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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 17 October 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

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Secretary of State was asked—

WTO Reform

1. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the extent of the Government's influence on potential reform of the World Trade Organisation after the UK leaves the EU. [900000]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): I am a big supporter of the WTO, but it does need reform. When the UK takes up its independent seat at the WTO for the first time in many years, we will strongly be backing the rules-based multilateral trading system and making the case for reform.

Martyn Day: 10 December—the date on which the WTO appellate body crisis will come to a head—is looming ever closer. Can the Secretary of State confirm that she will follow the European Union in working to restore an operational appellate body, and will she tell us what conversations she has had with her United States counterpart regarding that urgent need?

Elizabeth Truss: When I was at the WTO in Geneva last week, I met David Walker, who is currently leading work to resolve the appellate body crisis. I have given him my full support in that work. It will require movement on behalf of the EU and the US to find a solution to this crisis, but it is vital that we fix this in order to keep the WTO going.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Ind): As well as undermining the dispute settlement system, the US is threatening the principles that support developing economies and imposing tariffs for political ends. How does my right hon. Friend propose that the UK stands up for the rules-based order while trying to negotiate a trade deal with the US?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right that the rules-based order is very important. Last week we got the support of all the Trade Ministers of the Commonwealth, who represent a third of the world's population, to make the case for an immediate resolution to the WTO

appellate body crisis and for a rules-based order. As she says, it is particularly important for the smaller countries that do not have the muscle to make their way in trade negotiations to be able to rely on the WTO to resolve disputes.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): How exactly do the Government intend to reform the WTO? Are they looking at tariffs, for example? What exactly are they trying to achieve?

Elizabeth Truss: The WTO needs to reform to reflect trade in the 21st century. It needs to become more transparent. We also need to deal with issues such as state-owned enterprises, forced technology transfer and intellectual property, ensuring that these matters are resolved within the WTO. But we also need an appellate body system that works for all WTO members, which is why I am supporting David Walker from New Zealand, who is conducting the review. I urge the US, the EU and all other parties to work together to resolve this situation.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): May I urge the Secretary of State to use our voice at the WTO to champion both free trade and, as she has described them, “orderly” markets? Now is not the time for world trade to revert to old-fashioned protectionism.

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Since the repeal of the corn laws, the UK has stood up for free trade. We were one of the founding members of the general agreement on tariffs and trade in 1947. There is a huge opportunity for us as we leave the EU to retake our independent seat, to make the case for free trade and to be prepared to stand up for the values that we believe in as a country.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State wake up? She sounds almost as if she is in a trance this morning. Instead of talking to significant people in the WTO, will she come to my constituency of Huddersfield to meet exporting companies and top managers there, who believe that she is sticking a dagger into the heart of this country's exporting companies? We want to know what the future is for exporting businesses in Yorkshire when we leave the EU, if we have to leave the EU.

Elizabeth Truss: Well, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I am going to be in Yorkshire next Friday, visiting and talking to exporting businesses such as Bettys of Harrogate and Burberry in Leeds. If he wants to extend an invitation to me to visit an exporting business in Huddersfield, he should get on with it.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend be a champion for opening markets to the world's least developed countries?

Elizabeth Truss: Absolutely. One of the great benefits of trade is the prosperity it can bring to some of the poorest countries in the world. Part of our no-deal tariff schedule is about ensuring that those countries are supported, but we will have a huge opportunity to open up more trade once we leave the EU. At the Commonwealth Trade Ministers meeting, we talked about just that.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): We all wish to see reform of the WTO and a functioning dispute resolution system, but given that the UK is responsible for 3.4% of global trade compared with the EU being responsible for 35%—a full third—of global trade, is it not the case that the UK's influence inside the WTO is now massively diminished?

Elizabeth Truss: One of the groups we are working very closely with is our Commonwealth partners. We are developing a Commonwealth caucus at the WTO that represents a third of the world's population and has a very strong stake in making sure that the WTO works for small states, in particular. Of course we will work with the EU and of course we will work with the US when it is in our mutual interests, but the fact is that the EU has pursued protectionist policies, and that has not necessarily helped some of the least-developed nations. I believe that the UK will have a unique voice, particularly in favour of free trade.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): We know that the new Secretary of State can do the impossible, because recently she announced that for the past 45 years the UK had been a member of the WTO—which was only founded in 1995. So will she now inform the House of how she has resolved the challenge that 20 or so members of the WTO have lodged against the UK's proposed new bound tariff and quota schedules, and of what provisional sum she has agreed with the Chancellor to pay any successful claims?

Elizabeth Truss: The UK was a founder member of GATT, which then became the WTO. As the hon. Gentleman knows, by his definition we would only have been in the EU since 1993, because previously we were in the European Community, as I am sure he has said.

Of course we will work through the issues on the goods schedules at the WTO, and we are doing precisely that at Geneva. Those schedules are all ready to go in the event of no deal. Of course, what we want is a deal, and the Prime Minister is currently in Brussels working very hard to get that. If that is what the hon. Gentleman wants, I suggest that he votes for it.

EU Trade Agreements: Roll-over

2. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What progress she has made on the rollover of existing EU trade agreements. [900002]

The Minister of State, Department for International Trade (Conor Burns): In preparation for our exit from the European Union, the Government have, to date, secured 16 continuity trade agreements with 46 countries. Trade with those countries represents 72% of the UK's total trade. I am pleased to inform the House that only last week my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State signed another agreement with the Southern African Customs Union and Mozambique to roll over the existing EU trade agreements that we have with them.¹

Dr Huq: The Minister says there are 16 agreements, but given the Government's clear broken promise to roll over at least 40 trade deals by one minute after midnight on 31 March, two Brexit extensions ago, have they carried out any assessment of the economic loss that

will result if—I will say if, not when—we are unable to secure a trade deal with all the countries that the EU already has an existing arrangement with?

Conor Burns: I am sorry that the hon. Lady has not welcomed the efforts that the Government and officials have made to make this incredibly successful transition. These deals account for over £100 billion-worth of our current trade, and they are warmly welcomed by the businesses that trade beyond the borders of the European Union. I will tell her what assessment we have made on the European Union: we have made an assessment that it would be deeply damaging for our democracy if we do not honour the referendum of 2016.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Will the Minister explain to the House how, when we leave the EU, his Department will continue to protect UK businesses from unfair trading practices?

Conor Burns: We remain absolutely committed to ensuring a level playing field. The United Kingdom has been one of the leading international advocates of a rules-based order. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we are committed to playing our full part in the WTO, and we are absolutely committed to having a trade resolution body up and running and formally underpinned by statute. This is the boring bit—the continuity bit. The exciting bit comes when we leave the European Union and we can strike out with new, comprehensive free trade agreements around the world.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Despite the existing architecture, despite not needing to reinvent the wheel, despite not starting from zero—we could just follow the work the European Union has done—and despite the promise to do this by one minute after midnight, the slow progress in these trade agreements surely does not bode well for any of the future trade agreements that the Government talk about ad nauseam. Meanwhile, the UK Government are endangering the trading potential of companies in the UK. When will the other 24 be done?

Conor Burns: We are working aggressively to continue the roll-overs, and many are very close to being completed. Despite the hon. Gentleman's distinguished position as Chair of the International Trade Committee, if optimism were a disease, he would be immune.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): The Trade Bill was supposed to govern the roll-over of EU trade deals, but the Government abandoned it in the last Session because they knew that they would lose votes on important amendments, including on scrutiny and parliamentary approval. Can the Minister confirm that the Government will carry over those vital provisions into the new trade Bill, so that elected Members of this Parliament can properly scrutinise all trade agreements, to prevent our NHS, food standards and environmental protections from being traded away to President Trump?

Conor Burns: As a distinguished parliamentarian, the hon. Lady knows how this House works. She will have ample opportunity to scrutinise the trade Bill during its passage through Parliament and, if she wishes, to make amendments to the Bill, which can then be considered

1. [Official Report, 31 October 2019, Vol. 667, c. 4MC.]

by the House. I wish that the Opposition would stop peddling this lie, which is worrying people, about the NHS and the United States. The Prime Minister has made it repeatedly clear that the NHS is not on the table in any trade agreement. She should stop scaremongering.

Scotch Whisky Tariffs

3. **Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): What recent discussions she has had with her US and EU counterparts on the imposition of tariffs on Scotch whisky. [R] [900003]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): We are extremely disappointed that the US has decided to levy tariffs, including on the Scotch whisky industry. I have urged my US counterpart to rethink this, and the Prime Minister has also raised the issue with President Trump.

Brendan O'Hara: In the days following this announcement, the Government were asleep at the wheel. We now have only 12 hours before this tariff is implemented. What action will the Secretary of State take in the next 12 hours to delay this? If she cannot delay it, what will she do to mitigate the impact, particularly on small and medium-sized distillers, which rely so heavily on the US market?

Elizabeth Truss: I have been raising this issue with my US counterpart since July, when I first met Bob Lighthizer. I have also raised it with Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross. I have made it clear to the Americans that it is not helpful in terms of our relationship with them to see these tariffs placed on such an iconic industry, among other industries in the UK.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's efforts. In my recent urgent question I asked the Prime Minister to speak to the President, and he did, but I also asked that consideration be given to an announcement that the UK would not levy tariffs on bourbon when we left the EU. Can she tell us something about her consideration of that?

Elizabeth Truss: When we leave the EU, the UK will be responsible for its own tariff policy. At this point we are part of the EU and those overall discussions on tariffs, so we cannot make that type of statement. The point I have been making to the US is that this will not help our relationship. We are also being threatened with £1.2 billion of car tariffs, which could hit the UK on 14 November, and I have raised that with my US counterpart. If the US wants the British public to have a positive view of our trading relationship with it, it needs to reverse these decisions.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Scotch whisky producers will have difficulties with the tariffs that will fall on their whiskies, but the Republic of Ireland will have no tariffs whatsoever. Echlinville distillery in my constituency is an Irish whiskey producer. What is being done to help Bushmills and Echlinville distilleries, which are very important to jobs in my constituency and across Northern Ireland?

Elizabeth Truss: My understanding is that the Republic of Ireland has been hit with tariffs on other products. These retaliatory tariffs following the Airbus dispute have been levied on a number of European countries. The point I have been making to the Americans is that the UK has complied with the WTO ruling. We are not in breach of that ruling any more, and we have met all the compliance stats.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): The Secretary of State is aware that my constituency is severely affected by a number of the tariffs applied by the US. What will she be doing in the next 12 hours to at least delay these tariffs being implemented? If they are, unfortunately, implemented, what can be done to get them removed as quickly as possible?

Elizabeth Truss: I am aware of the fantastic whisky distilleries—in fact, I visited Macallan with my hon. Friend very recently—and they are an incredibly important part of the Scottish economy, but also an iconic brand for the UK. I am hosting a roundtable with affected industries this afternoon, and the Chancellor is currently over in the US speaking to his counterpart as well. We are putting as much pressure as we can on the United States on this issue. We will also be looking at measures to help the industry here in the UK.

Welsh Exports

4. **Jane Dodds** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): What recent assessment she has made of the potential effects of WTO tariffs on Welsh exports after the UK leaves the EU. [900004]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): The best way to avoid potential tariff barriers is to support good free trade agreements with both the EU and the US. I hope the hon. Lady will support any deal the Government bring forward to make sure we can leave the EU with a deal.

Jane Dodds: I have spoken before about the impact of export tariffs on Welsh lamb and beef exports, which would be seriously damaging for the Welsh farmers I represent in Brecon and Radnorshire. We have heard the Government recently talk up Japan as a tariff-free export destination, but only £4,000 of lamb goes to that particular country. Can the Secretary of State provide a guarantee—yes or no—that the livelihood of Welsh farmers, such as those in Brecon and Radnorshire, will not suffer as a result of the imposition of these export tariffs?

Elizabeth Truss: I know that very high-quality lamb is produced in the hon. Lady's constituency. In fact, I have visited the Rhayader sheep market and seen it for myself. I can assure her that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is working with the Treasury to make sure there is support for lamb farmers in the eventuality of potential issues. However, we also need to open up more markets for British lamb. I have particularly got my eye on the US market—it is the second largest importer of lamb by value in the world—and we need to make sure that Welsh lamb farmers have more places to which they can export.

Tariff Policies: US and China

5. **Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): What assessment she has made of the effect on EU trade policy of recent changes in tariff policies between the US and China. [900005]

The Minister of State, Department for International Trade (Conor Burns): The European Union has made very clear its opposition to tariff escalation and its support for the international rules-based trading system. As a vocal champion of that very system, the United Kingdom endorses the EU approach. Low tariffs and free trade are the underpinning guarantor of prosperity and jobs in the UK; tariff wars are in no one's interest.

