.

What Peter really appreciated was that John Smith made time for other people and took the time to canvass for him and to knock on doors, which worked because local people trusted John, meaning that they voted for Peter. Even if he was too polite and spent too long speaking to people who clearly were not going to support Labour, he was dignified and always listened even when people disagreed with him. He gave them the respect they deserved before politely offering his counter-argument.

What struck me from reading the biographies and the book dedicated to John, which was edited by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), was his inclusiveness and willingness—even eagerness—to surround himself when Leader of the Opposition with people with whom he disagreed, and the aeroplane analogy of the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) is quite fitting. That is what John’s best man Jimmy Gordon—now Lord Gordon—remembers as well. John had huge respect for Back Benchers and wanted to listen to them, regardless of whether they agreed with him. Jimmy thinks that that was because of John’s deep-rooted belief that everyone entered politics as a

public service. We may disagree on particular issues, but John tolerated political difference because he respected everyone who made the sacrifices necessary to enter politics as a public service.

That tolerance has struck me because we have a real problem in politics at the moment with people at all levels who do not have that same strength of character, the same tolerance, the same confidence of their conviction, and the same ability to use the art of debate to persuade that John Smith had. We are living in a time of political intolerance, which is a problem for all our parties, our political movements and all of us. That intolerance has led to a culture in which abusing politicians and other public figures is becoming normalised. When John Major paid tribute to John Smith in this House in the hours after his death, he spoke of someone he debated with vigorously in public, but with whom he could share a respectful drink in private. Now there is a dangerous tribalism under which people are incapable of being wrong, we do not allow ourselves the space to accept nuance, and pragmatism is looked on with suspicion.

If we are to tackle abusive behaviour online and in public, it is incumbent on politicians to show some leadership. Yes, call out problems where we see them, as some of my colleagues did at the weekend, but also show a little more respect to one another and more tolerance for people with opposing views. Debate with John's passion, but have a civilised relationship afterwards, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) rightly said. Otherwise, I fear that we will move to a politics in which creative thinking and collaboration are impossible.

There is no doubt that John Smith was a thinker. We have already heard of the policies that he proposed that are still his legacy to this day, but Peter Sullivan says that he was coming up with new policies that had not appeared in Labour's manifesto for the upcoming elections. Those policies included allowing council tenants to live rent free after a period spent in council housing, such as 25 years. I can certainly see the attraction of that policy, and I am sure that others on the progressive side of politics would, too.

John is remembered locally as someone who was accessible and worked hard for his constituents, but he will be remembered by most as a formidable parliamentarian. Jim Sillars was a member of the parliamentary Labour party at the same time as John Smith and remembers how he used his forensic skill as a defence lawyer in parliamentary debates. However, like Peter Sullivan, Jim saw someone with the necessary human touch that is required in political leaders, but is sometimes lacking. The valuable asset, as Jim describes it, was John's sense of humour coupled with a sense of humility. It was that humility that drew me to quote, of all my many illustrious predecessors, John Smith's maiden speech in my own first contribution in this place. He was humble enough to admit his nerves before that maiden speech, and in his last speech he said he just wanted to serve and that he genuinely believed in public service.

As Jim says, John did not see himself as exalted but as fortunate to be given the opportunity to work on people's behalf. Jim is right, and that should be what drives all of us. Lord Gordon agrees and feels that that feeling of public service is being lost, not just by a small number of those involved in politics but by those who observe and comment on politics, who often forget that public service is what drives the majority of us.

In that regard, it is timely that the former leader of the Labour party in Scotland, Kezia Dugdale, should be taking up her post at the John Smith centre for public service. I am sure we all wish her well, and I know John's family are still deeply involved with the centre.

People locally and nationally often speculate as to what might have happened had it not been for John Smith's untimely death, and we heard some speculation in this debate. Would Labour have won in 1997? Undoubtedly. Would the Labour Government still have been radical and popular? Almost certainly. Would we have gone to war in Iraq? Unlikely.

But I do not think John Smith's legacy should just be his policy ideas or his unfulfilled destiny, because although I agree with much of what he stood on politically, I cannot agree with all his political decisions. What should be remembered is what he stood for. That should be his legacy and a lesson to unite people in politics today. We can agree or disagree with John Smith's politics, but we should admire and aspire to his tolerance, his humility, his inclusiveness, his egalitarianism and his eagerness to serve the people.

4.36 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I share the last sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray). We remember the man.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) for securing this debate, because John Smith is still a towering figure for many of us. The words spoken today on both sides of the House are tribute to the high regard in which John Smith is held not simply by those who knew him but by those who are, in some ways, heirs to what he stood for.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) is right in saying that Conservative Members claim John Smith as a fellow parliamentarian, which is right and proper. And it is right that the Scots in this Chamber claim John as a Scot, and they should be proud that John was such a proud Scot. We, of course, claim him as Labour, because John was Labour. Whatever John Smith was in his life, he stood for the values and principles on which the Labour party was founded and he took them forward so ably.

It is almost axiomatic that John's moral view of the world was that social justice was at the heart of what he stood for in politics and of what he believed the Labour party had to stand for. That is an eternal message for my party, and politics across the world needs people who will challenge injustice on behalf of those who cannot speak up for themselves—we have heard those words repeated on numerous occasions—and that is the hallmark of what John Smith was all about.

John Smith was, in many ways, a model Member of Parliament from a Chief Whip's point of view. Madam Deputy Speaker, as a former Chief Whip you will know the value of such discipline. The present Labour Chief Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown), will not be dismayed if I point out, as others have done, that although John Smith broke the Whip on only one occasion, he did so on a matter of fundamental principle—his passionate belief that Britain is a necessary part of a larger structure, the then European Economic Community. He could not, therefore, go along with the mainstream of Labour votes at the time.

[Tony Lloyd]

I therefore use this opportunity to quote another leader of the Labour party who is known for having broken the Labour Whip once or twice, the present Leader of the Opposition. He has asked me to read these words into the record:

“John Smith was Labour to his core. His politics were those of a genuine social democrat—he promoted equality, supported trade unionism, and believed in a kinder, more caring society.

Not only that, but he was an exceptionally decent and inclusive Leader of the Labour Party. I joined the Labour Party in the 1960s, and of all the Labour leaders I knew, John was the one I admired the most.

I will never forget his speech to the Labour Party Conference in 1993...promising the same legal rights to every worker from day one of their employment, part-time or full-time, temporary or permanent.

It has taken too long, but the next Labour government will deliver on John's commitment.

His death was a tragedy, not just for his own family and friends, but also for the Labour Party, and the country as a whole.”

What lies within those words is sometimes missed. It has been said today that John Smith was moderate and right-of-centre in Labour party terms. Actually, that is not a strictly accurate interpretation of what he was about; he was more radical than people believe. The fact is that he was comfortable with Labour's traditions—comfortable talking about employment rights and advocating them, as I heard him do many times in this Chamber when he was shadow Secretary of State for Employment during the passage of Norman Tebbit's draconian anti trade union Bill. John Smith was a passionate defender of the rights of people in the workplace. He was sponsored by the Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, along with my good friend Gerald Kaufman—perhaps the two most unlikely boilermakers ever to hit this place. Nevertheless, they were committed to the principles of that union and what trade unionism was about in the Britain of that time, and that remains relevant to the United Kingdom of today.

As has been mentioned, John could also claim significance in the debate about the minimum wage. I was on the shadow employment team for a time during that period: we were told by the Government that the minimum wage would cost 1 million jobs, which was then hiked to 2 million jobs. It did not cost those jobs, of course—it was part of creating a fairer society. The interesting point is that while John Smith was leader the issue was massively controversial, even within the Labour party. Some of our major trade unions at the time were saying that it would erode wages for their own members. That argument was strenuously put forward, but John Smith was one of those who said that that argument could not prevail. People were on derisory wages that have been forgotten now. Hairdressers were sometimes on wages so outrageous that it was impossible for them to support their families. Fighting for that kind of social justice was radical, and the hallmark of the then Leader of the Opposition.

John had enormous intellectual gifts as a parliamentarian. Almost every friend and colleague I have spoken to about him has a memory of John's decision-making capacity. He would come to quick and robust conclusions about what was right and proper, sometimes on issues that mattered but did not necessarily have a strong

policy bent. Lord Foulkes—then George Foulkes, shadow Foreign Minister—travelled with John Smith to China. They had many engagements with the Chinese Deputy Prime Minister, who would raise questions of policy. John would turn to George, who told me he would stammer out some quick response about what he hoped the policy was. John instantly turned it into something that sounded credible and competent, and was accepted by the Chinese Deputy Prime Minister as the voice of a party ready for government.

I saw John Smith in a similar light when he took on controversial policies. The promotion of comprehensive education was an issue in the '90s just as it is today. John was easily persuaded that social justice was on the side of taking forward that reforming step. That was controversial, but he was prepared to take on controversy if he believed it was the right thing to do.

As a politician, John was gifted and formidable in this place. Reference was made to the YouTube videos that David Ward has made available. David will be glad to know that I watched one of them—it is some years since we have seen each other, so I am delighted to see him in the Under-Gallery—and it was interesting to see how full the Chamber was when John Smith spoke. He was one of those people: everyone would be encouraged to come in to listen to him—to his bulldozer drive against the Government of the day, his forensic skills, his strong intellectual ability and, of course, his devastating wit. Sometimes, that devastating wit was most telling of all. The then Prime Minister John Major had apparently written a chapter in a book about football called “We'll Support You Evermore”; as John Smith said at the time, it was obviously not a Tory party publication. I would venture to say, without introducing too much bitter politics into the debate, that we could make the same claim today.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East will not be unhappy if I recall the fact that although people talk about John being a kind man—and he was; he was very forgiving and prepared to heal the enmities, or at least some of them, that existed in his time—he was also very caustic when he wanted to be. My right hon. Friend was at the Dispatch Box as a junior shadow Treasury Minister being harangued by Government Members, three of whom stood up to challenge him to give way on some point. Gordon Brown was on my right hon. Friend's right, giving him a stream of statistics and a robust intellectual defence of the Labour case; John Smith turned to my right hon. Friend and said, “Just pick the most stupid.” That was not reported in the *Hansard* of the day.

I wish to turn for a few moments to John Smith as a family man. Those of us who met and know Elizabeth—she is Baroness Smith, but Elizabeth is probably a kinder way to refer to her—know that she is still intensely proud all these years on, just as John's daughters, Sarah, Jane and Catherine, are intensely proud of their father. John was a family man, although as Elizabeth said to me, as he was in political life, he was a family man in very short spurts. They still enormously value the family holidays and family time they had on the island of Iona. It was so important, not only for John as a human being, getting himself away from being the man of politics, but for John as a man more widely, with his family being part of something wider for that wider human being.