Greg Hands: Does my right hon. Friend agree, given the growing disruption in the EU's trade relationship with both the US and China, that now is not the time to have disruption in the EU-UK trade relationship? The UK will become, overnight, the EU's second largest trade partner. Does that not show all of us the need to get a trade deal with Brussels that we can live with and move on?

Conor Burns: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. As a distinguished former occupant of the job I now have, he understands these matters incredibly well. He is absolutely correct: the United Kingdom is about to become the EU's second largest trading partner, with £357 billion of goods and services exported to the UK last year. A good Brexit deal is in the interests of the EU and in the interests of the UK, and I am sure the whole House—at least, I wish the whole House—would wish my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister every success today in trying to get that agreement.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): Recently, the Secretary of State said she would be “unapologetic in fighting the forces of protectionism, in favour of genuinely free trade.”

Will she put this into action now for one of my constituents, a specialist publisher of historical aviation books, who from tomorrow will pay 25% tariffs on his materials, a large proportion of which are shipped to the US?

Conor Burns: I absolutely give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that we will work tirelessly to promote trade, investment and the prosperity of the United Kingdom. On the hon. Gentleman's particular point, I would be delighted to meet him to talk about his constituency business.

Freeports

6. **Ross Thomson** (Aberdeen South) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the economic merits of freeports. [900007]

13. **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the merits of freeports. [900014]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): I am working closely, as are my colleagues across Government, to make sure that the

freeport policy will be successful, and will help bring regeneration, jobs, opportunity and prosperity to every part of this United Kingdom.

Ross Thomson: Given Aberdeen's new harbour expansion, which is supported in part by UK Government investment, and a growing cluster of subsea businesses near Aberdeen International airport, does my hon. Friend agree that freeport status for Aberdeen could help to turbocharge the engine room of the Scottish economy?

Graham Stuart: My hon. Friend is correct in his assertion that freeports have the potential to drive growth in towns and cities across the UK, enabling them to make the most of Brexit opportunities. We are working hard to design a model that delivers optimal benefit for the UK and specific locations. Where appropriate, we will work with the devolved Administrations on this matter, but it would be helpful if the SNP showed more enthusiasm for something that could make a big difference.

Jack Lopresti: Does my hon. Friend agree that freeports could hugely benefit and provide great opportunities for the south-west regional economy? What plans will he put in place to ensure that local communities around freeports benefit economically?

Graham Stuart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—no one in the House works harder to promote their area than him. Freeports offer an opportunity to unleash enterprise. We want to set forth all the principles and wealth creation that the Labour party stands against, and to allow my hon. Friend's constituents, and the communities he represents, to prosper and grow through free enterprise, and we will carry on doing that.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Prime Minister has suggested that there would be about six freeports. What assessment has the Minister made of the impact that that would have on ports that are not chosen to be freeports?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Lady makes a serious and important point. We are working hard and closely with our Treasury colleagues and others to ensure that we design the policy in the right way so that we minimise displacement and bring in additional activity and prosperity. We do not expect, and we will not design, a system that will damage those ports that do not become freeports.

Topical Questions

T1. [900016] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): I am delighted to have been appointed as Trade Secretary at this vital time in our nation's history. For the first time in 46 years, we will have an independent trade policy and be able to set our rules and regulations, which means that we will be able to strike deals with likeminded countries such as the United States, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. We will also be able to take up our independent seat at the World Trade Organisation, leading the fight for free trade and participating in the battle against protectionism.

Martyn Day: Ninety per cent. of the world's illegal deforestation takes place in the Amazon rainforest—something that the Paris agreement explicitly sets out to tackle and reduce. Does the Secretary of State agree that if we are serious about tackling climate change, the ratification and implementation of the Paris agreement must be a precondition for any country that wishes to make a trade deal with the United Kingdom?

Elizabeth Truss: I am a great believer that free trade and free enterprise help us to achieve our environmental goals through better technology, more innovation and more ingenuity. The Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), recently visited Brazil and discussed those precise issues with its Trade Minister.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Sylatech is a precision engineering business in Kirkbymoorside in my constituency, but it is suffering a significant business impact due to control delays on its export licence applications. Will my hon. Friend update the House with a timescale to resolve that problem?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): I congratulate my hon. Friend on working so hard to promote businesses in his area. I am delighted that our performance in dealing with licence applications is good, and I pay tribute to those who work in the Export Control Joint Unit. Some 80% of applications are concluded within 20 days, and 96% within 60 days. In some cases, complex issues have to be assessed, but we will do everything that we can to facilitate and accelerate the decision on the case raised by my hon. Friend.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The House recently passed a statutory instrument to extend EU protection against extraterritorial lawsuits under the US Helms-Burton Act. The Secretary of State will know that investors are already speaking with law firms to launch dispute proceedings against the UK under long dormant bilateral treaties. What estimates has she made of the quantum of such suits, and what protections will she introduce to safeguard the public purse and public policy?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and I will look into that issue.

T6. [900022] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Southend on the initiative of welcoming ambassadors from countries such as Thailand, the Philippines, Taiwan, the Maldives and India to boost trade once we leave the European Union?

The Minister of State, Department for International Trade (Conor Burns): It sounds like my hon. Friend is drawing up a very exciting programme of autumn travel. He is absolutely right that our departure from the European Union will offer huge opportunities for the United Kingdom in the vast and growing Asian market, which I saw at first hand only a couple of weeks ago in Vietnam.

T3. [900019] **Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): The annual number of customs declarations established by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs under a no-deal

scenario is estimated to be 270 million. The current number is 55 million. How do the Government expect to process the additional workload when they are shutting down vital HMRC centres such as Lynx House in Portsmouth?

Elizabeth Truss: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that an incredible amount of work has been going on across Government to make sure that we are fully prepared for all scenarios. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has been holding daily meetings—there have been 60 so far—and we are performing well, particularly on making sure that actions at the borders are in place.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Our biggest export sector is services, which are invisible, and particularly financial services. Our biggest export market is the US. What discussions has the Secretary of State had about opening up financial services exports to the US and removing some non-tariff barriers?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—this is a fantastic opportunity for the UK. When I was out in the US, I met Bob Lighthizer, and I also met the Treasury Secretary to discuss those potential opportunities with him. The UK is not just going to roll over in a trade deal with the US. We will make sure that our industries are promoted. We want barriers removed in the US to our successful service industries.

T4. [900020] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Back when we were told that we hold all the cards, the post of British trade negotiator had been obsolete for 45 years. Would the Secretary of State recommend it as a long-term career path? We are, as we know, at the beginning. When does she envisage the negotiations ever being over?

Elizabeth Truss: I hope that the hon. Lady will be supporting the Prime Minister in his negotiations in Brussels, where he has already secured significant advances to where we were, in particular by ensuring that Britain is able to have its own independent trade policy once we leave the EU, and to control our own rules and regulations.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): To avoid freeports just displacing activity, does the Minister agree that freeport activity should be based on the existing unique and distinctive capabilities of a port, such as Milford Haven, the UK's leading energy port, which has an unrivalled skills base and infrastructure?

Graham Stuart: My right hon. Friend is quite right. The design of the policy is vital. Optimising existing strength is an important part of ensuring that the policy is a success.

T5. [900021] **Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Despite the 2016 Colombia peace agreement, murders of trade unionists, human rights defenders and community leaders continue in very large numbers. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that there will be no free trade agreement with Colombia until it fully complies with its international human rights obligations?

Elizabeth Truss: To be frank, a free trade deal with Colombia is not one of our urgent priorities.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): As a result of devastating African swine fever, 130 million pigs have recently been slaughtered in China, which is home to half the world's pigs. Is this not a great opportunity for my right hon. Friend, who did so much to open this market to British pig farmers, to promote the merits of British products from our pigs, including, of course, the unrivalled Gloucester Old Spot?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right. I was very proud to open the market for pigs trotters into China when I was Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Market access is very important. We have seen a massive increase in pork exports to China over the past five years. He is right that our high welfare standards and quality produce are valued across the world. There are lots of new opportunities, including for the Gloucester Old Spot.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Leaked documents from Operation Kingfisher showed that York would be the worst-hit place in the country in the event of no deal. What discussions is the Secretary of State having with my city to ensure that we will be able to trade after 31 October?

Elizabeth Truss: No doubt the hon. Lady will be supporting a deal to ensure that the good people of York have the trading opportunities that they deserve.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Returning to the issue of freeports, the Secretary of State visited Immingham in my constituency last year and saw for herself the great opportunities that exist to improve the local economy. Will she continue working with me to ensure that the Humber ports do indeed receive freeport status?

Graham Stuart: As I represent a constituency in the Humber area, I will continue, without giving any special status, to ensure that we liaise with my hon. Friend, but he is so right. Conservative Members are focused on trying to find policies that open up investment and bring in further jobs, but the Labour party's manifesto sets out policies that would destroy inward investment and cost tens of thousands of jobs.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State accept the Food and Drink Federation's analysis that, with a complex and confusing no-deal tariff schedule, investment made right across the supply chain in preparing for a no-deal Brexit means that food prices will likely increase?

Elizabeth Truss: The best way of avoiding no deal is for the—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but this is common sense: the best way to avoid no deal is to vote for a deal.

Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give us an update on where we are on joining the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership?

Elizabeth Truss: I discussed that with Trade Ministers when I visited New Zealand, Japan and Australia. They are all very interested in the UK's joining, and I want to

progress that alongside the bilateral discussions that we are having with the countries. It will give us access to 11 fast-growing markets in Asia, so it is a massively exciting opportunity.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Will Ministers assure us that, in their desperation to sign any trade deal to justify their Brexit policy, they will not give a green light, or a nod and a wink, to President Bolsonaro to continue the destruction of the Amazon rain forest?

Conor Burns: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State alluded to some moments ago, I visited Brazil recently. In addition to conversations about trade, we discussed with the Brazilian Government how the United Kingdom can assist them in their move to a low-carbon, greener energy production model. We have spent over £150 million of climate finance in forest programmes across Brazil, and I was delighted, in the light of my recent visit, that the Prime Minister announced a further £10 million to help the Brazilian authorities in forestation and deforestation.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (LD): The National Audit Office said yesterday that if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, cross-border shipments could be reduced by more than 50% and would take 12 months to return to normal. Can we stop this charade? Is it not the case that no responsible Government would do that to our businesses, and that if there is no agreement with the EU by Saturday, the Prime Minister will send the letter requesting an extension, not least because if he fails to do so he will be in contempt of court, given the proceedings in the Court of Session?

Graham Stuart: As well as birthday congratulations to the hon. Gentleman, I have other good news: we are taking steps to support businesses in all scenarios and to ensure that, with or without a deal, we minimise any negative disruption. But as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State just said—this is an appeal to Members right across this House—we will have the opportunity to vote for a Saturday sitting, and we will have the opportunity, I hope, to see a deal put through that will mean that we can move forward. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, finally, will support and respect the decision of the British people in 2016.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Gender Recognition Act 2004

1. **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): When she plans to publish the Government's response to their consultation on reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004. [900023]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): The issue of the response to the consultation on the Act is very important. It needs time for consideration, and I will want to study it closely.

Christine Jardine: Last night, at the PinkNews awards, Baroness Williams of Trafford, the House of Lords Minister for Equalities, said, "bear with us" on gender

recognition reforms. Quite frankly, Minister, that is not good enough for people who are already going through one of the most difficult experiences they will ever face—more difficult than we can possibly imagine. They face abuse, discrimination and even, sadly, violence, just because of who they are. So I ask the Minister again: when will we see the results of the consultation, and can she assure me, and the people who are waiting on those results, that the most right-wing Government in decades will follow through on the GRA?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely condemn bullying or violence towards trans people, but I do not think that that could be confused with the complex piece of work that is the reform to the Gender Recognition Act. In particular, I will not be rushed into it. I am very keen that we protect single-sex spaces and vulnerable women, and that we do not rush into reform before we have had full, proper discussion.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to her new position and look forward to working with her on all these issues. I am losing count, but I think she is the fifth Minister whom I have shadowed since I have occupied this position. However, we do not start from the beginning every time we change Ministers.

Reform of the Gender Recognition Act was promised in 2016. The Minister does not need to look at it carefully; the Minister just needs to expose what came out of the consultation and amend the Act as promised. The Minister needs to stop kicking the can down the road. There has been a 37% increase in hate crime against transgender people, and the Minister is exacerbating the pain and the hurt in the LGBT+ community. Please, Minister, just reform the Gender Recognition Act already.

Elizabeth Truss: As I have said, I completely condemn violence against trans people, and we and the Home Office are doing a lot of work to combat it, but I think it is completely wrong to conflate that with a complex piece of legislation that we need to get right. There are serious concerns about single-sex spaces and ensuring that vulnerable women are protected, and we should get the legislation right rather than rushing into things.

I am afraid that the hon. Lady is trying to make this into a political football. What I am interested in is making the right decisions for the people of Britain so that we have proper protection for transgender people and also ensure that we protect our single-sex spaces.

Gender Pay Gap

2. **Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP):** What recent steps the Government have taken to close the gender pay gap. [900024]

8. **Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** What recent steps the Government have taken to close the gender pay gap. [900031]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): This is the third year of gender pay gap reporting. We are focusing on the three sectors that employ the most women, and also on those with large gender pay gaps, such as

financial services. Work is already under way on, for instance, the independent review of the gender pay gap in medicine, the recommendations of which will be published shortly. I am delighted that experts on the Women's Business Council are helping us with our work in the retail and financial sectors in particular.

Martyn Day: The Scottish Government have lowered the threshold for listed public authorities to report their gender pay gaps and publish equal pay statements from more than 150 employees to more than 20. Will the UK Government consider lowering their threshold as well to increase equal-pay transparency?

Victoria Atkins: I am delighted to hear what the Scottish Government are doing. We keep that and other measures under review. As I have said, this is the third year of reporting, and we are delighted that thus far there has been 100% compliance. We must look at the data carefully, but everything is open to review. What is brilliant about this legislation is that for the first time, 10,500 employers in the country are talking about how they treat their female workers.

Marion Fellows: Last year in Motherwell and Wishaw, women working full-time earned an average of 10% less than their male counterparts. For women who are already struggling with Tory austerity—for example, the capping of universal credit at two children—a 10% increase in pay would make a huge difference. What are the Government doing to help those women, and women across the country?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady will be delighted by the Chancellor's announcement that we are increasing the national living wage. As she will know, 60% of people who are paid the living wage are women, so that increase will have a huge impact on many women. The hon. Lady and I can agree on at least this: we want women to be treated properly and fairly in the workplace, and I am sure that we all want to close that gap.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Flexible working gives many parents with young children an equal chance to work, and they would therefore support the narrowing of the gender pay gap. Does my hon. Friend agree that all job advertisements should specify whether the jobs are flexible, and that employees should have the right to request that flexibility?

Victoria Atkins: Very much so. My hon. Friend is right to mention flexible working and childcare. The message for employers is that flexible working not only improves diversity in their business models, but helps the bottom line. It is good for business, it is good for our country, and I think that, in particular, it is good for women to have the ability to earn their own incomes and to have the independence that we all cherish in this place.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the Conservatives have actually done more than any other Government to tackle the issue of pay inequality at work? What more is she doing to help women in the boardroom who do not earn as much as their male counterparts?

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend, who has done so much work on women and equalities and also on menopause. *[Interruption.]* I note that Opposition Members are laughing and guffawing, but these issues have a real impact on women who are the lowest paid. I am delighted if it means that the Labour party is supporting gender pay gap regulations, because it was a Conservative coalition Government who introduced the regulations and a Conservative Government who brought them into force two years ago. We need to ensure that employers are treating female employees correctly and properly, and that we are tackling that in the lowest paid sectors. That is why we have the three priority sectors of retail, healthcare and education that are working to bring action plans forward to ensure that we help the lowest paid.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): May I take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, to congratulate you on your *PinkNews* award, and your inspirational and outstanding speech? Trans rights are human rights.

In the previous Queen's Speech, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) pledged to make further progress to tackle the gender pay gap, but that was noticeably absent from this week's Queen's Speech. Does that mean that the current Prime Minister does not want to reduce the gender pay gap?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her very gracious remarks; I apologise for my inattention. It is much appreciated.

Victoria Atkins: Mr Speaker, forgive me for not congratulating you on your award. My right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) also received an award last night at the *PinkNews* celebrations.

On the question, that most certainly does not mean that this Prime Minister is in any way not committed to improving the gender pay gap. The fact that we have a strong ministerial team on the Front Bench today is a very clear indication of how seriously the Government take this issue. Having got the regulations in place, we are now working with industries to ensure that we are helping them achieve those action plans so that they can make the change. This has to be led with business; we have to bring business and employers with us to make this real cultural change.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): As we begin to understand the gender pay gap, does the Minister agree that, because the race pay gap is bigger than the gender pay gap, we should start to compel companies to publish their figures on that?

Victoria Atkins: That is a very good question, and I would expect no less from the hon. Lady. We are looking closely at ethnicity pay gaps. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, who is present on the Front Bench, is leading on that work, and it is really important. We have been talking to industry leads and stakeholders in the third sector, and the hon. Lady will appreciate that quite how it is defined is not as easy as it is for the gender pay gap, but there is a great deal of work going on in Government to look at it.

Gender Equality in Boardrooms

3. **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): What steps the Government are taking to increase gender equality in boardrooms in the (a) private and (b) public sector. [900026]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): Women represent half of the population, and I believe that we are missing out on a huge amount of talent because we do not have enough women in senior positions. I commend the work of Helena Morrissey who has achieved fantastic results with the 30% Club.

Carol Monaghan: I do a lot of work with science and technology companies and there is still a struggle in many of them to get women into senior positions or get women in at all. We have been using the carrot for decades now to try to get more women into the boardroom; when are we going to start using the stick?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady talks about science and technology, and one of the big issues is the gap that we have in school education, with fewer girls going on to study maths and science later in their school careers and girls losing confidence earlier on in their school careers. The way for us to tackle that it is to improve our education system, which is why we introduced things such as the English baccalaureate and tougher maths GCSEs, and why we are working more on maths education. I am passionate about this, and I am very keen to drive it forward as Minister for Women and Equalities.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): The construction industry is notoriously male-dominated, so will the Minister join me in congratulating Caroline Gumble, who has just become chief exec of the Chartered Institute of Building, of which I am a very proud member?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree: as well as Bob the builder, we need Brenda the builder. I congratulate my hon. Friend's constituent on her fantastic achievement. In every walk of life, it should not matter whether someone is a woman or a man; it should matter how good they are and how much effort they put into the job. That is what we champion on this side of the House. We believe that it is about someone's qualities as an individual, not what group they belong to.

12. [900035] **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree with me and the many women in my constituency who believe that International Women's Day could be made a public holiday? That would raise all the issues that we have been talking about today and give them focus.

Elizabeth Truss: I have to say that my focus in this job is not on bank holidays; it is on getting more women into work and getting them up the career ladder once they are in jobs. However, if the hon. Gentleman is offering to take on some work while women have a day off, I am sure that we would be very interested in that.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee has nine members, eight of whom are women. Will the Minister encourage

the Bank to employ more women in senior roles, and the Chancellor to appoint more women when he gets the chance?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is right. I describe finance as the final frontier for feminism. We have never had a female Chancellor, and we have never had a female Governor of the Bank of England. The Governor's job is coming up very shortly, so I am sure that the Chancellor will hear what the hon. Lady has to say.

Sexual Harassment and Bullying at Work

4. **Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): What recent steps the Government have taken to improve protections from (a) sexual harassment and (b) bullying at work. [900027]

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): In the summer, we ran a consultation to understand people's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and to assess whether the law in this space needs changing. Our consultation also included wider harassment protections, which cover many bullying behaviours. We are now considering the responses that we received, and we will publish proposals in due course.

Mrs Miller: Last week, a partner at Freshfields solicitors was ordered by a professional tribunal to pay more than a quarter of a million pounds for sexual misconduct with a junior colleague. Should not every regulator treat actions of sexual misconduct as a breach of professional standards? If the regulators do not act, will the Government?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my right hon. Friend, who as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee has done so much work on ensuring that employers' and regulators' responsibilities in the area are met. I welcome—indeed, I encourage—strong action from regulators to stamp out sexual harassment. We are working with relevant enforcement bodies and inviting them to join our public sector equality duty network to share and promote best practice. We are particularly focusing on regulators of specific relevance, to explore how they can support compliance with equality law.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The #MeToo movement was inspired—if that is the right word—by the activities of Harvey Weinstein in the film industry. Despite all their celebrity, many of the women affected did not feel able to turn to anyone when they encountered bullying and harassment in the workplace. That is all the more true for women today, particularly in small businesses. What is the Minister doing to ensure that women have legal and present support? Does she agree that the fact that Harvey Weinstein remains honoured by the British state with a CBE is a terrible indictment of our honours system?

Victoria Atkins: Of course, the #MeToo movement met with a great deal of attention and support across the world. In terms of sexual harassment, the consultation that closed on 2 October looked at all sorts of workplaces across the United Kingdom, and we are looking at responses to it very, very carefully. The hon. Lady will appreciate that it is only just over two weeks since the

consultation closed and I do not want to pre-empt anything. In terms of Mr Weinstein, I cannot comment on individual cases; his case will be dealt with in the US.

Pensions: 1950s-born Women

5. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on transitional arrangements for women born in the 1950s since the High Court judgment of 3 October 2019. [900028]

6. **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on transitional arrangements for women born in the 1950s since the High Court judgment of 3 October 2019. [900029]

9. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the implications for the Government's policies of the High Court judgment of 3 October 2019 on the increase in the state pension age for women born in the 1950s. [900032]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): The claimants applied for permission to appeal on 16 October 2019, which was of course yesterday. Hon. Members will therefore understand that I cannot comment on live litigation.

Liz Twist: Thousands of women across my constituency and millions nationally continue to face real hardship from this inequality. What steps is the Minister taking, in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions, to address their real concerns and distress and to provide equality?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for this opportunity to comment on the wider picture. As the Minister for employment with responsibility for jobcentres, I would tell anybody experiencing hardship at any point in their life to go to the jobcentre and to speak to their local citizens advice bureau—[*Interruption.*] The jobcentres do so much more than help people into work. They are a place of safety if you are suffering domestic violence, if you are looking to get support on benefits or if you are looking for housing support. It is a severe frustration for me as the Minister that people simply do not understand that jobcentres do much more than help people into work.

Judith Cummins: Yesterday, along with many other colleagues in this House, I met a group of 1950s women who have been affected by the changes to the state pension age. Having been silenced while other groups took legal action, they are frustrated that they are still no further forward. What concrete actions will the Minister now take to help those women and give them the justice they deserve?

Mims Davies: I appreciate that this will look and feel frustrating to many women because of the legal action and the live litigation, but I absolutely believe that we are trying to find a balance in our Department in supporting people of all ages at all points in their lives when they need support and ensuring that we are balancing an ageing demographic and a secure retirement.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful to the Minister for those replies, but notwithstanding the High Court decision and the appeal, there are thousands of women in my constituency who were born in the 1950s and who are affected. They find the support and advice measures that have been put in place inadequate, and I ask the Minister to liaise with the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to look again at this issue.

Mims Davies: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I absolutely understand that this is about a sense of balance. I reiterate my point that we have a wide range of benefits and support in the jobcentres—*[Interruption.]* Well, if the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) disagrees, I would be happy to meet her to say more. It is absolutely right that if the support is not there, people should come to the jobcentres, speak to me and get involved with the DWP. We will support these women. This is ultimately about equality. We now have no defined retirement age for anyone: anyone who can work can continue to do so, and for anyone who wants to have a secure retirement, we will support them.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): As a WASPI woman, may I say on behalf of the many women who have come to me about this matter that we have been caught in a sandwich generation? We had our children young and brought them up, then acted as carers looking after our mums. This is causing big problems for women caught up in this dilemma. They are now finding themselves in the job market, having had very disrupted careers. That is what is so difficult for those women, when they are suddenly being asked to retrain in their 60s. It is really causing big problems.

Mims Davies: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. The women issue and the work journey are absolutely a priority for me in this role. Universal credit is not a gender-specific fund. It focuses on individual needs and support, and that can be different for men and women. I am absolutely determined, in this role, along with the new Secretary of State, to ensure that we better reflect the women's work journey, including returning to work.

Women Leaving Prison

7. **Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab):** What steps the Government are taking to support women leaving prison. [900030]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Wendy Morton): We remain committed to delivering on the commitments laid out in the female offender strategy, which sets out our vision to see fewer women coming into the criminal justice system, a greater proportion being managed successfully in the community and better conditions for those in custody. Currently, women leaving prison are supported under the enhanced Through the Gate service specification implemented in April 2019. This new specification includes defined minimum support requirements such as accommodation, employment, training and education, finance, benefits and debt, and health and social care.

Emma Hardy: I thank the Minister for her answer, but we are seeing an increased number of people affected by homelessness and addiction problems across the

streets of my city of Hull, many of whom have left prison. In addition to the things that she has already mentioned, what more can be done to support women leaving prison to prevent them from ending up homeless, and what more can be done while they are in prison to deal with their addiction problems?