In John's memory, the John Smith Trust continues to do incredibly valuable and powerful work, particularly in central Asia. John was passionately committed not simply to social justice but to the principles of good government that have been carried forward in the determination to train a generation of political leaders in central Asia in particular. They bear his name as fellows of the John Smith Trust. That is a remarkable signal to us all.

The hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts said that John Smith was a humble man; I am not quite sure that I entirely agree with that description, because one of the good things about John's background—not only his family background but his time at the University of Glasgow debating society and all the rest—was that he had confidence in himself, his politics and his belief system. He had confidence in his humanity, which is important. So he was not a humble man, but he was a simple man. A simple man is probably the most vividly fitting description when we think of the place that John chose for his burial on Iona: a very simple grave and memorial. Something very simple for a very decent man who graced this place, graced our politics and graced those who knew him.

4.50 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Oliver Dowden): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Members for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) and for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald), my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) and the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) on securing the debate. I am also grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time to it.

With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall keep my remarks relatively short, not from a lack of respect but because, unlike so many other Members who have contributed to the debate, I did not know John Smith personally. None the less, it is an honour to wind up the debate on behalf of the Government. I am not quite as young as the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney), who I believe was five at the time of John's death, or as the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), who was eight. I was a 15-year-old Tory boy at my local comprehensive, rather lonely position in the mid-1990s, as Members might imagine—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) says from a sedentary position that it toughened me, and it certainly did.

It is a sign of the contribution made by John Smith that, even among teenage Tory boys like me, he was regarded as a towering political figure and there was a genuine and profound sense of shock when we heard of his death. It is a sign of his legacy that 25 years later here we are in this Chamber discussing it. So much of what he did, whether on devolution or the national minimum wage, and the way in which he conducted his politics still seem fresh and relevant to politics today. That is a true tribute to the legacy of John Smith.

My politics and my interest in politics were certainly stimulated by John Smith and I certainly remember those Maastricht debates and the incredible skill that he had—he simultaneously supported the Government on Maastricht and managed to sow division within the Conservative party and inflict defeats on it. Like many others, I also remember his funeral. It was a unique

expression of the affection and respect he commanded, not just from the Labour party but from the Prime Minister and other major figures from every party and every area of national life who crowded into that simple parish church in Edinburgh to say goodbye to a man whose basic decency and good sense we could ill afford to lose. As our then Conservative Prime Minister, Sir John Major, said, he

“was one of the outstanding parliamentarians of modern politics. He was skilled in the procedures of this House, skilled in upholding its traditions, a fair-minded but, I can say as well as any Member in the House, tough fighter for what he believed in and, above all, he was outstanding in parliamentary debate.”

He went on to talk about

“the waste of a remarkable political talent”—*[Official Report, 12 May 1994; Vol. 243, c. 429.]*

and that certainly was raised by many hon. Members, not least the hon. Member for Edinburgh South.

I think that I can say without any risk of contradiction from any of my hon. Friends that if a Conservative Member of Parliament was ever asked to name the greatest Labour Prime Minister we never had, we would all choose John Smith. As many Members have reminded us, many of the causes that John Smith championed are still relevant today. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling talked about the role John Smith played in devolution. In many ways, he was the godfather of devolution.

Some Members may have heard the Radio 4 programme last weekend, recalling the path to devolution, in which John Smith's daughter recalled a dinner very shortly after her father's death to which both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were invited. Tony Blair apparently earnestly asked John Smith's daughter how committed her father really was to Scottish devolution, and she apparently left him in absolutely no doubt about the strength of his commitment to that cause.

Other Members, particularly those who worked with John Smith—especially the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), who made an excellent contribution—mentioned his basic human decency. It was also brought out very well by the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) that it is easy to overlook his role as a family man and that his death deprived his wife of her husband and three girls of their father.

The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) said something that we could all do with remembering on both sides of the House: for a political plane to take off, it needs both its left and right wings fully intact. That speaks to a wider role that John Smith played in promoting a civility in British politics that, as so many hon. Members have rightly observed, is sometimes lacking in these turbulent times. Despite only leading his party for approximately two years, a genuinely huge expectation had built up behind his leadership in 1994, but this never inhibited him from being an open, congenial and good-humoured man, as his colleagues have attested—no matter what their political allegiance.

Perhaps I may be forgiven for concluding my remarks by quoting the oft-uttered words of John Smith the night before he died that many hon. Members have also observed today:

“The opportunity to serve our country—that is all we ask.”

And what a fitting legacy of that great man.

4.57 pm

Ian Murray: This has been a worthwhile debate to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of John Smith, and I am grateful to all Members from across the Chamber who have contributed some of their stories, which have been moving and appropriate for this commemorative anniversary, and I have enjoyed hearing them. I may have been listening to them for the second or third time in the past few weeks, but I have certainly enjoyed hearing them in public. I pay tribute to everyone who knew John and to the staff team who worked with him. Sometimes when I sit in this place, I get a bit envious because I have not experienced some of the history of this Chamber. Indeed, I felt a bit envious this afternoon, listening to the stories of people who worked with John and who saw him in the flesh at the Dispatch Box, doing what he did best. I think the greatest tribute is to try to emulate our political heroes, and we should certainly all try to do that in this case.

I wrote down some words as Members were making their contributions: outstanding, civilized, missed, a great, inclusive, dignified, a listener, formidable, humility, tolerance, gifted, social justice, forgiving, humane, community, responsibility, fun, the common touch, moral commitment, caring, traditional, idealistic, friend. Those words just sum up what John Smith's life, including his political life, was about. I am glad that we have been able to commemorate this anniversary in the House. As I have said, all our thoughts over this weekend—especially on the 25th anniversary on Sunday 12 May—will be with Sarah, Jane, Catherine, Elizabeth and the wider family.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It has been a very powerful and moving debate. You have all done a giant of a man proud, and I hope that his family and friends will appreciate it; I am sure they will.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the 25th anniversary of the death of John Smith, former leader of the Labour Party.

A14 Cambridge-Huntingdon Upgrade

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

4.59 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing the House the opportunity again to consider the very important issue of the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon upgrade; the diversions that those works have required; and, I am afraid, the misery that those diversions have caused to so many of my constituents. It is sad to have to follow such an uplifting debate about John Smith with one on an issue such as this.

To those who follow Adjournment debates closely, this topic may feel somewhat familiar because last July I was standing in this very place holding a debate with almost exactly the same title. To paraphrase the Prime Minister, nothing has changed. That is because, frankly, the problems outlined almost a year ago have not been rectified and, I am afraid, the misery continues. But one thing has changed—one positive thing. I am delighted that, whereas last year the Minister was not available, today he is. That means that we are able to continue our very regular dialogue, which is usually conducted through the Transport Committee.

It is very tempting just to re-read my speech from last July, where I outlined the history of the project and praised those such as John Bridge from the chamber of commerce who have done so much to secure the project, as well as Doug Whyte and Elaine Gristwood, and Councillors Claire Richards and Jocelynne Scutt, who have done so much to continue to highlight the problems faced by residents and constituents. I also praised those involved in what is a fantastic project: David Bray and his entire team from Highways England—the construction workers, civil engineers and project managers. It is a truly impressive project.

There is no doubt that the upgrade is absolutely vital because the existing A14 trunk road between Cambridge and Huntingdon is notorious for congestion and delays. About 85,000 vehicles use this stretch of the A14 every day—many more than the road was originally designed to take. About a quarter of those vehicles are heavy goods vehicles—well above the national average for this type of road, adding to the need for an upgrade.

There have been some hugely impressive innovations involved in this project. Only this week, I read in *The Cambridge News* about the self-driving truck—a massive truck—deployed to speed up the works. Some of the bridge installations have been quite astonishing, truly impressive and watched in fascination. It is a deeply impressive engineering endeavour but, sadly, managing the disruption caused to local residents has been much less successful. I am here not to berate Highways England, or even the Conservative county council, under-resourced as it is, because that is a wider issue, but to raise the disruption that this project has caused to residents in my city of Cambridge and the surrounding villages.

Let me go into more detail about the problem. The road closures caused by these works have resulted in an official diversion strategy of overnight closures from Highways England that adds about 30 miles to the journeys of those driving lorryloads across the country, taking them along a strategic diversion route that includes the M11, the A505 and the A11 back to junction 36 on

the A14. Given that it is such a lengthy diversion, it is unsurprising that some drivers choose to shortcut through Cambridge along King's Hedges Road, Milton Road, Victoria Road, Newmarket Road, Histon Road and Huntingdon Road. The overnight road closures that began to cause trucks to drive through the city's small roads started about a year ago and, I am afraid, have been unrelenting from the beginning. A year on, my constituents still face grim traffic, sleepless nights and even damage to their property. In the debate last year, the Minister's colleague promised what she called a "step change in diversions" in September. My first specific question to the Minister today is to ask what happened to that step change and what we can expect over the next few months.

The shortcuts through the city disrupt the lives of those who live in and around my city. Roads inappropriate for HGVs are used. One, Victoria Road, already has a weight limit, which could be extended on a temporary basis to other similarly inappropriate streets, or to an even wider area still. Labour County Councillors Jocelyne Scutt and Claire Richards, and their officers, have been working hard to ameliorate the problem, working on a range of measures such as replacing pothole lids with new ones to make them quieter, looking at some of the weight and speed restrictions on certain roads, and maximising signage.

However, the problem is that it is ultimately completely inappropriate to have hundreds of HGVs thundering along residential roads through the city at night. I have heard, in some cases on many occasions, from exhausted constituents regarding the huge noise disturbances on the roads that I have mentioned. I know that neighbouring MPs have heard the same from residents in villages such as Swavesey, Histon and Impington, where, I am told, houses shake from the HGVs' impact and people are similarly kept up all night by the noise.

In the city of Cambridge, one constituent told me:

"We had many trucks rattling down Victoria Road again from around 4 am (or earlier) until at least 5 am this morning, badly disrupting sleep... Does this mean that, yet again, the drivers can simply ignore the signage—and the law—when they choose? Is anything more being done about this issue?"

That is precisely the problem. There is no effective mechanism that any authority seems to be able to use to combat the issue and I will return to that point.

Constituents have also told me about serious road traffic congestion problems. One wrote to me saying that it has

"come to something when you've got to queue to get out of your own drive at 4.30am to go to work and the lorries are backed up."

To most of us, that seems a quite extraordinary situation, but that is what people are facing—traffic queues in the middle of the night. It is playing havoc with the lives of hard-working people in and around the city, destroying their sleep and their routines. It is also causing significant damage to infrastructure—which is ironic, as it is a result of other infrastructure improvements—because local roads are just not designed for this type of traffic. I was told by my constituent and local campaigner Doug Whyte:

"There are already pot-holes and crumbling road surfaces on the roads that have been used by the lorries."