Wendy Morton: I know that the hon. Lady takes an interest in this topic and has a prison in her constituency. Alongside the enhanced Through the Gate service specification, resettlement planning is led by the probation officer in the community where the offender is to be released, making it easier to connect into local services such as women's centres. We also want greater involvement from voluntary organisations with the expertise to support offenders leaving prison.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Ministers will be aware of the campaigning work done by Bishop Rachel Treweek of Gloucester and others to encourage non-custodial sentences for women, and the Minister for Women, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), visited the Nelson Trust in my constituency, which does so much to help ex-prisoners. However, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), will know that many women who leave prison do not have a suitable home to go. What more can we do to provide suitable accommodation for such women?

Wendy Morton: As I have set out, we have the enhanced Through the Gate service specification, but I am more than happy to discuss the matter further with my hon. Friend. I would be interested to know a little bit more about the particular project to which he referred.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Today, Mr Speaker, with my voice, I am going to be Bonnie Tyler. *[Laughter.]*

One in six women leave prison with no home to go to. A combination of homelessness, a lack of job opportunities, and the stigma of being an ex-offender is setting up these women to fail and is undoubtedly responsible for the disproportionate number of recalls. The Government have to do more to help these women, who have to be able to escape the vicious circle. What are the Government going to do for these women?

Wendy Morton: In addition to the Through the Gate service, I am sure that the hon. Lady is aware of the social impact bond. In June of last year, we published our strategy for female offenders, setting out our vision and a plan to improve outcomes for women in custody and in the community. Like her, I am keen to do all that we can to help women who are leaving custody.

Topical Questions

T1. [900038] **Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab):** If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): My vision as Minister for Women and Equalities is to ensure that everyone has the freedom to be whoever they want to be and to shape their own future, regardless of their gender, sexuality, ethnicity or disability. I was proud to open the Asia chapter of the Global Equality Caucus during my recent visit to Japan, and I look

forward to building on the excellent work of this Government: from ensuring 12 years of quality education for every girl internationally to removing the barriers that stop women getting on at work and bringing LGBT leaders from across the world together in May next year. Together we can make Britain the best place in the world to be a woman and to be LGBT.

Mohammad Yasin: The Child Maintenance Service is failing receiving claimants, most of whom are women. Will the Minister introduce tighter monitoring of direct pay compliance, stop collect and pay charges for receiving parents, and finally introduce a service that ensures effective enforcement of late payments?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): I am happy to hear details of where the Child Maintenance Service is a concern. The Minister for Welfare Delivery is working directly to support families in this area. As I said, I am happy to hear the details, so please write to us and we will come back to the hon. Gentleman.

T4. [900041] **Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): Bullying and harassment that particularly affect women have no place in any workplace anywhere in the world. When will the Government ratify the new International Labour Organisation global convention that outlaws such offences? This Government led the way on that convention when it was established earlier this year.

The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins): Again, I thank my right hon. Friend, who has brought a laser-like focus on bullying and harassment in all places of work. The Government and I strongly support this convention, which seeks to ensure that women and men around the world are properly protected at work. Our law makes it clear that violence and harassment at work are unacceptable and unlawful, and our next steps will be to consider how we will ratify this and bring this new treaty to the attention of Parliament.

T2. [900039] **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): May I remind the Minister that next year marks 50 years since the Equal Pay Act 1970, and much of the progress has been made because of our membership of the European Union? I took the first petition on equal pay and sex discrimination to the EU in 1977. Much of the progress has been made because the EU has pushed us and many Labour Members campaigned for many years. How much longer are we going to have to wait? Is it going to be another 50 years?

Elizabeth Truss: I do not believe that we need the EU in order to have strong rights for women in Britain; I believe that we British women are strong enough to stand up for ourselves.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): We have a gender gap not just in the workplace, but among entrepreneurs; one in 10 men in work are entrepreneurs, whereas only one in 20 women are. What does the Minister think would be the best way to address that?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right about this, particularly in respect of funding. Female-led businesses are getting less funding from venture capital than male-led businesses. We want to address these barriers and open

up entrepreneurship to women across the country. We are lagging behind places such as Canada and Australia, and we need to do better.

T3. [900040] **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am sure the Minister will agree that all women deserve equal protection under the law, no matter where they come from. Indeed, I have had positive conversations with Ministers about including migrant women in the Domestic Abuse Bill, but can she tell us when she will be able to commit to including them specifically in that Bill?

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady and all Members of this House who contributed so positively and, on occasion, movingly to the Second Reading debate on this important piece of legislation. She knows that the Government are conducting a review of the treatment of migrant women, because we have very much borne in mind the findings of the Joint Committee, chaired so ably by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). That review is ongoing and as soon as I have more news I promise that the hon. Lady will be among the parliamentarians I speak to.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): In Cheadle, Northern Rail has responded positively to my campaign for lift accessibility for people with disabilities by giving 24-hour access, but not every disability is visible—some are invisible. Does the Minister agree that we should support people and help to promote the need for accessible toilet signage?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Absolutely, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on campaigning so hard on behalf of her constituents and working with Northern Rail. She is right about this. The inclusive transport strategy covers not only visible disabilities, but those that are invisible, and we are about to undertake a huge communications campaign to make people with all disabilities comfortable and confident to use our public transport system.

T5. [900042] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Audio-visual announcements on buses are vital to enable people with sight loss or hearing loss to travel with confidence. The UK Government's consultation ended more than a year ago, in September 2018, with no further progress, so what discussions has the Minister had with her counterparts in the Department for Transport to bring forward this important measure?

Ms Ghani: This is a key piece of our work in the inclusive transport strategy, especially as buses are the form of transport used most often by people with disabilities. We are crunching the data we have and we are hoping to make this available soon, but the inclusive transport strategy abides by the United Nations' aims to make sure that all of our transport is accessible by 2030.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Sexual harassment online is a major issue for many women. Will the Minister examine the issues of cyber-flashing and revenge porn to make sure that victims are given the proper legal protections from those as sexual offences?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend raises a point that concerns many in the House and outside. I am currently doing a piece of work on online offences and look

forward to the development of the online harms White Paper, because I suspect that many of the answers we all seek will be in that documentation.

T6. [900043] **Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Endometriosis UK found that 476,000 British women had to visit their GP more than 11 times for a positive diagnosis, and that their pain was often dismissed as being psychological. What steps is the Minister taking to eliminate gender bias in the diagnosis of health conditions?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ms Nadine Dorries): On the particular issue of endometriosis, I will have to write back to the hon. Lady, but being wrongly diagnosed as having a mental health condition is incredibly serious, and we are looking into rolling out training to GPs to help them better to diagnose mental health conditions. I will use this opportunity to say again that we are investing £2.3 billion a year in mental health services in the community, and hopefully that will go into GP practices and GPs will know not to make those kinds of diagnoses in future. I will get back to the hon. Lady on that particular condition.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): When she was Minister for Women and Equalities, my right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) committed to the House to introduce legislation to remove caste as a protected characteristic from the Equality Act 2010. When will the current Minister for Women and Equalities and her team bring forward legislation so that we can end this bizarre and divisive situation?

Victoria Atkins: It is a pleasure, as always, to respond to my hon. Friend on this important piece of work. I am in the process of discussing this with the Secretary of State, and we hope to have an answer for him shortly.

T7. [900044] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): In the spirit of equality, the Electoral Reform Society has said that compulsory photo ID for voters will potentially leave millions of voters voiceless. Some 3.5 million voters have no photo ID at all, with the most affected being the elderly, ethnic minorities and those who are socially disadvantaged. Is it not the case that the suppression of voter participation is dangerous and will exclude many from exercising their democratic rights?

Elizabeth Truss: It is perfectly proper that we make sure that the right people are voting and that they bring ID with them to the polling station. We have had issues with electoral fraud in this country.

T8. [900045] **Kate Hollern** (Blackburn) (Lab): During the Prime Minister's leadership campaign, he promised to look into the impact of the changes in state pension age for women. Will the Minister commit to working with the Prime Minister to provide transitional arrangements for the women of the 1950s, who have been hit hardest?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue again. Obviously, with the litigation ongoing it is difficult for me to comment more broadly, but I understand that that comment was made by the Prime Minister. If people are suffering and need any support, they should go to their jobcentre, talk to their local citizens advice bureau and make sure that they ask for help. We have many different benefits, both in retirement and after retirement, to support people to have a good, secure retirement. This issue should not affect anyone—women or men.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We now come to the urgent question.

Online Pornography: Age Verification

10.43 am

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Ind) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the future of age verification for online pornography.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): I thank my hon. Friend for her question and for the work that she did as my predecessor at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

It will always be the priority of this Government, and probably of any Government, to protect citizens in general and children in particular. We will do that online just as much as we would seek to do offline. It is because of that approach that we are changing the approach to age verification on the internet. As my hon. Friend knows, the Secretary of State tabled a written ministerial statement on this issue yesterday. I hope to provide some more detail on that.

Adult content is too easily accessed online and more needs to be done to protect children from harm. We want to deliver the most coherent approach possible. I believe we can protect children better and more comprehensively through the online harms agenda that my hon. Friend championed so effectively than we can through the measures in the Digital Economy Act 2017. I shall be straightforward: it will take slightly longer to do it through this mechanism, but we will go as fast as we can and deliver on the agenda in a more comprehensive way.

As my predecessor in the Department, my hon. Friend was of course responsible for the publication of the “Online Harms” White Paper, which proposed the establishment of a duty of care on companies to improve online safety, overseen by an independent regulator with strong enforcement powers to deal with non-compliance. That vehicle goes further than the age verification proposals originally tabled, and since the White Paper’s publication, the Government’s proposals have continued to develop at pace. This week, the Government announced as part of the Queen’s Speech that they would publish draft legislation for pre-legislative scrutiny next year. It is important that our policy aims and our overall policy on protecting children from online harms be developed coherently. In view of these developments, we will bring forward the most comprehensive approach possible to protecting children.

The Government have concluded that this objective of coherence and comprehensiveness will be best achieved through the wider online harms proposals that my hon. Friend championed and that have support across much of the House. That is why we do not propose to commence part 3 of the Digital Economy Act 2017. As currently drafted, the Act does not cover social media platforms, for instance, which is something that she and I both know was of concern to this House. It will give us a further opportunity to revisit the definition of pornographic material, which was also a concern of some Members.

As I say, we want to deliver the most comprehensive approach to keeping children safe online. I fervently believe that we can do that better through the online harms agenda. We are committed to the UK becoming

a world leader in the development of online safety technology as a whole. This is a part of that, and it includes age verification tools, which will continue to be a key part of it. Everyone across the House agrees on the need to protect children online and offline. Pre-legislative scrutiny for the online harms Bill will be a vital part of that process. I hope that Members across the House, particularly my hon. Friend, will continue to engage with the Government so that we can bring forward something for which there is a cross-party consensus and that delivers an agenda that we can all share.

Margot James: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. The statement yesterday came as a shock to children’s charities, the age verification industry, the regulator and the online pornography industry itself, all of which were ready for, and expecting, the age verification regulations to be brought into law by the end of this year.

The Government postponed the introduction of the controls in July after an administration error in which the EU was not informed about the proposals as it should have been in line with single market rules. At that time, firm assurances were given to the public, children’s charities and the industry that the EU issue would be resolved swiftly and that legislation would be brought in by the end of the year or early next year at the latest. There was a debate in the Statutory Instrument Committee earlier this year about the exemption of Twitter and other social media platforms from the AV regulations, and it was agreed that we would review the effectiveness of the regulations 12 months on from their introduction. Such a timetable would still be much sooner than the indefinite postponement effectively announced by the Secretary of State yesterday.

No one is arguing that AV provides a panacea for the prevention of children accessing adult content—we know that there are ways to circumvent AV—but children’s charities have provided evidence that too many children stumble across adult material accidentally and that this can have a damaging effect on them at a vulnerable age. It is likely that the regulations would raise the age at which young people are first exposed to pornography. The Secretary of State should not make the perfect the enemy of the good when it comes to child protection, especially after the Government have given so many assurances that once the privacy issues have been dealt with—they now have been—the regulations will be brought into law. For the Government to renege on their commitments in this important area is a very retrograde step, and I urge my hon. Friend and the Secretary of State to think again.

Matt Warman: I share a huge number of the hon. Lady’s concerns. This is not an indefinite postponement of the measures that we are seeking to introduce; it is an extension of what they will achieve. I honestly believe that we can do even better than some of the original proposals. For instance, she is right that raising the age at which children are exposed to deeply inappropriate content is important. Nobody is pretending that the proposals, either in the online harms agenda or in the original legislation, are perfect, but we should do all we can to make them as good as possible. I honestly believe that we will achieve more for child protection through this slower but more comprehensive approach than we would be taking the faster approach, which, as she has said, would end up being reviewed relatively quickly

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and, I suspect, wrapped into the online harms agenda. We are not delaying this unnecessarily; we are seeking to bring forward this aspect of the online harms agenda as quickly as possible.

Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): Every time the Government get in a mess, they used to say, “Uncork the Gauke.” But now, with Morgan missing, the cry goes out, “Where’s Warman?” And here is the Minister again, to clean up yet another Government mess.