Another constituent pointed out that the council's current programme of road improvements will turn out to be "a total waste of our money, as it will all be churned up by the HGVs again".

The mismanagement of the diversions will affect the work by councils to improve their local areas, while costing taxpayers extra money.

The damage is not only to public infrastructure and property. My constituent Elaine Gristwood explained to the A14 team:

"We have noticed over the last few months that we have cracking to all the ceilings in our house which were not there prior to these closures. As reported to yourselves last year with the HGVs coming down Kings Hedges Road the whole house shakes and we are sure this is what has caused the cracking to these ceilings. It now makes us wonder how much more damage is going to occur due to this diversion, and how many other houses along this route are affected. We would like to know how we can claim compensation for these issues caused by this diversion."

She was told:

"Whilst we sympathise with your concerns about the damage to your property, I'm afraid there's no grounds for a claim".

Where can Elaine and other residents go from here?

That is the human misery and infrastructure damage caused as an unintended consequence. The question I would like to address is, what can be done? One of the key points I raised last year was the accuracy of data. We can all agree that there will inevitably be disruption with any project like this, and my constituents understand and appreciate that. The question is, how much is reasonable? To make any rational judgment, the most basic element is at least having data on how many traffic movements are being generated.

In the debate last July, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), told us:

"Highways England is working with Cambridgeshire County Council to implement... HGV counters"—[*Official Report*, 19 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 698.]

That is fine, but she went on to quote figures for nights when closures were taking place that seemed to be surprisingly—in fact, suspiciously—low. I have been pursuing that since last July and, astonishingly, we still cannot get accurate and reliable data, despite the well-intended promises made by the Minister that evening.

Anecdotally, I am told that residents are counting from 50 to more than 100 HGVs an hour in the middle of the night. When I looked at the data from the counter that was sent to me following the debate, the numbers were tiny by comparison. To my astonishment, the data also seemed to be telling us that there were virtually no vehicle movements during the daytime, but anyone who knows Cambridge knows that traffic is frequently gridlocked at that point. Quite frankly, the data was wrong. Last year I asked, somewhat rhetorically, whether the Government think it is more efficient for residents to stay up through the night counting the vehicles manually or to rely on BBC news reporters to do the same. If we have the technology to move a bridge, surely we can install at least a camera and count the number of vehicle movements. This is a woeful failure, and I hope we can have an assurance from the Minister today that at least the data issues will be resolved, so that we can have a rational discussion based on evidence.

That brings me to a bigger problem. This huge and impressive £2 billion project is being spoiled, because our public services around the project are now so fragmented and under-resourced that they are unable to do what would be necessary to make diversions work. The main problem is that, with so many authorities potentially involved, it is unclear who leads or takes

[Daniel Zeichner]

responsibility. We have a combined authority, which has strategic responsibilities. We have a woefully under-resourced county council, which has responsibility for local roads. We have a metro mayor and a police and crime commissioner. We have the local police and we have Highways England. Local residents ask, “Who’s in charge?”—maybe the Minister can tell us.

When residents first came to me with this problem, I went to the council, which then directed me to Highways England, which then referred me to the Department for Transport and the police. We have so many different agencies involved and, frankly, they do not communicate properly and clearly with each other, let alone with the public. When I ask what should be a relatively simple question, such as “Why can’t these diversions be properly enforced?” no one can in the end give me a clear answer that does not end up blaming one of the other partners. No one is prepared to take the lead and no one is prepared to push for solutions. This is very frustrating for me and local councillors but, most importantly, it leaves residents in the lurch.

This is not just an issue for this project. When talking to others elsewhere in the country, I have been told that similar problems have emerged in other major schemes and diversions. The county council does have some potential powers and we have talked about those with the council—traffic regulation orders, weight limits and so on—and it is true that there are complexities in distinguishing genuinely local traffic from freight passing through, but the basic problem is that ignoring a 30-mile diversion is a perfectly rational thing to do if there are no consequences.

That is the policy point that I would like the Minister to focus on for the future: how we provide a disincentive for people to take the short cut. I have to say that, with cameras, automatic number plate recognition and all the modern technologies available to us, it does seem to me to be perfectly possible to come up with a solution. Put crudely, if it costs lorries more to take the short cut, they will stop doing it, but it does need the Government to get a grip. The local agencies have neither the powers nor the resources to make it happen.

As we have tried to come up with local solutions, we have hit persistent obstacles—no least the lack of resources in local policing to enforce any mechanism that could be put in place. Sadly, as I think we all know, traffic policing has virtually disappeared. That is backed up by the fact that Highways England actually offered to pay for more policing to enforce the diversion. When it did so, however, it transpired that there simply are not enough police officers available for the force to spare, regardless of the offer from Highways England to pay for them.

When I spoke to the police and crime commissioner’s office, I got a factually accurate, if rather depressingly defeatist, account of basically why it could not do anything. I was told that

“it is currently an ongoing issue that the Constabulary have had to deal with...surrounding the A14 upgrade. The diversion routes are clearly signposted, however, they are not enforceable and drivers cannot be made to follow these routes. There is currently nothing to stop HGV’S using Huntingdon Road and Histon Road to bypass the ongoing overnight closures as there is no weight limit in place. Victoria Road however is subject to a 7.5 tonne weight limit between the hours of 23:00 and 07:00.”

That was it. Basically the message is: nothing we can do. Frankly, that is simply not good enough, which is why I am rather looking forward to discussing further with the Minister some of the ideas I am proposing in a meeting that we have scheduled for next week.

To conclude, I have some questions for the Minister. How long will the current closures really go on for? How are we going to get accurate data, as the A14 team themselves have accepted that the current numbers are incorrect? How will he ensure that the diversions are managed properly, that my residents can sleep at night and that their houses and roads are not damaged at their expense? Just for good measure, is there any chance of convincing his Cabinet colleagues to stop running down the public services that are so essential for supporting big infrastructure projects such as this?

I will leave the Minister with a final image. In December last year, the local press reported on Barbara Placido, who woke up in her home one morning to find that an articulated lorry had torn through a small garden wall and crashed into the corner of her house. This was actually the second time that it had happened and it was in the heart of Cambridge; it is a lovely line of houses overlooking Jesus Green. I am sure the Minister knows Cambridge well. What on earth was that lorry doing there? She told the *Cambridge News*:

“We’re not being protected on our streets. It is really disheartening.”

This gets to the crux of the matter: there is no protection for residents between the myriad different agencies involved in this project.

The A14 upgrade should be a regional improvement and a showcase of UK civil engineering, which it is. However, it has also become a nightmare for motorists and passengers stuck in grim traffic queues, too often a headache for people finding regular journeys taking far longer than expected and, as I have outlined, a misery for residents in Cambridge and the surrounding areas. I hope the Minister will be able to outline how he will improve things.

In the debate last July, I invited the Minister to commit properly to resourcing a framework to ensure that HGV drivers follow the proper diversions. In my view, those who do not should be named, shamed, and fined to protect the people of Cambridge—or whichever area is under pressure—who currently lack protection. But guess what? Nothing has changed. A year on, can the Minister persuade me that we will not be having the same debate this time next year? Indeed, I have an inkling that, by later in the year, some things will have changed, hopefully for the better.

5.15 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) on securing this debate about the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon upgrade. He is a genial although troublingly probing inquisitor on the Transport Committee, and it is always a great pleasure to discuss these issues with him. I look forward to this being the first half of a little two-step, with the second half at our meeting next week. In an Adjournment debate last summer, he diligently raised his constituents’ concerns, particularly about the impact of road diversions through Cambridgeshire as a result of the A14 scheme. He need not repeat his speech—I am glad he did not—because I have read it with care and attention. I was not able to

attend that debate, but I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), who responded in my stead.

I wish to use this opportunity to outline what Highways England has done, and is continuing to do, to reduce the impact of the scheme's road diversions on local residents. Inevitably, much of that will revisit issues already discussed in the previous debate. It is important to be clear that this is a genuinely difficult issue for reasons I will come to, and we do not need conspiracy theories or worries about overlapping or underlapping jurisdictions to recognise the genuine difficulty of this situation.

I will come on to discuss the road diversions in some detail, but let me remind the hon. Gentleman of some of the strategic reasons for the scheme and provide an update on Highways England's progress in delivering it. As he and any local resident or traveller in that part of the world will know, The Cambridge to Huntingdon section is one of the busiest parts of the strategic road network between the midlands and East Anglia and the port of Felixstowe. It is vital to connecting businesses, communities and families across Cambridgeshire and beyond, and a crucial corridor for international freight. It is also a long-standing congestion hotspot and an area of concern for the communities around it.

In delivering upgrades to the A14, Highways England and my Department acknowledged that the demand placed on it was taking an increasing toll on drivers and local residents. Commutes between Huntingdon and Cambridge were severely congested, and small villages on either side of the road suffered from increased traffic caused by drivers rat-running to avoid traffic delays on the A14. The scheme was drawn up in recognition of those concerns and in an attempt to alleviate them. That is why the A14 improvement works were included as a major project in the Department's five-year road investment strategy, which was published in December 2014. In a measure of how important the scheme was locally, local authorities and local enterprise partnerships committed £100 million towards the total £1.5 billion cost. That contribution will help to deliver a scheme that meets the needs of the strategic road network and local people.

The benefits to local road users and communities include 21 miles of new three-lane dual carriageway road—that was mentioned in the debate last year—a new 750-metre viaduct; the removal of the existing unsightly viaduct in Huntingdon town centre; two new footbridges at Swavesey junction and Bar Hill; and—this is the bit I really like—more than 18 miles of routes that are suitable for walking, cycling and horse-riding. The goal, which we believe the scheme will achieve, is to create a positive legacy that ties communities together, unlocks regional and local economic growth, combats congestion and improves road safety. Relieving congestion will make travel, particularly commuting, easier, safer and more reliable. We hope the scheme, along with better design, will improve road safety.

The scheme separates strategic and local traffic, which will help to reduce congestion. It has been designed to accommodate the expected significant growth in the area over the next 15 years or so. This will be vital if the scheme's benefits are to continue. I understand we are looking at a 26% growth in traffic. Cambridgeshire's employment alone is forecast to grow by 16% between

2012 and 2031. We hope there will also be improvements to air quality and a reduction in traffic noise. Highways England never undertakes any scheme without paying careful attention to the environment and local wildlife. The scheme will deliver nearly 700 hectares of new habitat for wildlife and 18 new wildlife habitat creation areas, and hundreds of bat boxes and a variety of bird boxes will be installed. All of that adds up to a highly attractive and important scheme that creates a positive legacy for the residents and businesses of Cambridgeshire.

The scheme has also created jobs through the new Highways College in west Anglia, which was opened to give up to 200 local people the skills needed to get the road built. Highways England is making good progress on the scheme. It is within budget and on target to meet an open-for-traffic date in 2020, as outlined in the road investment strategy, although it would be nice to think that it will be possible to take some of the diversions off before the end of that period. That is certainly the aspiration, but the open-for-traffic date at the end of 2020 is the stipulated date.

Turning to the hon. Gentleman's specific concerns about noise and disruption for residents on and off the official diversion routes caused by the scheme's construction, as he knows the Government and Highways England are focused on ensuring that the delivery of the scheme causes the minimum inconvenience to local residents, while recognising that some inconvenience is inevitable in a scheme of this magnitude. Since the issue was raised of HGVs, lorries and other vehicles not following the recommended road diversions, Highways England has been working hard to develop measures that will help to lessen those impacts and encourage more drivers to use the preferred diversion routes. As he noted, it is working closely with Cambridgeshire County Council and partner organisations to minimise the impact where possible.

When closures are in place on the A14 between junction 36 and junction 31, the strategic diversion route directs traffic south of Cambridge on what, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, is a substantial detour. The trouble is that alternative routes are required for non-motorway traffic. This is where we get into the genuine complexity of the issue. There is non-motorway traffic and local traffic travelling to local destinations, where the strategic diversion would be considered irrelevant or not acceptable. Those routes take traffic further into and around Cambridge city centre and include, as he mentioned, Kings Hedges Road, Newmarket Road and Milton Road.

Highways England has no powers to prevent road users, including HGVs, taking other routes they have a legal right to use as an alternative to the official strategic diversion. As the hon. Gentleman knows, traffic is like water—it tends to flow down the channels of least resistance. Blocking traffic on some local roads inevitably diverts it on to other local roads, and that creates complexity for the scheme. Highways England is working actively to keep strategic traffic—we are talking about a very small percentage of thousands and thousands of journeys every day—following official diversion routes. This includes giving weekly briefings to regional media, parish councils and local organisations, and posts on social media. There are also over 40 roadside signs, some including instructions not to follow sat-nav systems, up to 13 mobile variable messaging signs, and the use of

[*Jesse Norman*]

overhead signs further afield on the strategic road network. Works have also been resequenced to resolve technical challenges involving utilities and drainage. The A14 project team are working with the Road Haulage Association and Freight Transport Association so that diversion information can be shared with their members too.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I am concerned about a possible mismatch between the data reported by Highways England and the on-the-ground data and experience of his constituents. Following the previous debate, Highways England was asked to take a look at this. As he knows, it is working with Cambridgeshire County Council to implement speed signs and HGV counters and, as he recognised, it has offered to pay some of the enforcement costs, but it has also taken the trouble to check the calibration of the counters. If there is still a mismatch and the calibration shows a much smaller number—say 20 to 30 vehicles during some hours of the night on some roads, rather than the large build-ups that his constituents are recording—we will have to get to the bottom that. We will be happy to share the data—next week, I hope—and look through that in more detail.

I need hardly say that Cambridgeshire police are also aware of the issues raised and have agreed to check for non-compliance with speed or weight restrictions at key sensitive locations. That is important. Such measures are not necessarily resource intensive, if they are focused and if the effect is to create a sense of uncertainty or

concern, which can have a powerful deterrent effect on regular abusers of the traffic system. That said, for operational reasons, this is not always possible, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

The overall commitment to deliver the A14 upgrade on time and within budget remains, but the scheme has been created to ensure that wherever possible local stakeholders' concerns are at the forefront of the work. The trouble is that in many cases for a period some of the distress felt historically in the villages has been transmuted to the centre of the city, which is unfortunate, but the A14 will in due course serve a wider goal. As I have said, the diversion routes may be required until the open-for-traffic date, programmed for 2020, but the hope is that they will not be.

The traffic data collected by Highways England and residents is a fraction of the many thousands of the HGVs that use the A14 every day, and Highways England is working with Cambridge City Council to improve the weight limit signage, which is also an important part of this. It has assured me that the matter of traffic on diversion routes for subsequent schemes, such as the A428, will be considered in the early stages of the planning process. If that is one tangible result of the hon. Gentleman's intervention, it will have been a valuable one. I thank him for raising this issue.

Question put and agreed to.

5.27 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 9 May 2019

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Pre-eclampsia

1.30 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered pre-eclampsia.

I am delighted to have secured a debate on this important issue, and I thank my colleagues on the Backbench Business Committee for supporting it. The debate is timely because we are approaching World Pre-Eclampsia Day on 22 May. According to the House of Commons Library, the House has never had a debate about this extremely important matter, which affects every constituency, and every country in the world. Although I am surprised that there has been no previous debate, I am delighted that we are here today to put that right and to have what I hope will be a constructive, illuminating and considered debate. Before I proceed, however, I must say that I am extremely disappointed by the apparent lack of concern about this issue across the House, as we can see from the number of Members in the Chamber. Women and families who are concerned about pre-eclampsia will be equally disappointed by the poor turnout.

I want to pay particular tribute to Marcus Green, the chief executive of Action on Pre-Eclampsia, and all his team for all the support and information they have provided to me and all Members to help ensure that this debate is as well-informed as it needs to be. I applaud the work of Marcus, his team and others, including at the University of Liverpool, who expend huge personal and professional effort to combat and better understand the appalling condition of pre-eclampsia. I thank those who research this illness to help us better treat and manage it, because their work is ultimately about improving survival rates for mothers and babies when this condition occurs.

Pre-eclampsia is a very serious disease related to high blood pressure. It can strike out of the blue with no apparent warning—the word “eclampsia” is Greek for lightning. It can strike any pregnant woman, most notably in the second half of pregnancy, or up to six weeks after delivery. It is a symptom of new-onset hypertension and significant protein in the urine after the 20th week of pregnancy. There is no cure for pre-eclampsia, which is why treatment and management of the condition matter so much.

Identifying pre-eclampsia early is so important for mothers and babies; it can literally mean the difference between life and death. Globally, pre-eclampsia accounts for 14% of all maternal deaths, killing 40,000 women every year. Five women every hour die from pregnancy complications related to pre-eclampsia. Not surprisingly, poor outcomes for mother and baby are associated with poor care, which is most often found in low-income countries. Across the United Kingdom, our NHS services still face significant challenges with regards to pre-eclampsia.

The hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who is very sorry not to be here, suffered a stillbirth due to pre-eclampsia. My personal interest in this issue was sparked by the death of my son Kenneth, who was stillborn two days after his due date, after his birth was delayed while he was still alive and healthy. No reason was given for that delay; in fact, when I reported back to the hospital the same day in terrible pain—a few hours after being told my baby would not be delivered that day as planned—I faced obstruction and argument. I was repeatedly told to go home as there was nothing wrong. How that could have been established when I had not been examined was a question that was never answered, then or since. My husband insisted that I be admitted to hospital. I was later informed that had he not done so, I would certainly have died.

According to a leading consultant obstetrician, Professor Edward Shaxted of Northampton General Hospital, had NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde reacted to the clear signs of my pre-eclampsia when I attended the maternity unit in pain, our otherwise healthy 8 lb 7 oz son would in all likelihood have survived. My husband and I commissioned a report from Professor Edward Shaxted after waiting for over a year in vain for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to engage with us after the stillbirth.

When I reported to the hospital, I was neither examined, tested nor treated, but I was—bizarrely—injected with morphine twice. By the following morning, baby Kenneth was dead. I had developed a very severe form of pre-eclampsia called HELLP syndrome, a condition that is life-threatening to mother and baby. Not only did my baby die, but my husband was summoned to be told to say his goodbyes to me, as I was not expected to survive following a rupture of the liver. I was in a critical condition, and spent a number of weeks in a high-dependency unit.

While the mortality rate for HELLP syndrome is estimated by some to be as high as a massive 30%, Professor Shaxted’s report described the errors made in my case as “extraordinary”. He said:

“With a little thought it would have been recognised that Mrs Gibson had developed pre-eclampsia.”

My concerns were ignored despite the fact that my baby was due for delivery. The professor went on to say:

“Delivery of Mrs Gibson’s baby while still alive”—

on my due date, as planned—

“would more likely than not have led to the birth of a live child who would have survived intact.”

His conclusion was echoed by Professor Benjamin Stenson of the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, from whom we also commissioned a report. Anecdotally, I know that this experience is not unique to me.

We must continue to strive to do better at monitoring pregnant women and to listen to what they tell us, because being aware of, looking out for and dealing with pre-eclampsia must be on the radar of all professionals dealing with expectant mothers on the frontline. Recognition of the condition and early intervention are vital. When the signs are present, it is important they are not missed. Overall, maternal mortality across the UK has much reduced over the generations, but there must be no room for complacency, as there appeared to be in my case, and as I know there has been in others. I was labelled high risk, having undergone five years of in vitro fertilisation and being over 40.

[Patricia Gibson]

When mistakes are made, they cannot be undone, but if we do not learn from them, that is disgraceful and completely unacceptable. Despite low levels of maternal deaths, there are still unacceptable levels of stillbirths and babies born being prematurely and/or underweight because of pre-eclampsia. Significant numbers of women suffer from pre-eclampsia in pregnancy. We know that screening and diagnosis are the cornerstones of safe management, and that deaths are preventable with good-quality routine antenatal care in pregnancy and evidence-based guidelines for antenatal care and the management of hypertension in pregnancy.

However, according to the Library, no NHS in the UK collects official statistics on the number of women who develop pre-eclampsia during pregnancy. We do know that there are around two maternal deaths due to pre-eclampsia every year in the UK, but no figures are recorded for how many babies die due to pre-eclampsia-related issues, although research by Imperial College London puts the figure at around 1,000 babies each year across the UK.

There is also no information published about how much pre-eclampsia costs the NHS across the UK. The lack of detailed information on this issue is quite staggering. I urge the Minister to ensure that such information is collected and recorded. I will lobby the Scottish Government to do the same. We need clear information to know the true scale of the challenge we are facing. One of the keys to meeting such a significant challenge is clear information.

This is a complex illness. It cannot be predicted with certainty who will develop pre-eclampsia or what causes it, although risk factors can be identified, including having a strong family history of pre-eclampsia, being over 40 years old, and being overweight or obese. Evidence appears to suggest that black and Asian women are more likely than white women to develop pre-eclampsia, which requires further investigation. It seems that black women are five times more likely than white women to develop pre-eclampsia, and that Asian women are twice as likely to develop it. We need to understand better why that is and to treat such patients accordingly.

There is also evidence that women who develop pre-eclampsia in pregnancy are at greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease and kidney disease in the longer term, shortening their life expectancy. At the moment, no part of the UK has standard care pathways to monitor the long-term health of women who have had pre-eclampsia. That needs to change. I urge the Minister to address that, and I will continue my conversations on that matter with the Cabinet Secretary for Health in Scotland, Jeane Freeman MSP.