Just four months ago, the previous Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport came to the House to announce another delay in the introduction of age verification. He stood at the Dispatch Box and told us “let me make it clear that my statement is an apology for delay, not a change of policy... Age verification...needs to happen... it is in the clear interests of our children that it must.”—[*Official Report*, 20 June 2019; Vol. 662, c. 368.]

Well, it is not going to happen. It is obvious today that the Government’s much-vaunted age verification policy is dead.

The Government tried to bury the bad news once again, but I am glad that the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) had the courage to force the Minister to the House, to clean up the Government’s mess and explain the policy to the nation. Ever since its inception, the policy has been beset by mistakes, mishaps and month after month of delays.

The Opposition raised serious concerns at the outset that the policy was not well thought through, posed serious privacy concerns and would prove nearly impossible to implement. The Government used every excuse in the book to explain the delays, but today we know the truth: the policy, as conceived by the Government, was unworkable, and the Minister has finally ditched it. Will he now confirm that the policy has been abandoned? If he will not, will he admit that it was at least severely downgraded in the Queen’s Speech?

My colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), in the process of scrutinising the legislation in Committee, warned that the British Board of Film Classification should never have been tasked with this job in the first place, even though it said yesterday that it had a system ready to implement. Can the Minister explain whether the Government had confidence that the BBFC was ready to implement age verification and whether it will have any future involvement in the project? Can he tell us how much public money has been spent on this failed policy? If he cannot do so today, will he commit to providing that information in writing in the near future?

The bigger danger in all this is that it is a sign of what is to come: that the online harms legislation that we so badly need will also be delayed, disrupted and finally abandoned in the “too difficult to implement” box. We must not let that happen. Every day our children are viewing hateful and harmful material online—material so sickening that it drives some young people to suicide and others to extremist violence and murder. These are the frontier challenges of internet regulation.

We need to keep our kids safe. Any Government taking on the tech giants will need determination and meticulous attention to detail. That has been utterly lacking thus far. The Government must not fail again.

Matt Warman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words at the beginning of his question, if not much else. He is absolutely right in his closing point that online harms is a difficult agenda and we must not get it wrong. I look forward to working across the House to ensure that we do this right because there should be no party political division on this agenda.

Age verification will be a key part of the online harms agenda. It will be a key tool in the box, but the toolbox will, through the online harms agenda, be bigger. I say honestly that the inclusion of the online harms Bill in the Queen’s Speech is testament to the Government’s commitment to delivering it, and we will be bringing it forward for pre-legislative scrutiny so that we can get it right. I hope that the BBFC will be a key part of the future of this process, because its expertise is in the classification of content. I am going to see its chief executive shortly; my officials have already been in touch. We look forward to working together with the BBFC.

The hon. Gentleman asked how much money has been spent. I think that approximately £2.2 million has been spent on this part of the agenda, but it is of course also a key part of the online harms agenda, so it would be silly to suggest that that is money wasted. It is money invested in protecting our children, and we will continue to do that.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): There is nothing that I have heard from the Minister today or that I saw in the written ministerial statement yesterday that gives any good reason why this decision has been made. There is no reason why these provisions could not have been commenced and then the online harms process added. This decision has delayed the provisions for at least a year, if not longer, as the Minister well knows. Will he explain why the previous Secretary of State came to the House in June and said that this measure would be commenced as soon as possible and that there was no change in policy, but now there has been? What has happened between the summer and now for this decision to have been made?

Matt Warman: Of course the Secretary of State appeared before my hon. Friend’s Select Committee yesterday, after the publication of the written ministerial statement. The Secretary of State and I sincerely believe that we can deliver this agenda better and with an overall more comprehensive net impact by doing it through this mechanism rather than through the Digital Economy Act. Some people will say that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, but I think we can go further overall and do better with this approach. This agenda is so important that it is worth us taking our time to get it right.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): This disastrous handling seems to be a metaphor for this shambolic Tory Government—not least as they forgot to inform the EU of their plans. The first duty of any Government is to protect their citizens. The widespread availability of pornographic material to children and young people, and the increase in violent content and revenge porn, is having a profound impact on society, relationships and body image. This delay will create more harm to young people and citizens across the UK.

The Government have suggested that this issue will be addressed through the proposed online harms Bill. How do they plan to do that? Will the proposed online

regulator be tasked with the responsibility for pornographic verification, or will that be conducted by a separate regulatory body? The charities I met have concerns about the BBFC, despite the assurances that it has given. What is the cost to the taxpayer and to businesses, which are ready for this change and will now be severely out of pocket?

Matt Warman: The approach of introducing a duty of care on all relevant companies through the online harms Bill is what will allow us to go further. The hon. Lady—as I did at the beginning of my response to the urgent question—talks about the duty of care that a Government have to their citizens, and that is what is driving us to take this new and broader approach. She asked about the money—as did the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson)—and I refer her to my answer to him. My officials met the affected companies yesterday, and I will continue to engage with them. In what was a constructive meeting, they said that they would seek to continue to be part of the online harms agenda because, as the hon. Lady says, it is an issue that is far broader than simply age verification.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): This is more than disappointing; it is critically urgent. Over half a million pornographic images are posted daily on social media platforms, and there cannot be a parent in the land who is not worried sick about this. The Government need to treat this with much more urgency and respect than they have done. How are the Government—how is the Minister—going to demonstrate urgency in protecting our children from accessing pornographic websites? There are over 50 streaming this material daily, many not from the UK.

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend is of course completely right. It is a critically urgent issue, but it is also critically urgent that we get it right, and I do think that we can make that progress by doing it in a way that is comprehensive, in line with the online harms agenda. However, I am not seeking to make age verification line up with that timescale. We will do this aspect of the policy as quickly as we possibly can, and I honestly look forward to working with her on that.

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I am very shocked at this U-turn by the Government. The framework that had been created to support section 3 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 was robust: it was a platform to start protecting children from online harm. Why can it not continue in parallel with the online harms legislation being developed? The two are not incompatible. The Government have a choice—they start protecting children now from online pornography or they leave them exposed.

Matt Warman: The hon. Lady is right that the framework was potentially a start, but I think that we can do better. We have a duty to present a coherent set of regulations rather than introduce something that would have been, as she puts it, a start, but would not have gone as far as we can and will overall, I think, be seen as something that we would have had to fundamentally reform and review once we had put it in the context of the online harms agenda. I understand where she is coming from—I really do—but I honestly believe that by doing this more slowly we will make a better impact overall.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The Government's approach seems to be, "Give us more time and we can produce a better system", so, as parents, when can be satisfied that there will be a system in place that will protect our children from the corrosive effects of online pornography?

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend characterises our response absolutely correctly. It is time that will allow us to produce the best possible solution for protecting children. We will be responding to the online harms consultation by the end of the year and bringing forward legislation for pre-legislative scrutiny in the new year.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): In the statement yesterday, the Minister said that the regulator will have the discretion to require companies to meet their duty of care, so what sort of enforcement does he envisage that regulator having, and how soon will they get it?

Matt Warman: I hesitate to pre-empt what will ultimately be in the draft Bill, but it is obvious that we would want any regulator to have extremely strong sanctions in extreme circumstances. However, we would also want there to be a tariff, as it were, of what they could do in less severe circumstances to make sure that users were protected from a whole host of both illegal and legal but harmful experiences online.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Age verification is important, but please, as a result of this debate today, let us not see it as a silver bullet. The real solution is to educate all young people on the harm caused by pornography. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that those who protest against mandatory relationship education for primary school age children—measures this Government have already put in place—are failing to see the importance of teaching all children what a good relationship looks like, which is not pornography?

Matt Warman: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. While pornography is one extreme example of some of the corrosive effects of the internet, we have to look far more broadly than online behaviour in order to try to fix some of the effects that have come into the real world as well.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Further to that point, when the Children's Commissioner worked with DCMS and had workshops with children asking them what they wanted from this, they reported that their e-safety lessons at school were generally boring and not very useful. Does this not highlight how important it is to have relationship and sex education across the whole of our education system, but also, critically, to give teachers high-quality training to deliver fun, useful lessons that children find will actually help them?

Matt Warman: The hon. Lady highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach that goes far beyond online. The nature of the lessons that she talks about is not within my Department's scope, but I think we would all agree that we want children to be engaged in lessons that are particularly important.

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): This legislation is well overdue, and many are concerned that the delay may come at a significant cost. If we genuinely get

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better legislation that can better protect children, it may be worth while, but this delay has come as a surprise. What is the Minister doing to restore or build trust with key stakeholders that this delay will lead to better legislation to protect children?

Matt Warman: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. She is right that it is important for us to retain the confidence of stakeholders. For instance, the response of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is one that I share. It has said:

“This delay is disappointing, but it is also imperative that the vehicle used to achieve protection for children from pornography is robust and effective.”

That is what we seek to deliver, and we will work with the NSPCC and a whole host of other stakeholders to deliver it.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): We have been debating this in the House for nine years. The Minister simply cannot say that this is an urgent problem that has popped up. His decision today means that children will be exposed to this vile pornography for another two or three years. Can he take back his suggestion that it is the children’s responsibility to learn how to avoid it? It is his responsibility, surely, to protect them.

Matt Warman: If what I said was open to misinterpretation, I apologise. I am not suggesting for a second that it is a child’s responsibility to protect themselves online. That is why the Government are bringing forward the online harms agenda. I am not suggesting either that we are addressing a problem that has suddenly popped up. It is something that Governments of various colours have sought to address over a number of years, and we will continue to do that. We are seeking in the “Online Harms” White Paper to go further, in a thoughtful and sensible way, than any other country in the world has managed to do, and I hope we can do that with cross-party consensus.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The internet has been a fantastic resource for children in their education, but all too often, pornographic images are available to children when they are not specifically looking for them, particularly on social media sites. What will the Government do during this brief delay to ensure that social media is encompassed within their reforms?

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend highlights one of the crucial differences between our new policy approach and the old one, which is that we are now able, via the “Online Harms” White Paper, to consider what the duty of care might mean for social media companies in a way that would not have been in the scope of the original proposal. That is just one example that demonstrates how much further we are able to go with this new approach, and it is a reason why this is the right thing to do, even though it is a tough decision.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I am really struggling to understand the logic here. Some 95% of 14-year-olds have seen porn, and the harm that it causes to future relationships is well documented. Why, when the age verification regulator was ready to install this

measure by Christmas, can it not go ahead? When, under the Minister’s new proposals, will we see protections in place for children?

Matt Warman: I sympathise with what the hon. Lady seeks to achieve, but we can do more by going slightly slower. As I have said, we will respond to the consultation by Christmas and bring forward legislation for prelegislative scrutiny in the new year. I hope that she will work with us on that. We will, of course, seek to bring forward this part of that agenda much more rapidly than the whole package, because, as she says, this is hugely important. Getting it right is important, but getting it enacted quickly is also important.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Does the Minister recall the nerve required to reach for *Health and Efficiency* and the looks at the counter as it was put in a paper bag? What is out there now makes *H&E* look like a nursery rhyme. His approach really is going to be comprehensive, is it not?

Matt Warman: I am afraid I am too young to recall precisely the experience to which my right hon. Friend refers—and I am sure he was speaking on behalf of others, rather than himself. However, he is absolutely right that what is out there on the internet now pales into insignificance compared with everything that was printed for newsagents. That is precisely why we have to go so much further.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): For the Minister to say that he will wrap up childhood protection in the online harms legislation is not even a fig leaf to hide the fact that his Government are absolutely naked when it comes to a robust legal framework that deals with privacy, data, age verification and identity. We need measures that put in place protection for children online, not that kick in after they have already been exposed. What is he doing to ensure that children have the same rights online as they do in the real world?

Matt Warman: I think what the hon. Lady is saying is that in many ways prevention is better than cure, and that is why the online harms approach will place a duty of care on website operators to make sure they have to take a preventive approach.

Chi Onwurah *indicated dissent.*

Matt Warman: The hon. Lady shakes her head as though I have misunderstood her question. I am very happy to talk to her outside the Chamber to try to give her a better answer if she wants one.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Keeping our children safe must always be a priority, and I too am deeply concerned by this delay. Age verification is achievable. The company Yoti in my constituency is already providing highly accurate digital ID in 170 different countries. Will the Minister work with companies such as Yoti to make sure that the very best technology is used to keep our children safe?

Matt Warman: I am glad my hon. Friend raises this point. In many ways, this is a technology problem that requires a technology solution. She mentions Yoti, and

I have already met SuperAwesome, which is another company working in a similar space. People have talked about whether facial recognition could be used to verify age, so long as there is an appropriate concern for privacy. All of these are things I hope we will be able to wrap up in the new approach, because they will deliver better results for consumers—child or adult alike.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The age checks for porn have been backed by children’s charities. The NSPCC said this morning that

“viewing this explicit material can harm their perceptions of sex, body image and health relationships”,

and it has said that the climbdown was “disappointing”. May I therefore ask the Minister how the Government will allay my fears and those of charities such as the NSPCC, and how they will deliver the objectives of the Digital Economy Act to ensure the protection of children and vulnerable young people from online pornography?

Matt Warman: The hon. Gentleman is completely right that the concerns of the NSPCC are those that I know he and I, and, I am sure, Members across the House, would share. We will work with such charities to make sure that we deliver, as I quoted earlier, the “robust and effective”—and comprehensive—regime that they and I think we would all want to protect children online.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): The tech companies and social media companies have incredibly powerful and sophisticated tools at their own disposal. Does the Minister not agree that they have a moral responsibility to do more themselves, and what will his Department be doing to urge them to do that to keep our children safe?

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the technology companies can do more. For too long, a voluntary approach has not delivered the results that we would all like to see. As I have said, the “Online Harms” White Paper is the legislative method that will put a far greater duty on them not just to invest in safety, but to make it a genuine and meaningful top priority.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): During the Science and Technology Committee inquiry into the impact of social media on young people’s health, we heard some horrendous statistics about the number of young people who have stumbled across pornographic images. I asked my own daughter, who was 11 at the time, if she had seen such images, and she had. These are our own children—the children of many Members—who are stumbling across this. Yes, we have to get it right, but we have to get something in place now, as quickly as possible. If it needs correcting later on, we correct it. Why are we not acting now?

Matt Warman: I share the hon. Lady’s concerns. I worry about what my three-year-old might stumble across online, even though she would be too young to

understand it. Too often, stumbling across explicit material happens through sites such as Twitter, which would not have been in the scope of the original proposals but now will be. That is an example of why we should take an approach that, while not being unnecessarily slow, is more comprehensive. I hope that we can work across the House to deliver on those objectives.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): The internet can provide children with a wealth of information, but it also exposes them to real harm. What progress has been made by the Information Commissioner’s Office in designing a new statutory code of practice for developers regarding standards of privacy for children?

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend references the age-appropriate design code, and the ICO has published proposals and is working vigorously to improve on what they might mean. As I said earlier, we do not fix problems after they have occurred for individual children in this country; we must present an internet that is appropriate for their needs.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): The Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Dominic Cummings know a lot about online harms—they have been committing them since at least 2016. The Minister calls for a cross-party approach, but how can that possibly happen when that triumvirate have been ducking and diving, avoiding questions from the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, and from me, regarding online harms through which criminal offences have been established, and in which they will not divulge their role?

Matt Warman: I say gently to the hon. Gentleman that the online harms being discussed in this urgent question are fundamentally about the protection of children on the internet, and I hope we can genuinely forge a cross-party consensus on what that means. This is an important and difficult agenda, and I hope that we can work together to protect children on the internet, wherever they may end up finding themselves.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): The protection of our children is paramount, and a recent report on online harms by the NSPCC did not make good reading, and suggested to me that time is of the essence. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that any independent regulator that is introduced will have sufficient enforcement powers to take effective action against sites that ignore their moral responsibility and make it easy for children to access inappropriate material?

Matt Warman: The precise purpose of changing our approach is to have a regulator that, in due course, will have comprehensive authority to take the actions that we need to protect children. That will always be this Government’s top priority on the internet. I hope that Opposition parties across the House will join us in that endeavour, and that we can come quickly to a conclusion that allows us to achieve what should be shared objectives.

Business of the House

11.18 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): The business for the week commencing 21 October is as follows:

MONDAY 21 OCTOBER—Continuation of the debate on the Queen's Speech, on the NHS.

TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER—Conclusion of the debate on the Queen's Speech, on the economy.

WEDNESDAY 23 OCTOBER—Second reading of the Environment Bill.

THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER—General debate on spending on children's services.

FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

Right hon. and hon. Members will have seen the motion on today's Order Paper which, if approved, will allow the House to sit on Saturday. Subject to that approval and to the progress of the negotiations, the necessary motions for the House to consider on Saturday will be tabled before the rising of the House today.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business for next week. There will be a debate on the business motion in any event, I am sure he will agree.

We are in a new parliamentary Session. It was helpful that in the *Official Report* on 14 October there was a chronology of parliamentary debates, a list of Her Majesty's Government and all the people who are in the House. It is helpful for Members to look at that. There is a recently updated list of ministerial responsibilities.

Unlawful, breaking conventions, misleading—all these words apply to this minority Government. Our gracious sovereign was forced to read out a programme that should have started with, "My Government apologises for dragging me into controversy." Where are the state visits? It seems that no one wants to come here. Eleven out of the 28 Bills announced in the Queen's Speech began in the previous parliamentary Session. Of the seven Brexit Bills, five are Bills that the Government failed to get through the last Parliament—nothing new in the Queen's Speech.

This minority Government set out their plans to recruit more police officers, but they imposed, as we found out in the west midlands, a five-year recruitment freeze. That was the last Conservative Government—hopefully, it will be the last Conservative Government. The total of 20,000 police officers is just replacing those that were cut in 2011. Building 40 new hospitals quickly unravelled as spin. It is not 40 new hospitals; it is a reconfiguration of six. Perhaps the Leader of the House can update us on the news about Canterbury hospital? I am not sure if the Prime Minister was right. Is Canterbury hospital on or off?

On financial services after Brexit, there was nothing in our sovereign's Gracious Speech on ending tax avoidance or tax evasion. The Government pulled the Financial Services Bill at the last minute in March. Will the Leader of the House please confirm that the Government will not pull this very important Bill? Where is the

registration of overseas entities Bill to address money laundering? The chairman of the Joint Committee on the draft Bill, Lord Faulks, said in May:

"Time is of the essence: the Government must get on with improving this Bill and making it law."

There are no policies for the people, so the Government want to rig the next general election. Requiring voter ID will disproportionately affect people from ethnic minority backgrounds and working-class voters of all ethnicities. The Government only want votes for the few. In the last general election, there was only one instance of voter personation. Will the Leader think again and pull that Bill, or may we have a debate on early-day motion 30 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid)?

[That this House expresses deep concern at the Government's announced plans to prevent people from voting unless they can provide photographic identification at the next election; notes that of the 44.6 million votes cast in the 2017 general election, there were just 28 allegations of in-person voter fraud and one conviction; recognises that some 11 million citizens do not possess a passport or driving licence and that people aged between 17 and 30 and black and minority groups are 15 per cent less likely to own driving licences; expresses concern that this policy will introduce widespread voter dropout among vulnerable and disadvantaged groups if rolled out; and calls on the Government to urgently review its proposals.]

We have the Environment Bill next week. We have had earthquakes, and Cuadrilla has begun removing equipment from its site. Will the Leader of the House confirm that there will be an end to fracking?

Misleading statements: saying Brexit can get done by 31 October, when the Leader of the House and this minority Government know it will take years to unravel 40 years of partnership and agreeing new trade deals. The Leader of the House admitted on Sunday that he might have to eat his words. I have two for him: terminological inexactitude.

What about a debate on an alternative Queen's Speech, with a Bill to establish a national education service that values all children and lifelong learning, and abolish tuition fees; a Bill for an NHS that remains free at the point of need, with safe staffing levels and over £30 billion of extra investment; a Bill to establish a Ministry for employment rights, delivering the biggest extension of rights for people in the workplace; a Bill to build 1 million affordable homes to rent and buy over 10 years; a Bill to invest an extra £8 billion to tackle the crisis in social care; a national investment bank; regional development banks; a national transformation fund; a green new deal; and the closure of loopholes so there is no outflow of capital, with equality, social and economic justice and opportunity as our watchwords? When can we have a debate on that?

When can we have a debate on harnessing the energy of our natural resources in a way that respects planet Earth, on harnessing the energy and talent of all our citizens in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and on an ethical foreign policy that does not allow the incarceration and separation of Nazanin and Gabriella when they go on holiday, or the detention of other UK nationals detained in Iran—Morad Tahbaz, Kamal Foroughi, Aras Amiri and Anousheh Ashouri? Will the Leader of the House please arrange for the Prime Minister to meet with the Families Alliance

Against State Hostage Taking? Is the Leader of the House aware that there is a case against Nazanin based on the Prime Minister's words to a Select Committee?

I thank the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) for moving the address on the Queen's Speech. He failed to address one question: in whose interests do we make evidence-based policy decisions—the many or the few? Moreover, we must always make them in the public interest. I say to the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) that it is great to think that a former party vice-chair is either Demelza or Ross. She may like to know that Ross was a socialist. However, both hon. Members gave entertaining speeches.

I thank Ruth Evans, who has resigned as chair of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, finishing in that post yesterday. I know that we value her insights into IPSA, and I hope that her great contribution to public service will continue.

We wish England, Cymru and Ireland all the best in the quarter-finals of the Rugby World Cup.

Finally, I welcome the new Serjeant at Arms, Ugbana Oyet. Mr Oyet is currently Parliament's principal electrical engineer and programme director for the estate-wide engineering infrastructure and resilience programme. Mr Speaker, you know what they say—bigger job, smaller title. We wish him well.

Mr Rees-Mogg: There was an enormous amount in that, but I think the key point on the Queen's Speech is that we have had six days of debate and all those issues could have been raised then; that is the opportunity to discuss them. This Queen's Speech is not very popular with the Opposition, which I confess is not a great surprise—why would it be? They are, after all, the Opposition. The basic point is that they should have voted for the motion allowing for an early general election, and then they could have had their own Queen's Speech. The right hon. Lady kept asking when we were going to have a new Session of Parliament, so it really is absolutely extraordinary that as soon as we oblige her—as soon as we do what she has asked for—she says that that is not right, either. There is, it has to be said, no pleasing some people.

I shall address some of the specific points the right hon. Lady raised. The Government will be spending an extra £33.9 billion on the health service—a really important and significant amount of money—including £1.8 billion going to 20 specific hospitals. I am glad to say that the Royal United Hospitals Bath, which serve my constituency, will be receiving some of that additional money. I think that right hon. and hon. Members across the House should welcome the commitment that the Government are making to the health service. Perhaps that is the nub of the matter: a really exciting domestic programme has been announced in the Queen's Speech—it will tackle knife crime, it will ensure that prisoners serve proper sentences, it will deal with the national health service and improve it, and it will improve people's standards of living—and it is absolutely fascinating that the Opposition are clearly not in favour of reducing knife crime, do not care much about the NHS and do not want to improve standards of living for people across the United Kingdom. That is the oddity of opposition.

Is it not wonderful, Mr Speaker: there is objection to ID being presented before people go and vote, whereas there are reports that somebody has gone to work for

the Leader of the Opposition who had been found guilty of fraud—over 100 individual cases of people faking electoral identification? One begins to understand why the Opposition are not so keen on identification—because it makes it harder for them to scurry for votes around and about.

The right hon. Lady, as always, mentions Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and is quite right to do so. This is a matter of the highest priority for the Government, although there is a recognition of the limits of what Her Majesty's Government can do in influencing regimes that behave unlawfully. She mentions the Families Alliance Against State Hostage Taking. I am sure that a Minister will be available to see them and talk to them; I think that would be an important and right thing to do.

The right hon. Lady ended by saying that the Government should act for the many and not the few. Well, this Government, being a Conservative Government and not factional, believe in operating for everybody and looking at a united and single country, where we offer services, good will and an improved standard of living to all.

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Ind): The Leader of the House will be aware of the amendment that stands in my name, which will fall to be discussed after the business question. Would he consider, even in the short period available, the Government's actually accepting that minor, technical amendment, which would provide for amendments to be made on Saturday, so that we do not have to have a vote on it today?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend, who is one of the most thoughtful Members of this House; the things that he brings forward have always been carefully considered. I would say to him that the motions that the Government are tabling are in relation to Acts of Parliament, and when we have amendments of many kinds to motions that follow an Act of Parliament, it is more likely to cause confusion than elucidation of the point.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing—well, something, anyway, that it looks as though we will be doing next week.

I, too, welcome the new Serjeant at Arms, Ugbana Oyet. I think that all of us on these Benches are looking forward very much to meeting him and working with him in the future.

It was uncharacteristic of the Leader of the House not to announce today that he had secured his deal—and well done to him and his Government for eventually getting something after all this time. The only problem is that it is a worse deal than that of the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). It takes Scotland out of the European Union against its national collective will, it deprives us of customs union and single market membership, and it will stop the freedom of movement on which our economy and so many vital sectors depend.

They are all still on the Hillary Step. The dark clouds are still there, and the mist is still in the air in the shape of the Democratic Unionist party. Sherpa Foster has unshackled herself from the Prime Minister, and is busily descending the mountain as we speak.