The only cure for pre-eclampsia—if we can call it a cure—is the delivery of the baby, but that often means the baby being delivered dangerously prematurely, which throws up all kinds of moral dilemmas and is not always straightforward. Of course, pre-eclampsia is a progressive condition, which gets worse, so mother and baby need close and careful monitoring. We know that babies born underweight or prematurely are at greater risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes in later life. We need ongoing research to find better treatments that reduce the risks to children whose mothers suffer from pre-eclampsia.

Let me say a little about the placental growth factor test. The symptoms and signs of pre-eclampsia are not always reliable or consistent, meaning that women may be admitted to hospital unnecessarily or have a severe case of pre-eclampsia that goes undiagnosed. Like too many other women, I know how tragic that can be. The PLGF test is a new blood test that indicates whether an expectant mother has the disease. When it is used on a woman with suspected pre-eclampsia, it can reliably indicate whether they will need delivery soon and whether the baby is at risk. It can also show whether the woman needs to be admitted to hospital and requires intensive monitoring to determine when delivery should take place, or whether it is safe to discharge her. Its use means that several other tests, which may not be so reliable, do not need to be done, saving our hospitals time and other resources. The PLGF test is available, and it must be provided regardless of where in the UK people live. I urge the Minister to do all she can to ensure that that is the case.

The PLGF test is an important tool that will help us make progress in combating pre-eclampsia by improving its diagnosis and treatment. NHS England will soon make the test available, and I am in negotiations with Jeane Freeman about it being made available in Scotland, too. The test is too important and too accurate, and the information it can yield too informative, for it not to be made available where necessary by health services across the UK. It will not just save lives; it will save money, and it will offer expectant parents huge reassurance about the health of their baby.

The Lancet published a study of implementation in England, which demonstrated that the test improved cost and clinical outcomes, with a 64% reduction in time to diagnosis, a 37% reduction in out-patient visits, and a 35% reduction in the use of bed nights for neonatal care. It seems that it is something of a breakthrough, and I think it has the potential to save many lives. With around 1,000 babies dying every year in the UK due to complications related to pre-eclampsia, this simple test offers real hope and gives us cause for optimism. It is a real milestone in how we treat this horrible condition, which can strike expectant mothers with no warning but with devastating, life-changing consequences for families. I hope that, one day, it offers real hope to women across the world—especially those in poorer countries—that mothers and their babies need no longer die.

World Pre-Eclampsia Day on 22 May deserves a place on our calendars. It deserves to be recognised this year and every year. More than 30 organisations recognise it, including Action on Pre-Eclampsia, Save the Children, the Preeclampsia Foundation and a whole range of others around the world. I urge the Government to ensure that more research is carried out into the condition so that better preventive work, as well as more and better treatments, can be developed. I urge the Minister to do all she can to ensure that women are educated about the condition and about how they might recognise and mitigate it.

As we approach World Pre-Eclampsia Day, this debate matters. Pre-eclampsia is killing our babies, and I believe we can and should be able to detect and treat it more effectively. I absolutely support the call from Action on Pre-Eclampsia to prioritise research into stillbirths from pre-eclampsia and to increase resources to support parents

through the trauma of that. The UK has the lowest incidence of maternal mortality from pre-eclampsia in the world—that is not an accident; it is down to better care and attentive clinicians—but we have not found a cure. Until we do, and until we completely stop babies dying from this condition, we need to do more.

This is the very first debate on pre-eclampsia, and it is long overdue. I urge the Minister and the Government to commit to doing all they can to improve research, treatment and detection. We have come some way—we can see that from the number of deaths of mothers—but we must remember that 1,000 babies are stillborn as a result of this condition every year, so we certainly are not there yet. Let us work together to make as much progress as we possibly can.

1.47 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Hollobone. I had not intended to make a speech, but I was ashamed by the lack of Back-Bench contributors and felt moved to do so, rather than making an intervention. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing the debate. Despite the poor attendance, this is an extremely important issue; the figures she outlined speak for themselves and do not need repeating by me.

I am here because my wife had pre-eclampsia during both her pregnancies. It was particularly acute during her first pregnancy, with my daughter Emma. The care she received when she was eventually admitted was exemplary. I could not fault it; it was fantastic from start to finish. However, in a similar vein to my hon. Friend's experience, when my wife was first sent to hospital by her GP, having presented feeling nauseous and light-headed and with various other symptoms, she was not taken entirely seriously when she got there. Her blood pressure was up and down, and at one point she was accused of white coat syndrome and sent home. But she knows her own body, and she did not feel right at all, so she phoned up, went back to the hospital and was eventually admitted.

My hon. Friend is right that, even now, awareness and diagnosis of pre-eclampsia is still not good enough and must be improved. Despite its prevalence, pre-eclampsia does not get the attention or research it deserves. The fact that I am the only other Back-Bench speaker is probably a testament to that. My eldest was born six and a half weeks early, at 3 lb 10 oz, in an emergency caesarean. After an extended stay in hospital, she was sent home healthy, and she is still healthy—touch wood—to this day. My wife had no repercussions from the condition thereafter. She got pre-eclampsia again, albeit a much milder version, in her second pregnancy, which almost went to full term.

Many mothers with pre-eclampsia will give birth prematurely, and premature birth is an issue we have discussed in this Chamber of late. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), who will speak for the SNP from the Front Bench, will talk more about that. My daughter Emma was born six and a half weeks premature, and once she was born my wife, who had had a caesarean section, sent me straight back to work, because she wanted my paternity leave to coincide with her arriving back from

hospital so that I could help around the house. It does not feel natural in the slightest to go back to work with a daughter in an incubator and a wife recovering from surgery, but back to work I went, because that was her wish.

I went back to work and spoke with colleagues, receiving their congratulations and so on. About an hour and a half after getting in, I was pulled into the office by my boss, who essentially sent me straight back to the hospital—I was given additional paid leave for as long as I required it. I was extremely lucky, but that was only because my boss and another colleague had had similar experiences, so they were in a position to help me and my wife. However, it should not be down to luck. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East will go into more detail, but I fully back the calls made by him and the all-party parliamentary group on premature and sick babies for extended parental leave in such circumstances. I hope that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will publish the report on its review as soon as possible.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran once again on bringing forward the debate. I sincerely hope that this is the important first step in giving this condition the attention it deserves at parliamentary and governmental level.

1.52 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is, as always, an immense pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for securing and opening the debate. Ahead of World Pre-Eclampsia Day later this month, the debate timeously highlights a hugely important issue surrounding prenatal health. She spoke with a personal understanding that sadly will resonate with many other families right across the UK. The fact that she can stand up and talk about something so deeply personal should be valued. That is not easy. She did so when many others would sit back and say, "I'm not willing to put myself in that space." I am sure I speak on behalf of the Chamber in saying that we should be hugely appreciative of that.

This is not an easy subject to talk about, but my hon. Friend did so in a considered and sensitive manner. I very much commend her for putting pre-eclampsia on the parliamentary agenda for the first time. I heard her say earlier in the week that this was the first time it was to be debated, and I confess that I doubted that, but she confirmed today that it is the first time that it has been debated in the House of Commons. I hope that this will be not just one set-piece event to mark World Pre-Eclampsia Day, but the beginning of a conversation in this place.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), who stood up and contributed without notes, again referring to his personal experience and that of his wife, Lynn, with the birth of Emma and Eilidh. It is no secret that he is a genuine friend of mine and somebody I spend personal time with—not just time with here as a Member of Parliament. He is a real ally in the campaign to extend paid parental leave for parents of premature and sick babies. I am all the richer for having him at my side as together we battle the UK Government.

[David Linden]

Pre-eclampsia has been at the forefront of my mind recently. Some in the Chamber will know that my wife Roslyn had a baby late last year and that her type 1 diabetes complicated the pregnancy. In addition to the complications we experienced during her first pregnancy with our son Isaac, we were acutely aware that diabetes increases the risk of pre-eclampsia by a factor of between two and four. I know from that experience that it is a real source of stress for expectant parents, particularly those with multiple risk factors for pre-eclampsia.

Pre-eclampsia is traditionally difficult to diagnose. Women with pre-eclampsia are often asymptomatic, and conventional diagnosis methods that look at hypertension and urinary protein levels can be subject to observer error. Therefore, the recently published findings of the Parrot trial into placental growth factor testing are a game-changer, showing that the time it takes for clinicians to diagnose the condition can be significantly reduced. Alongside clinical assessment, the testing can also be used to rule out pre-eclampsia, which would bring peace of mind to parents-to-be as well as cost-saving benefits to health services. Jane Brewin, the chief executive of Tommy's, the charity behind the Parrot trial, said:

"For other women with raised blood pressure this 'rule out' test will give women peace of mind and enable doctors to treat their condition more appropriately."

The reduction in diagnosis time brought about by placental growth factor testing is hugely important in determining the care pathway for mum and baby.

I have recently held stakeholder meetings in my role as chair of the APPG on premature and sick babies, one of which was with Professor Andrew Shennan, a professor of obstetrics at King's College London, and Marcus Green, the chief executive of Action on Pre-Eclampsia. Professor Shennan truly is a leading expert on pre-eclampsia, with a working knowledge spanning decades of clinical practice. What really came across was the importance of individualised, tailored care pathways for patients with pre-eclampsia. A multi-disciplinary and systematic approach is required to ensure that each patient receives the appropriate care in order to reduce risk and increase the likelihood of a positive outcome.

Placental growth factor testing will play a vital role in the future, allowing for much greater management of the condition. At an estimated cost of only £70 for a simple blood test, there is clearly a massive cost-benefit in making the testing widely available. Research published by Action on Pre-Eclampsia shows that the cost reduction per patient compared to standard clinical assessment could be almost £3,000.

The recent announcement that NHS England will be rolling out this testing is a hugely welcome step forward. It would be churlish of me not to place on the record my admiration of Her Majesty's Government for taking that step forward. I understand that the Scottish Government are looking at adopting this north of the border, and I am keen to see that. I am happy to support the lobbying efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran to ensure that progress is made. Given the Scottish Government's recent announcement of a new model for neonatal and maternity care, backed with £12 million of investment, I strongly expect that Edinburgh will be fairly receptive.

The other big takeaway from my meeting with Professor Shennan and Marcus Green was that there are training issues with some clinicians. To an extent there is a postcode lottery when it comes to the assessment and knowledge of risk factors for pre-eclampsia. Globally, the UK has the lowest level of maternal deaths caused by pre-eclampsia, but if we are ever to change the stubbornly high level of adverse outcomes for babies, educating clinicians must be prioritised.