[Pete Wishart]

May we have a debate on culinary delicacies? The plat du jour for the Leader of the House is his own words: a delicious Northern Irish Brexit jambalaya of choice vocabulary including “impractical”, “bureaucratic” and “betrayal of common sense”, all washed down with the finest Château Cretinous. Churchill may indeed have found his own words very nutritious, but I suspect that the Leader of the House will only get indigestion.

We will deal with the issue of the Saturday sitting when we debate the motion, but we will complete our debates on the Queen’s Speech in the next few days, and it looks very likely that a Queen’s Speech will be voted down for the first time since 1924, when Stanley Baldwin was in power. May I ask the Leader of the House what happens in such circumstances? He will obviously tell me that he thinks and hopes that the Queen’s Speech will get through, but what will happen if it does not? We have heard from the Government that they intend to introduce the measures in the Queen’s Speech Bill by Bill. If that is indeed their intention, I should like the Leader of the House to confirm it to the House. I know that he likes to give his views on such issues, so let us see whether he can be straightforward with the House today.

The Leader of the House will have noted from what was said at the Scottish National party conference that we intend to hold an independence referendum next year. We as a nation must unshackle ourselves from this whole ugly, disastrous Brexit business, an issue that we wanted absolutely nothing to do with. Is it not interesting that under the deal that has been announced today, Northern Ireland will be given a differential deal on single market membership, Wales will get what it wants, and the rest of the UK will get what it wants as well? The only nation that does not get what it wanted in relation to Europe is Scotland, and that is not good enough.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It’s being so cheerful as keeps the hon. Gentleman going. It is always a pleasure to listen to him. He mentioned the deal. I am pleased to say that it is a really fantastic and exciting deal, and I am very glad that he has given me the opportunity to speak about it. When I was speaking on behalf of the Government on Sunday, I was doing so because I trusted the Prime Minister and knew that he would get a good deal. I was supporting the deal on the basis of trust, and now that I know what is in it, my trust has been completely justified. It is a really exciting and positive deal. It removes the undemocratic backstop, and it is a huge advance for the whole United Kingdom. It will ensure that we are one single customs territory.

I am aware of the details of the deal. I actually have the text of it here. I am glad to say that, unlike the hon. Gentleman, I have had a chance to peruse it in detail. [Interruption.] The hon. Gentleman says, from a sedentary position, that I have not read it. How do you peruse something without reading it? Does the hon. Gentleman think that I have understood it through extrasensory perception? I tell him he is wrong. It has not come to me through the ether. I have looked at the words on the page, of which the normal definition is reading. Perhaps, after this session, people should be given remedial education so that they can understand the normal use of words in English.

We have a really good, exciting deal that takes out the undemocratic backstop and delivers on what the Prime Minister promised he would do. In 85 days, he has achieved something that could not be achieved in three years—

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Because of you.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me credit for it, but the credit belongs to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has achieved this remarkable success in a deal that all of us can support. Every single Member who stood on a manifesto saying that they would respect the will of the people in the referendum can support the deal with confidence. All our socialist friends can support it with confidence because it delivers on the referendum result. Today is a really exciting day in British politics. All Eurosceptics—all my friends who sit where I used to sit—can rally around this great deal, and I hope that my friends in the DUP will also find that what it does for the whole of the United Kingdom is something in which they can have comfort and that they can support. I understand that our separatist friends do not want anything for the benefit of the whole United Kingdom; they are always trying to pick things apart, but they will be shown to be wrong.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) asked if I would at any point have to eat my words. I must say that this deal is the *tournedos Rossini* of a deal—it is a deal that one can eat with joy and pleasure, and it is the finest culinary delight for me to have.

I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I did not pay unduly close attention to the SNP conference, having other things to do of slightly more interest, although it has to be said that almost anything would have been of slightly more interest—I noticed that the hon. Gentleman was very pleased to be here in the House of Commons earlier in the week to avoid his leader’s speech. The difference between Scotland and Northern Ireland is absolutely clear, and that is the Belfast agreement—the Good Friday agreement—and the fact that there is a land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and that is a land border with the European Union. Northern Ireland is therefore unquestionably in a unique position, hence its difference.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): We have our own environmental emergency in Buckinghamshire at the moment at Great Missenden. Despite Buckinghamshire County Council, Chiltern District Council, myself and the local councillors all asking the Department for Transport to halt the enabling works at Great Missenden for HS2 until the Oakervee report has come in, they have gone ahead. We have traffic chaos on the A413. I have been sent pictures of an ambulance and a fire engine being held up. Eight trees are going to be felled and people are demonstrating outside Great Missenden. May we have a debate on HS2 before the Oakervee report comes in so that we can give the Secretary of State for Transport courage to cancel this terrible project—phase one at least—and spend the money better on other parts of the United Kingdom whose transport infrastructure desperately needs improving?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend makes a very fair point on behalf of her constituents and the people who live in Great Missenden, and I will certainly take

what she says to the Transport Secretary to try to ensure that she gets a prompt response to the letter that she sent to him. When these sorts of projects are under review, I would encourage people to proceed in a thoughtful and careful way, and to consider the interests of communities affected by the works, particularly due to the inconvenience that may be caused. Perhaps there is a special feeling of the inconvenience that may be caused in this context, because I understand that the road to Chequers passes through Great Missenden, so this might be of immediate interest to the Prime Minister and I am sure that he will want to know about it.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): When the Leader of the House had another role somewhere on the Back Benches, he described the kind of deal that it appears has been done by the Prime Minister as “cretinous”. Can he tell me what on earth has happened in the last few months to change his view of the deal from “cretinous” to one of the best things that has ever happened? Is it his sudden appearance at the Dispatch Box that has changed his mind?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady is unduly cynical. This is a fundamentally different deal because the undemocratic backstop has gone. Why is that so important? The backstop meant that the whole United Kingdom could be kept in the customs union and the single market in perpetuity and could leave only with the permission of the European Union. It was harder to leave the backstop than to leave the European Union; there was no article 50 provision to get out of the European Union’s backstop. Under article 4 of the withdrawal agreement, this was made superior law for the United Kingdom.

That undemocratic backstop having gone, the operation of article 4 therefore means that as a nation, including Northern Ireland, we will not be tied into the control by the European Union that there would have been under the previous deal. We will be free. We will be out of the European Union. We will control our own tariff regimes and our own regulatory regimes. We will be a free country, and Northern Ireland will be free to follow the same route by a democratic vote of the people of Northern Ireland. I am proud to stand at this Dispatch Box, not for jobbery but because the Prime Minister has done such a fine job in freeing this country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. A very large number of right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye, but we must expedite proceedings because there is other important business with which to deal, so there is a premium on brevity from Back and Front Benches alike.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on an issue that was brought to my attention at the recent Conservative party conference: the lack of careers advice at school for young people who suffer from hearing loss?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend raises an important issue every week for the Government to consider. The Government’s careers strategy was published in December 2017. It contains a number of proposals to improve careers advice for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, including funding for the Education

and Training Foundation to provide professional development for practitioners working with these young people; funding for training and materials for post-16 providers to help them to design and tailor study programmes that offer a pathway to employment for these learners; and training for enterprise advisers so that they are confident in helping people with special educational needs and disabilities. I believe that what my hon. Friend asks for is being provided and will continue to be provided—and it is important that it is provided.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Can the Leader of the House confirm that the Government’s own economic assessment of a free trade agreement with the European Union shows that it would lead to the second-worst outcome for the economy after no deal and would, as Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs reported recently, result in British businesses spending £15 billion a year on filling in forms that they do not have to fill in today? Since he has just extolled the virtues of allowing the Northern Ireland Assembly to decide whether it wants to change its mind about the deal that has been agreed, why is he so opposed to the British people deciding whether they want to change their mind on the deal whose virtues he has just extolled before the House? I have to say that this is not a culinary delight; it is really bad for the future of our country.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The right hon. Gentleman has not asked for a debate, an Adjournment debate or a statement. His question is therefore irrelevant.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): If the House does indeed sit on Saturday, and if it does indeed approve the deal that the Prime Minister has secured, does it remain the Government’s intention to bring forward the legislation necessary to implement that deal so that we can leave by 31 October? Will the Leader of the House therefore be returning to the House on Monday to make a further business statement?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that important question. If the motion tabled for Saturday is passed, legislation will have to follow, so I fear that I may be troubling the House with further statements next week.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Leader of the House’s answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) smacks of sheer and utter arrogance. Can we have an urgent statement from the Government, or an urgent debate, on how bad this new deal is for workers and for the jobs of people in this country?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman objects to how I responded to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), but the point is that this is business questions, not a general debate—that is another occasion in this House. Given all the hon. and right hon. Members who wish to involve themselves in these proceedings, we will never get on to the Queen’s Speech if this is turned into a free-for-all. It is very important to remain orderly. The hon. Gentleman asks for a statement on the deal. There will be a debate on the deal tomorrow, so what he is asking for will be given.

Mr Speaker: Order. For the avoidance of doubt—I know that the Leader of the House will readily accept this, and I say it for the benefit of those observing our proceedings—the arbiter of order is the Chair. The arbiter of order is not the Leader of the House. Proceedings were entirely orderly; otherwise, I would have indicated to the contrary. It is the prerogative of the Leader of the House to respond as he thinks fit to each question put. I will just very gently make the point that if there is a desire in responding to questions to develop an argument more fully and with justified—in his mind—pride to celebrate a particular policy, and in the process going somewhat beyond merely treating of the schedule of business for next week, it is perhaps not altogether generous-spirited to excoriate a colleague who does not operate in quite the way that the Leader of the House would like. But as I say, I will judge order, and I do not require any help from the Treasury Bench.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): From personal or familial experience, and because of all the work we do here, we know of the fragility of good health, and 100,000 sufferers from multiple sclerosis know that, too. This week, I, along with colleagues, learned more about that condition in a presentation that was given in the House. Its causes are complex and its symptoms are initially very subtle, so raising awareness is critical, and a statement or motion before the House would allow that to happen. Ruskin said:

“Government and co-operation are in all things the laws of life”

Co-operation across this House can help to counter this dreadful condition.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I can come to the aid of my right hon. Friend straight away because on Monday 21 October the continuation of debate on the Queen’s Speech will be dedicated to the national health service, and that would be the opportunity on which to raise this point. The point is an important one, and bringing it forward in debate is absolutely the right thing to do.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (LD): Could the Leader of the House please let us have an urgent debate on the serious issues facing shellfisheries? They are highly dependent on EU markets, and I am afraid that no-deal planning has been woefully inadequate. Mussel fishermen in my constituency still do not have guidance on how to export in the event of no deal after 31 October. Likewise, many crab fisheries have many—in some cases, all—of their pots in EU waters. Could we hear when we can debate this?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The debate on the economy on Tuesday would be an opportunity to discuss the economy of the sea as well as the economy more narrowly.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend seen my early-day motion 2769, which points out a major flaw in the Sexual Offences Act 2003?

[That this House notes the ease with which registered sex offenders and criminals are able to change their name via deed poll, for as little as £15 online, as an automatic right; further notes that, under Section 84 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the onus is placed on the sex offender to notify the police of any such name change; understands

that this loophole in the law has the potential to allow many convicted sex offenders to go under the radar of authorities; acknowledges that the safer recruitment process and DBS checks are being undermined by the lack of regulation and robust due diligence provided for by the existing legislation in this area; further acknowledges that this is potentially placing society’s most vulnerable people at risk of harm; and therefore urges the Government to reform legislation to remove the automatic right of sex offenders to change their name online by deed poll, to set up a regulatory system to create a more joined-up approach between the relevant bodies and to introduce interim measures to protect the safety and security of children and vulnerable people presently at risk.]

My Harlow constituent and founder of the Safeguarding Alliance, Emily Konstantas, has conducted research showing that convicted criminals are able to change their name by deed poll for as little as £15 online and evade vetting processes and DBS checks under a new name, allowing them to work in an environment around vulnerable people. May we have an urgent debate on the state of safeguarding legislation?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend, as always, raises a point that is important and needs to be answered. He will be reassured to know that the United Kingdom has some of the toughest powers in the world to deal with sex offenders, and we are committed to ensuring that the system is as robust as it can be. Public protection is inevitably and rightly a priority, and the notification requirements for registered sex offenders are vital to managing them in the community. Crucially, the failure of a sex offender to tell the police of a name change within three days is a criminal offence with a maximum prison sentence of five years, so although it may be easy for people to change their name, it is illegal and the penalty is quite severe.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): This week, the Government announced an arms embargo as far as Turkey is concerned after its incursions into northern Syria, but all is not quite what it seems. My understanding is that there is an embargo only on new licences where it is believed that the equipment may be used in northern Syria. Given the confusion and lack of detail, will the Leader of the House organise a statement from the Department for International Trade?