The work being done at centres of excellence, such as the clinic at St Thomas' Hospital just across the river, deserves to become the gold standard of care, regardless of location. It is really promising that there will be some replication of the approach taken at the unit, and in the next 12 months we will start to see more clinics set up in other places. That is welcome. That approach, building on the strong foundations of the preterm birth network, could see the UK become a true world leader in dealing with pre-eclampsia. We should all get behind that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran said, we know that the greatest burden of the condition is on low-income countries, and there is a role for us to play in improving outcomes around the world as well as at home. In order to do that we need to have a best-practice model, and it needs to be in place and operational across all our health services.

Maternal deaths as a result of pre-eclampsia are now rare in the UK, with a risk of just one in a million, as my hon. Friend explained. Although that is good news, regrettably there are hundreds of stillbirths in the UK each year as a result of the condition, and we have heard personal testimony of that today. There is more research to be done and more support that can be given. It might seem like a big ask of the Minister, but one small step that the Government can take now is to recognise World Pre-Eclampsia Day, which takes place on 22 May. I sincerely hope that she will join me in doing that.

I will wrap up by noting that there is clearly a great deal of expertise and willingness within the health services to improve outcomes, but that perhaps we need to see some sharper focus on this issue from the top, including from the House of Commons. I congratulate the Government on being so quick to act on making placental growth factor testing available throughout NHS England and hope that this is followed with greater resourcing to help predict and prevent adverse outcomes in future.

2 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Hollobone. I am sure that happened just earlier this week or maybe it was last week; maybe it is every week.

I thank the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for securing this important debate, just ahead of World Pre-Eclampsia Day on 22 May, and for her heartfelt, thoughtful and passionate speech. She is so brave, as has already been said, to do this. I know, and she knows, how hard it is to speak in a debate about something as personal and hurtful as the loss of a baby; nothing can ever be harder. I have the honour of being vice-chair, along with the hon. Lady, of the all-party parliamentary group on baby loss, which

we set up. All the Members who set up the group have had the awful experience of baby loss, which makes it such a powerful all-party group. We all take the work it does very seriously and have had some small achievements, thanks to the Government listening to the voices from the group.

Some changes are being made and implemented across the country because of it. I am proud that we are able to use our own tragic experiences of loss to campaign for better care, treatment and diagnosis for future parents, so that hopefully they do not ever have to go through anything like the experience that the hon. Lady has been through. Let us hope that the debate today, which, as the hon. Lady said, is the first debate of its kind, will lead to some future changes that will ensure that even fewer people will have to go through that experience. I was so very sorry to hear the details of the hon. Lady's own personal experience of pre-eclampsia. I knew that was how she had lost her son, but not the detail. I thank her for sharing her story with us and I am sure that Kenneth would have been very proud of his mum.

I also thank the hon. Members for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and for Glasgow East (David Linden) for their excellent speeches, and I join everyone in saying how disappointing it is that there are not more Members attending this important debate. Perhaps the debate about acquired brain injury, taking place in the Chamber, has drawn a bigger crowd of available Members. Nevertheless, what we have lacked in quantity we have certainly made up for in quality; this has been an excellent debate so far, and we have yet to hear from the Minister.

As we have heard, pre-eclampsia affects around 6% of pregnancies; that means 1,000 babies a year are stillborn due to this awful condition. That is not good enough; it has to be and it can be reduced, as we have heard. The last triennial audit of maternal deaths in the UK reported that of the 22 deaths from pre-eclampsia, 14 were avoidable. Again, that number can be reduced. Because the symptoms of pre-eclampsia are so similar to the general symptoms of pregnancy, they are often missed and that can be fatal. That is why we are here today: to raise awareness and ensure change.

Women with diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney disease and a BMI of over 35 are more likely to develop pre-eclampsia. Many instances of these conditions can be prevented with a healthy lifestyle. As the Shadow Minister for Public Health, I cannot miss any opportunity to mention prevention and the cuts to health services of £800 million between 2015 and 2021 under this Government. If public health budgets, which fund services such as obesity services, had not been slashed so vigorously by the Government, the number of women with these conditions would be reduced. Even so, where cases have not been prevented, these women should still be a priority for midwives and healthcare professionals, and offered the tests that exist for pre-eclampsia, and support throughout their pregnancy. The same goes for women with lupus, women over the age of 40, women expecting multiple babies and women who have had pre-eclampsia before.

If we target the women most at risk of developing pre-eclampsia, we can detect the condition early and prevent fatalities. Finding at-risk women is now much easier as tests are available, as we have heard, that can predict with nearly 100% accuracy which mothers are at

risk of pre-eclampsia, but unfortunately the tests are not being used to their advantage. The test that is currently the only NICE-approved clinically available diagnostic test for pre-eclampsia in the UK has seen uptake in only a handful of trusts so far, meaning that very few women in the UK have access to those life-saving tests. Will the Minister write to NHS Trusts urging them to take up those tests, and advising them of the clinical guidance to do so?

Those tests can improve patient safety through accurate diagnosis upon the suspicion of pre-eclampsia, reduce the number of unnecessary admissions of suspected pre-eclampsia and reduce the direct costs to the system from the array of in-patient monitoring tests that are undertaken on the woman and her foetus. They will also relieve the stress and anxiety felt by expectant mothers that their symptoms are pre-eclampsia. We still do not know the root cause of pre-eclampsia. Does the Minister have any plans to fund research into the causes of pre-eclampsia so that more cases can be prevented each year?

Expectant mothers must also be made aware of pre-eclampsia and the signs and symptoms to look out for. I can remember being told about this terrible condition and every time my legs swelled or I had a urine test I would worry that I would get it. Maybe I was more informed or just a worrier, but I probably did not know enough about pre-eclampsia then. I might have been worrying needlessly; information is always a good thing. The knowledge will also fuel patient-led demand for testing and will, again, help to prevent deaths.

I hope the Minister will be able to assure us that the Department will look at this important issue further in the future, so that no more families have to go through the pain and suffering of losing a child to pre-eclampsia that we have heard about today.

2.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): It is a pleasure to see you here again, Mr Hollobone. It is an absolute privilege to respond to the debate brought by the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson). I thank her for bringing it forward, and for her courage and honesty in the way she has approached the subject, which is clearly sensitive for her. Parliament is at its best when it hears people's direct experience, so I am grateful for the way in which the hon. Lady has approached this.

I do not think the number of Members here reflects the importance of the subject, but, as the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) said, the quality of the contributions we have heard, all of which have been linked to direct experience one way or another, has made it one of the most powerful debates we have had in this Chamber none the less. I thank the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran again.

This is the first time that the subject has been debated by Members of Parliament; while that should be shocking, in some respects it is not, because often things that affect many women are not adequately debated in this place. Thankfully, now there are more of us here, we can start to address that, and we will do so all the more often.

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) talked about his wife's experience, how she knew her body and presented at the hospital, but was told to go home. I am afraid that happens far too much to women. We often feel diminished or that our voices are not heard. My challenge, in which I am sure all hon. Members will join me, is to ensure that all our health services just stop doing that to women, because it is not good enough. It has left us feeling diminished and not getting the treatment that we all deserve, so I thank him for amplifying that point.

It is always a pleasure to hear from the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), who has a unique ability to bring to life a dad's perspective on these concerns and worries. As ever, it was a pleasure to hear from the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West, who has also brought her own experience on these subjects in the past. I pay tribute to the work of the all-party parliamentary group that both she and the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran are so passionate about and so active in.

In its short time, the all-party parliamentary group has been incredibly influential; I would struggle to find a more effective one. It is a pleasure for me to work with it and support its work, and I am expecting both hon. Ladies to come with their cap in hand for the next wave of things they want me to fund under that work. It is making a difference and giving support to families on something that has hitherto been taboo, so I am grateful to them for that.

What is important about this debate and about pre-eclampsia is that, as we have heard repeatedly, it is an avoidable illness in the sense that we know the risk factors. To be frank, there is no excuse for the incidence of pre-eclampsia in 21st-century Britain. We may have better performance than other countries—and so we should, because we are Great Britain—but we need to do better, to improve outcomes both for babies, and for mothers and fathers. I rise to the challenge here and will hope to answer some of the requests made in the course of this debate.

It is still the case that pre-eclampsia and HELLP syndrome are a leading cause of maternal mortality and pre-term births, claiming the lives of nearly 76,000 mothers and 500,000 babies internationally each year. However, we know we can monitor the health of people in pregnancy, and we know the healthiest pregnancies are those that are planned, so it is important that we ensure that our policies encourage people to properly plan their pregnancies so that they can manage their health and, in particular, tackle things such as high body mass index and any other risk factors they may have.

In the UK, mild pre-eclampsia affects about 6% of pregnancies, and severe cases develop in about 2% of pregnancies. That is still quite high—dangerously high, considering the risk. According to the statistics for England, 14,352 pregnancies were coded for pre-eclampsia in 2017-18, which is 2.29% of all deliveries. That is 39 women in England diagnosed with pre-eclampsia every day. When we look at those types of figures, they bring home the fact that this condition is more common than the parliamentary attention given to it would suggest.

The prevalence of pre-eclampsia by maternal age or ethnic group is comparable to all pregnancies, but we know there is a risk of hypertensive disorders in women

over 40, and those with a gap of 10 years since their last baby are at a higher risk. It is relatively easy to identify the at-risk group. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran mentioned that there is a higher prevalence among black women, who are five times more likely to die in pregnancy than white women, while Asian women are twice as likely to die. We must ensure that we tackle that, and we will take it forward through the race disparity audit, not least because there are generally other issues that lead to black and Asian women facing higher risk factors in pregnancy across the board.

I have been asked to see that the NHS adopts a life-course focus, rather than a pregnancy disease focus, when looking at this subject. That has come up in my discussions about women's health. The president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists tells me that the factors that might lead to a woman's mortality tend to surface during pregnancy, so it seems to me that we are not taking full advantage of pregnancy to have a look at women's health and risk factors and help them with long-term prevention of poor health. We really need to do better at that.

For example, there are indications that someone will suffer from chronic kidney disease or cardiovascular disease in later life. We must embrace that life-course approach to women's health. That is one of the things my women's health taskforce will take forward, to make sure that we are really not wasting the opportunity of pregnancy to look at the health of women.

Reference has been made to placental growth factor testing, which is being made available in England through the Accelerated Access Collaborative. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West challenged me, fairly, to ensure that trusts make use of that test. We need to take every opportunity to give a nudge and properly encourage all trusts to assess the risk factors in deciding whether to apply those tests.

Obviously, we will continue to have conversations with the Government in Scotland about our experiences. We would also be more than happy to support the efforts of Action on Pre-Eclampsia to raise awareness of pre-eclampsia and other hypertensive diseases in pregnancy during World Pre-Eclampsia Day.

I am pleased to report that there has been a significant decrease in maternal mortality from hypertensive disorders during pregnancy in recent years, but we cannot afford to be complacent. It is certainly true that when we look back at cases where mothers have died, too often, improvements in care could have made for a very different outcome. That reinforces the need to make sure that people are aware of this disease, which can be a killer.

I have been asked to prioritise research into stillbirths from pre-eclampsia. It was such research that supported the study that showed that placental growth factor tests can diagnose pre-eclampsia more accurately than current techniques. We are also funding the PHOENIX study at King's College London, which aims to determine whether delivery in women with pre-eclampsia between 34 and 36 weeks of gestation reduces maternal complications without short and long-term detriment to the infant, compared with delivery at 37 weeks. That study will conclude next year. We are increasing resources to support parents through the trauma of stillbirth; we continue to fund Sands to work with other baby loss

charities and the royal colleges to produce the national bereavement care pathway and to reduce the variation in quality of bereavement care provided by the NHS.

We know that 1,000 babies die every year in the UK because of pre-eclampsia. Most die as a consequence of premature delivery, rather than the disease itself, because the only cure—if, as the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran says, we can call it that—is to deliver the baby. In terms of reducing those deaths, we need to ensure that we are managing that risk. Clearly, it is very important that we take full advantage of all antenatal appointments to do that, so that a pregnancy can be safely managed. We expect midwives to screen for pre-eclampsia at every appointment, by checking the woman's blood pressure and urine. It is disappointing that MBRACE-UK found that those routine antenatal checks were not undertaken on most women who died of pre-eclampsia. Straight away, that is something that we really need to give the system a nudge on, to make sure that risks are not taken with the health of the mother or her baby.

On some of the other things that will help to manage this, as part of the long-term plan we will continue to work with midwives, mothers and families to implement continuity of carer, so that there is a longer-term relationship between the mother and health practitioners, who can then have trust and honest, empowered conversations. Women can often feel intimidated when dealing with practitioners who perhaps treat them in a less than humane way. When we have that personal relationship, we can have honest conversations, leading to better care and trust between the mother and her midwife, nurse or doctor.

Pre-eclampsia is very unpredictable, which makes it difficult to manage if the risk factors that add to prevalence are not there. It is clearly crucial that, if a woman's condition deteriorates, a plan must be implemented quickly, with a multi-disciplinary approach to decision-making recommended. We expect every trust with a maternity and neonatal service to be part of the national maternal and neonatal health safety collaborative, which is driving forward practical improvements to make care safer in all maternity units by the end of 2019-20. I will make sure that there is specific action on monitoring that. NHS England is also supporting the establishment of maternal medicine networks, which will ensure that women with acute and chronic medical problems, including hypertension, have timely access to specialist advice at all stages of pregnancy, which, again, will help those discussions.

Members will be aware that, in November 2017, the Department extended the national maternity safety ambition to include reducing the national rate of pre-term births from 8% to 6%. The new Saving Babies' Lives care bundle includes a focus on preventing pre-term birth, looking in particular at prediction, prevention and better preparation where pre-term birth is unavoidable. Every maternity service in the NHS is actively implementing elements of the Saving Babies' Lives care bundle, and we are fully committed to implementing the recently launched version 2 of the bundle by March next year. Adherence to the care bundle is included in the planning guidance and incorporated into NHS standard contracts for 2019-20.

Placental growth-based blood tests clearly provide the ability to better diagnose pre-eclampsia and to manage risks. The tests have been selected as rapid uptake products by the Accelerated Access Collaborative, which works with commercial companies and clinical experts to make such products available much more widely. We will monitor that roll-out. That is an example of how we are trying to be much more fleet of foot when we identify these tests, products or medicines that can make a difference, which involves close working between NHS England and providers to deliver them. As set out in the long-term plan, the NHS will in the future introduce a new funding mandate for health tech products assessed as cost-saving by NICE. Clearly, preventive and testing measures are crucial to that.

I hope that Members welcome the progress made so far on this important issue. I am always happy to hear representations on where we can do better. Clearly, trying to make this country the safest place to have a baby, to make sure that we are doing everything we can to tackle stillbirths and to ensure that all women have safe and healthy pregnancies that deliver safe and healthy babies are priorities of the Government. I am very grateful for the constructive contributions of all Members. I am sure that this will not be the last time that we discuss this subject, even though it might be the first.

2.24 pm

Patricia Gibson: We clearly have a lot of work to do to raise awareness of this condition. The poor attendance in this Chamber is a clear testament to that, although I extend heartfelt thanks to my colleagues who have made the effort to come here today and speak.

As we have said—we cannot say this too often—1,000 babies across the UK die each year from pre-eclampsia-related complications. That demands our attention and requires our action. We know and have heard today that diagnosis and treatment are not what they could be and often not what they should be. If we do not talk about difficult issues, we are extremely unlikely to tackle them or, indeed, prioritise them. With pre-eclampsia affecting about—this is an estimate—6% of pregnancies in the UK, it affects every single constituency. I say this to all constituents who are watching the debate now or who may watch it later if they catch a bit of the news on social media about it: if this is an issue about which you are concerned, I urge you to contact your MP and ask them to raise it at every opportunity, because that is how change happens.

I welcome the Minister's constructive response to the debate, and I look forward to continuing to work with her through the all-party parliamentary group on baby loss, which deals with neonatal death. As she says, we know which women are likely to be at risk, so we need to ensure that the treatment of those women takes pre-eclampsia into account—that it is on the radar—so that we can better monitor them, and their babies' lives can be saved as a result. It is also extremely important that women are listened to when they present to any medical professional. That cannot be stressed enough.

It is also important that the placental growth factor test is delivered, especially to those women we know are in at-risk groups. I am encouraged by the Minister's mentioning the PHOENIX study, because I am hopeful that that will yield additional understanding that will improve treatment for pre-eclampsia.

[Patricia Gibson]

As the Minister said at the close of her remarks, this is the first debate on pre-eclampsia, but I am pretty confident that it will not be the last.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered pre-eclampsia.

2.27 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 9 May 2019

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER AND CABINET OFFICE

Common Travel Area

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): Recognising the deep and enduring relationship between our two countries, the UK Government and the Government of Ireland yesterday entered into a memorandum of understanding reaffirming our joint commitment to the common travel area (CTA), and to maintaining the associated rights and privileges of British and Irish citizens under this longstanding reciprocal arrangement.

The UK has consistently reiterated its commitment to maintaining the CTA. Following on from guidance published in February, this Memorandum of Understanding reaffirms the support of the UK Government for the principles of the CTA, and the rights it affords British and Irish citizens when in the other's state.

The CTA, involving the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, and Ireland, facilitates the ability of British and Irish citizens to move freely within it. Flowing from this right to move freely are associated reciprocal rights and privileges that are enjoyed daily by British citizens in Ireland, and Irish citizens in the UK. These include access to employment, healthcare, all levels of education, and social benefits on the same basis as citizens of the other state, as well as the right to vote in local and national parliamentary elections.

Neither Irish citizens in the UK nor British citizens in Ireland are required to take any action to protect their status and rights associated with the CTA. Both Governments are committed to undertake all the work necessary, including through legislative provision, to ensure that the agreed CTA rights and privileges are protected.

[HCWS1548]

TREASURY

Contingent Liability Notification

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): I can today confirm that I have laid a Treasury Minute, informing the House of the contingent liability that HM Treasury has assumed in relation to the transfer of sponsorship of the Bradford & Bingley plc (B&B) employer defined benefit pension scheme and the NRAM employer defined benefit pension scheme (the "Schemes") from B&B and NRAM, respectively, to UK Asset Resolution Limited (UKAR).

UKAR and the trustees of each scheme (the "Trustees") have agreed that the sponsorship of both Schemes should be transferred from B&B and NRAM to UKAR.

The contingent liability takes the form of a credit support deed (a "CSD"), entered into by HM Treasury and UKAR in respect of each of the Schemes, which will provide comfort to the Trustees that, in the event UKAR is unable to meet any payment obligation in respect of one or more of the Schemes, HM Treasury will provide UKAR with sufficient funds to meet such payment obligation. The remote maximum contingent liability possible under the CSDs together is estimated at c. £1.4 billion, based on the current mortality assumptions and discounted defined benefit obligations of the Schemes. This would only crystallise in the highly remote circumstances where the value of assets in both Schemes fell to zero and HM Treasury became liable for all liabilities under each scheme. Given that the majority of assets in the Schemes are held in gilts and the expectation that each scheme will be in surplus at the time of transfer, this scenario is considered highly unlikely.

As the Schemes will be in surplus at the time of transfer, UKAR is not expected to make any additional payments to either scheme until at least the next triennial valuations in three years' time. In the light of this and the fact that UKAR will be funded via the usual supply procedure, HM Treasury considers it unlikely that the CSD will be called upon.

The CSD will remain in place for as long as UKAR remains the sponsor of the Schemes. It should be noted that HM Treasury, as the ultimate owner of B&B and NRAM, already has indirect exposure to this risk. An existing guarantee given by HM Treasury to the B&B pension scheme trustees will remain in place following the transfer of the B&B pension scheme to UKAR.

The transfer of sponsorship will not affect members' benefits, there will be no impact on members' accrued rights, and the relevant trustee board of each Scheme will remain unchanged following the transfer of sponsorship to UKAR.

I will update the House of any further changes as necessary.

[HCWS1553]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) will take place in Brussels on 13 May. It will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), Federica Mogherini.

There will be an Eastern Partnership (EaP) ministerial before the FAC. The FAC will discuss current affairs, Libya and Sahel.

Eastern Partnership ministerial

Ministers will discuss the partnership's achievements, the need for further progress on reforms and the partnership's future direction post 2020. The ministerial forms part of a sequence of events to mark the partnership's

10-year anniversary, including an anniversary statement and the EaP Heads of State and Government high level conference, hosted by Presidents Tusk, Juncker, and Tajani on 14 May.

Current affairs

We expect HRVP Mogherini to update Ministers on recent developments in Venezuela, including the 7 May international contact group meeting. She may also provide an update on western Balkans, Sudan and the US decision not to renew the waiver of title III of the Helms-Burton Act.

Libya

Ministers will discuss the ongoing security situation in Libya, following Libyan national army (LNA) advances on Tripoli. The UK is deeply concerned by reports that the recent violence has caused the displacement of thousands of people, and blocked emergency aid to casualties, including civilians. The UK will underline that there is no military solution to Libya's challenges.

Sahel

Ministers will discuss the current situation in the Sahel. The Council will seek to agree conclusions highlighting the EU's commitment to working with the countries of the region to meet the security, development and humanitarian challenges they are facing.

Council conclusions

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Sahel and on the communication on relations between the EU and LAC (Latin America and Caribbean regional grouping).

[HCWS1551]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Investigatory Powers Act 2016

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 provides extensive privacy safeguards and has established a robust oversight regime with independent mechanisms for redress. The Investigatory Powers Commissioner, the right hon. Lord Justice Fulford, is responsible for overseeing the use of investigatory powers by the intelligence agencies, law enforcement and other public authorities. This oversight includes a programme of inspection and audit by judicial commissioners and inspectors, reporting to the commissioner.

This statement notifies Parliament of compliance risks MI5 identified and reported within certain technology environments used to store and analyse data, including material obtained under the Investigatory Powers Act.

The investigatory powers regime is the subject of ongoing litigation where the Government continue to defend the UK's legal framework. This does necessarily limit the extent to which it is appropriate for me to comment further on these issues, noting that the Government have, in line with their duty of candour, made the court aware of this issue in relevant litigation. The sensitivity of this issue will also be apparent. The Government will not say anything that could damage national security. To the extent that it is possible to set

out in open the nature and context of the material relevant to this issue, I have done so in this statement. Protecting the UK's national security is my top priority and it is critical that MI5 is able to continue to carry out its vital role.

The compliance risks identified relate to particular safeguards set out in the Investigatory Powers Act in relation to the processing of material that has been obtained under a warrant. Section 53 of the Act—which relates specifically to lawful interception—and parallel provisions for the Act's other powers require the authority issuing warrants to ensure certain processing is kept to the minimum necessary for the statutory purpose, including the number of people to whom material is made available, the number of copies made and the length of time it is retained. A report of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office suggests that MI5 may not have had sufficient assurance of compliance with these safeguards within one of its technology environments.

As will be clear from the above, the compliance risks identified are limited to how material is treated after it has been obtained. They do not relate in any way to the manner in which MI5 acquires information in the first instance or the necessity and proportionality of doing so. All UK intelligence agencies treat protection of personal information seriously. MI5 has in place internal safeguards concerning the handling of such information and ensures stringent vetting of individuals who will have access to this sensitive material.

The report of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office into these risks concluded that they were serious and required immediate mitigation. The commissioner also expressed concern that MI5 should have reported the compliance risks to him sooner. In response to the commissioner's report, MI5 has also taken immediate and substantial mitigating actions to address the concerns raised. Work to implement those mitigations is ongoing and is being treated as a matter of the highest priority, both by MI5 and the Home Office. This work is subject to review by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner to ensure that sufficient progress is being made.

It is of course paramount that UK intelligence agencies demonstrate full compliance with the law. In that context, the interchange between the commissioner and MI5 on this issue demonstrates that the world leading system of oversight established by the Act is working as it should.

Following his report, the commissioner was satisfied that the mitigating actions put in place by MI5 were sufficient for him to continue lawfully to approve decisions to issue warrants to MI5. I am also clear that none of the risks identified relate in any way to the conduct and integrity of the staff of MI5, who work tirelessly, under considerable pressure and without public recognition, to keep all of us safe.

The work MI5 does is absolutely critical, at a time when the threat from terrorism persists and continues to diversify. And the role of the Investigatory Powers Commissioner and his office is also fundamental to protecting our citizens, ensuring that our operational agencies are able to carry out their vital work in accordance with strict and proportionate privacy safeguards.

Given the importance of these issues, I have established an independent review to consider and report back to me on what lessons can be learned for the future. MI5 will also continue to work closely with the Investigatory

Powers Commissioner and his team to address the concerns raised and I anticipate that the commissioner will outline his position in his annual report in due course. As the parliamentary body responsible for oversight of the intelligence services, the Intelligence and Security Committee has also been updated on this issue.

[HCWS1552]

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures: December 2018 to February 2019

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of his TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

The level of information provided will always be subject to slight variations based on operational advice.

TPIM notices in force (as of 28 February 2019)	4
TPIM notices in respect of British citizens (as of 28 February 2019)	4
TPIM notices extended (during the reporting period)	0
TPIM notices revoked (during the reporting period)	0
TPIM notices revived (during the reporting period)	0
Variations made to measures specified in TPIM notices (during the reporting period)	4
Applications to vary measures specified in TPIM notices refused (during the reporting period)	2
The number of current subjects relocated under TPIM Legislation (as of 28 February 2019)	2

The TPIM Review Group (TRG) keeps every TPIM notice under regular and formal review. The first quarter TRGs took place during March 2019.

[HCWS1549]

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures: September 2018 to November 2018

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of his TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

The level of information provided will always be subject to slight variations based on operational advice.

TPIM notices in force (as of 30 November 2018)	5
TPIM notices in respect of British citizens (as of 30 November 2018)	5
TPIM notices extended (during the reporting period)	1
TPIM notices revoked (during the reporting period)	1
TPIM notices revived (during the reporting period)	0
Variations made to measures specified in TPIM notices (during the reporting period)	5
Applications to vary measures specified in TPIM notices refused (during the reporting period)	1
The number of current subjects relocated under TPIM Legislation (as of 30 November 2018)	3

The TPIM Review Group (TRG) keeps every TPIM notice under regular and formal review. The third quarter TRG meetings took place on 12, 14, 18, 25 and 27 September 2018. The fourth quarter of TRG meetings took place on 4, 6, 10, 11 and 19 December 2018.

Three individuals have been charged with breach of a TPIM notice. Their criminal trials have yet to be heard.

[HCWS1547]

Child Sexual Abuse Inquiry

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Today the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse has published its latest case study report, which can be found at <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/>

This report relates to the Diocese of Chichester and Peter Ball case studies in the inquiry's Anglican Church investigation. I am thankful for the strength and courage of the victims and survivors who have shared their experiences to ensure the inquiry can deliver its vital work.

The Government will review this report and consider how to respond to its content in due course.

I would like to thank Professor Jay and her panel for their continued work to uncover the truth, expose what went wrong in the past and to learn the lessons for the future.

[HCWS1550]

TRANSPORT

Airline Insolvency Review

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): We have a thriving aviation sector, with competition between airlines delivering choice of destinations and competitive fares for consumers, but occasionally airlines, like any business, do collapse. Over the past decade we have seen two of the largest airline failures in UK history, with the collapse of XL Airways and Monarch Airlines. In both situations, the Government of the day took a decision to ask the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to intervene to assist the repatriation of passengers.

When Monarch collapsed in October 2017, it could have left around 110,000 passengers overseas without a flight back to the UK. Given the specific circumstances and scale of the situation, the Government asked the CAA to launch an operation to ensure that all those abroad were offered an alternative flight to the UK. This involved the UK's largest peacetime repatriation operation. In total around 85,000 passengers were returned to the UK, with 98% of them travelling on the same day as their original flight.

While this support in both the XL and Monarch situations helped to reduce the detriment for passengers, it also resulted in significant costs to the taxpayer. In the case of the Monarch repatriation, the final cost to the taxpayer has been assessed to be £40.5 million.

Following on from the experience of Monarch, I commissioned an independent airline insolvency review, chaired by Peter Bucks. The review has considered consumer protection in the event of an airline or travel company failure. The final report has been published

today.¹ It draws on lessons from the collapse of Monarch Airlines and has considered both repatriation and refund protection to identify options to ensure passengers are protected and identified areas for further work.

We welcome the report and the work performed by Peter and his team. The Government are considering the range of options put forward by the review and will work swiftly to introduce the reforms that are needed to ensure a strong level of consumer protection and value for money for the taxpayer. In doing so we also need to consider the challenges faced by the aviation sector. We would welcome any views on the report's recommendations and encourage stakeholders to respond as part of the ongoing consultation on Aviation 2050, which closes on 20 June.²

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/airline-insolvency>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/aviation-2050-the-future-of-uk-aviation>

[HCWS1546]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Welfare Sanctions

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Amber Rudd): Conditionality and sanctions are an important part of the welfare system, motivating claimants to engage with the support on offer to look for work while ensuring the system is fair to the taxpayer.

Sanctions must be proportionate, particularly for the most vulnerable. The level of a sanction depends on the severity of the claimant's failure to comply with their work-related requirements. Sanctions escalate for subsequent failures, carrying greater penalties. Under current policy, a claimant on universal credit or jobseeker's allowance may receive a three-year sanction the third or subsequent time they have failed to comply with a work-related requirement.

Three-year sanctions are rarely used, but I believe that they are counterproductive and ultimately undermine our goal of supporting people into work.

I have reviewed my Department's internal data, which shows that a six-month sanction already provides a significant incentive for claimants to engage with the labour market regime. I agree with the Work and Pensions Committee that a three-year sanction is unnecessarily long and I feel that the additional incentive provided by a three-year sanction can be outweighed by the unintended impacts to the claimant due to the additional duration. For these reasons, I have now decided to remove three-year sanctions and reduce the maximum sanction length to six months by the end of the year.

It is important that sanctions remain proportionate to ensure they promote the best outcomes. For this reason, the Department is currently carrying out a further evaluation into the effectiveness of UC sanctions at supporting claimants to search for work. I will consider what other improvements can be made following this and inform the House in due course.

[HCWS1545]

Ministerial Corrections

Thursday 9 May 2019

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

China: UK Policy

The following is an extract from a Westminster Hall debate on China: UK Policy on Tuesday 7 May 2019.

Mark Field: As many Members may know, Huawei has had a long-standing joint venture with BT going back almost a decade and a half. Arguably, those who oppose Huawei having any more involvement will have to recognise that that has already been worked through. The extensive review that we now have will go far beyond individual vendors or countries.

[Official Report, 7 May 2019, Vol. 659, c. 261WH.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Asia and the Pacific, the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field):

An error has been identified in my reply to the debate.

The correct wording should have been:

Mark Field: As many Members may know, Huawei has had a long-standing joint venture with BT going back almost a decade and a half. Arguably, those who oppose Huawei **being involved** will have to recognise that that has already been worked through. The extensive review that we now have will go far beyond individual vendors or countries.

EDUCATION

Tuition Fees: EU Students

The following is an extract from the urgent question on Tuition Fees: EU Students on Monday 29 April 2019.

Sir Nicholas Soames: Does my hon. Friend agree that, generally speaking, the rule the Government should adopt, given the unfortunate decision that this country has taken to leave the European Union and in order to make our way in the world to the greatest advantage, is that we must retain a very open system to allow the brightest and the best to come and study here from all over the world at equal rates of charging, but also with a regime that allows them to stay here and work in an orderly, sensible manner that is easily enforced?

Chris Skidmore: From the international perspective of the United Kingdom's universities, I entirely agree that we now have the highest ever number of applications from foreign countries—about 158,000.

[Official Report, 29 April 2019, Vol. 659, c. 30.]

Letter of correction from the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation:

An error has been identified in my response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames).

The correct response should have been:

Chris Skidmore: From the international perspective of the United Kingdom's universities, I entirely agree that we now have the highest ever number of **applicants** from foreign countries—**about 134,000**.

ORAL ANSWERS

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