Mr Rees-Mogg: What is happening in Syria troubles Her Majesty’s Government and is being taken seriously, and what is going on in terms of arms and Turkey is being reviewed. This is an important and sensitive matter, because Turkey is, of course, a NATO partner and, therefore, there is no simple solution. However, the Government are treating the matter with the utmost seriousness and concern and have tried to discourage the Turkish Government from proceeding in the way that they have been proceeding.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), if we are able to sit this Saturday and pass the deal—heal with a deal—is it possible that we may also want to sit next weekend in order to expedite all the legislation needed to leave by 31 October?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on her zeal for Parliament? I think there is only one other person in this House who has such zeal, Mr Speaker, and that is probably you. We will need to use time very efficiently in order to legislate by 31 October. I think it is safe to say that I do not expect us to have to sit next Saturday and that we should be able to do things in an orderly way before then, but I will obviously keep the House updated.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I make no argument against us sitting on Saturday, but it is inconvenient for many people who have families. Unfortunately, the nursery is not able to be open to ensure that childcare is provided for hon. Members. Would it not be incumbent upon the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority to make financial provision so that the costs of childcare can at least be met for Members?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I recognise that it will be difficult for some right hon. and hon. Members with responsibilities. The matter can certainly be raised with IPSA to see whether it feels any special arrangements can be made. As a general principle, though, I would say that to sit on three Saturdays in 70 years is not an insuperable burden.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does the Leader of the House agree that, once we have Brexit done, there is the perfect opportunity to debate the stronger towns fund money that the Government have awarded to Redditch, unlocking up to £25 million of funding to regenerate our fantastic town? Will he find time for such a debate?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend tempts me, because the fund that she refers to will benefit two towns in North East Somerset: Keynsham and Midsomer Norton. The idea that we should have a debate is one that appeals to me greatly, but it may be more suitable for an Adjournment debate or even for the Backbench Business Committee.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Last week, more than 600 MPs from around the world were in London for the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's annual session, and I thank the House staff who worked diligently over the weekend to support and greet members. They were exemplary and left everyone with an image of our hospitality and professionalism. We held a session with more than 120 schoolchildren from around London, who were invited to talk to me and my vice-presidents from the UK, Portugal and Canada about defence and security issues. There was huge excitement about the debate and the questions were superb. I have asked the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence whether that is something that we could also take forward, as there is a clear appetite for it. Will the Leader of the House look at the potential for Select Committees to do outreach work in schools, so that we can engage young people in Parliament and its processes?

Mr Rees-Mogg: First, may I thank the hon. Lady for the tribute she has paid to the House staff? We are extraordinarily lucky in the way we are looked after in this House and with the commitment they have to Parliament. This gives me the opportunity to say that every member of my private office volunteered to come

in to work on Saturday. That gives me great pride in the team I am supported by, and I know this applies across the House. This House is incredibly good at education and bringing young people in, and it is one of the things you have focused on, Mr Speaker. The team in the education department are stunningly good, and I am certainly in favour of encouraging this, if Select Committees can do it.

Mr Speaker: I warmly appreciate what the Leader of the House has said about the staff of the House. I think it will be warmly appreciated by Members throughout the House and, above all, by those staff, who have been very properly acknowledged and congratulated. I thank him for that.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): May I take this opportunity to thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to use the House? The House did itself proud, and many of the delegates, from all around the world, including partner nations, were very impressed by what we are able to do here.

Thousands of women in the UK suffer from the debilitating, chronic disease of endometriosis. Despite employment law requiring employers to support employees with medical conditions, many women find themselves forced out of work, with little redress, especially because, on average, diagnosis can take seven to 12 years. May we have a debate on workplace practices for women who are suffering with this terrible disease, so that they do not have the trauma and stress of losing their jobs, on top of having to deal with a debilitating condition that destroys their work lives, as well as their personal lives?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Government recognise that there is more work to do on raising awareness of conditions such as endometriosis, and ensuring that clinical guidance is being followed and that therefore diagnosis is earlier. It is essential that all of us—Government, Parliament, employers, the NHS and wider society—do what we can to improve the diagnosis, and more generally get rid of old-fashioned taboos relating to women's health to ensure that people are treated fairly in the workplace and have their rights in law upheld and enforced. A debate on the Adjournment or in Westminster Hall would be a good way of giving this important issue further attention.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (IGC): It was really discourteous of the Leader of the House to wave around his own private copy of whatever has been agreed in Brussels, start the debate off and then try to stop everybody else asking him about it. Will he do something to remedy that discourtesy? I have two particular points to make about this Saturday sitting. First, he is not planning for it to be a 90-minute debate, is he? That would be totally ridiculous. Secondly, will he ensure that the Government publish a full economic impact assessment of what has been agreed, so that we can have it to inform Saturday's debate?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am slightly puzzled that the hon. Gentleman thinks it is odd that members of the Cabinet receive Government documents; this is the normal process of government in this country. I can give him the

[*Mr Rees-Mogg*]

assurance that all the documents will be published as required by the Act. [HON. MEMBERS: “When?”] They will be available online as soon as practicable. They will be in the Vote Office in draft shortly and they will be available as finalised documents once they have been agreed—assuming they are agreed—by the European Council. The surrender Act requires them to be laid on the day of the debate, and that will be done, but because the Government want to facilitate this House’s ability to study the papers, they will be made available earlier than is formally required under the Act.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I am pleased to see the Environment Bill coming before us again next week. However, Homes England is proposing that 13,000 homes be built just outside my constituency on greenfield sites to the west of Ifield. My constituents, through their local authority, will not get a say in the planning process. May we have a statement from the Communities Secretary as to how my constituents can have a say on the impact of 13,000 housing units, the loss of green space and the pressure on infrastructure that that would represent?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend lives in such a beautiful part of the country that many more people want to live there. That is a difficulty for many people with attractive constituencies. It is a natural desire of people to live in the most outstanding areas of our countryside. There is inevitably a tension, because the Government have a mission to build more high-quality, well-designed and affordable houses, and there is a balance to be struck between building them and protecting greenfield areas. However, I understand the issue that my hon. Friend raises—people in a nearby area but not the same administrative area can feel that they are not sufficiently represented—so I shall pass on his request to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): As the Leader of the House says, when the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) brings things to the House, they are carefully considered. The Leader of the House has undertaken to put the documents in the Vote Office if they are agreed with the European Union. When will that be? Will the documents include the political declaration? Will the documents highlight the changes made from the previous agreement, so that each Member does not have to go through and make their own comparison?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I said, the documents will be made available as soon as they can be. The European Council meets today and tomorrow and will have an opportunity to approve or not approve the agreement. It is a decision made by the 27 members, as the hon. Lady will know, and that decision will be made. The papers will be deposited once they are agreed. This is how things happen—it is a normal process—but I can be absolutely certain that the papers will be laid, in accordance with the Act, before the debate takes place.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): A few months ago, Barclays bank closed its Cleethorpes branch. At the time, the bank wrote to me to say it had identified 106 vulnerable customers whom it would be contacting

directly so that they could do their banking through the Post Office. Barclays has now withdrawn some of its Post Office arrangements, so may we have a debate to discuss how the people of Cleethorpes can be supported against Barclays bank?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have just been given wonderful news and the House will rejoice: the documents are now available on the gov.uk website, so I imagine that people will now flee the Chamber so that they can read them earnestly before bringing forward further points.

To answer my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), access to banking is a really serious issue for people. The Government are committed to supporting digital payments and safeguarding access to cash for those who need it, and we are pleased to see banks signing up to the banking framework agreement with the Post Office. It is saddening that Barclays has not been able to reach an agreement with the Post Office. I hope that efforts like that of my hon. Friend will put pressure on the banks to behave in the best interests of their customers and to ensure that service continues.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Government talk about putting billions of additional money into our NHS, yet in York the whole primary care mental health service is not being cut—it is being shut down because of lack of funds. May we have an urgent debate on where all these billions of pounds are meant to be going?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Some £33.9 billion is going into the NHS, and considerable extra funding, which has cross-party support, is going into mental healthcare facilities. I suggest the hon. Lady asks for an Adjournment debate on this matter, because that would be the ideal opportunity. I am sorry, Mr Speaker, I am giving you lots of Adjournment debates today, but they are such a good mechanism, using the Chamber of this House to highlight issues with Ministers, with the Box full of their officials, to make sure that things get done. The money is there and the hon. Lady is absolutely right to campaign for it for her area. If I were in her position, I would be doing the same.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): I was pleased that the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill was reintroduced after the Queen’s Speech. I supported the Bill before Prorogation as it is another example of the Government’s excellent record on animal welfare. Will the Leader of the House provide an update on when the Bill will have its Second Reading?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend tempts me to stray into matters that are not quite right for today. There is so much business to be done and so many future business statements. This issue is a priority for the Government—he is right to say that the Government have a good record on animal welfare. This is an important Bill that commands a lot of support across the House and I hope it comes forward in the not-too-distant future.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): People were obviously delighted to see Baby’s law come before Parliament, and if Parliament had not been illegally prorogued, it would have passed through this place

by now. I am glad to hear that it is a priority for the Government, but I would urge the Leader of the House to introduce it as soon as possible. It is a small Bill and could actually be fitted in in the next few days. Please will he give us some commitment that it is top of his list?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, but I refer her to my previous answer.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on transport infrastructure provision across south Gloucestershire, especially in relation to the campaign for a new junction 18A on the M4, which is ably supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore)? The new junction would unlock great potential for many more much-needed homes and more jobs.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend, who represents a south Gloucestershire constituency, is a near neighbour of mine, and I must confess I have a prejudice in favour of very good transport around Somerset and Gloucestershire, which is in all our interests. He can raise this at Transport questions on Thursday, but I would also encourage him to continue campaigning for it. I understand the beneficial economic consequence that road infrastructure can have.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Fortunately, the legal texts were available from the EU before the Government made them available. Does the Leader of the House, like me, welcome the fact that, under article 12 of the protocol, the courts in the United Kingdom will continue to be able to obtain preliminary rulings from the European Court of Justice and be subject to EU law? Can we have a debate about the benefits that the supremacy of EU law has brought to the UK?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am glad to say that the supremacy of EU law was one of the things rejected in the referendum, and it will fade away. As the morning mist fades, so will the supremacy of that appalling Court.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House might not be aware of the bridge crisis in my constituency, with first Abbeyton bridge and then Park bridge declared unsafe and closed, owing in part to swingeing budget cuts to Aberdeenshire Council from the SNP-run Scottish Government. Can we have a debate about how we can get direct UK Government funding for crucial infrastructure projects that are made impossible by budget cuts to local authorities by the Scottish Government?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. It is sad to see how wasteful the SNP is of taxpayers' money and how badly it manages to administer Scotland. The Union is good for everybody and works for the whole of the United Kingdom. He makes a good point about whether there are ways of directing money, but the devolution settlement is very important and needs to be respected.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): The decision has been taken to franchise two post offices in my constituency, which will lead to a reduction in postal

services and is a stepping stone to closure and ending the livelihoods of postal workers and their families. Can we have an urgent debate on the future of our postal services, after a decade of privatisation and neglect?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Obviously the provision of postal services, and the ability to access them conveniently and to get to post offices, is of great importance to people. I recognise that, because it is important in my constituency of North East Somerset. There are many opportunities to raise these subjects. It might be a suitable subject for the Queen's Speech debate on Monday, which is on economic matters—I think that post offices play an important part in the economy.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): This Government, like the previous Government, have made a welcome commitment to oppose the persecution of Christians globally and to support freedom of everybody in religion and belief, including those of no religion or belief. In the light of increasing problems, the latest being the closure of churches in Algeria, could we have a regular statement in Government time on the work the Government are doing in this area? I know they are committed to it, but we need to hear about it in Government time in the House.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have huge sympathy with what my hon. Friend is asking for. It might be possible to do that at business questions, in the way that the shadow Leader of the House raises the issue of people held illegally by foreign Governments. If Members were to raise this issue at business questions every week, that would be extraordinarily welcome. I think it is important, even though I am now sitting on the Treasury Bench—[HON. MEMBERS: "Lying on it!"]—sometimes, indeed—to keep pressure on the Government to act in favour of good and important activities so that they do not get forgotten. I am very grateful to him for raising this.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): After nine years of austerity, there is a huge funding gap in the early years sector, so I was shocked to hear not a single mention of the sector in the Queen's Speech. Will the Leader of the House therefore commit to having a specific debate on the closure of Sure Start centres and nurseries across the country?

Mr Rees-Mogg: That was actually mentioned in the Queen's Speech debate yesterday, so it has already been covered.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): In Harrow, we are blessed with three NHS walk-in centres, but the problem is that anyone from anywhere can just walk in and queue to see a doctor. To make the service more efficient and effective, the clinical commissioning group recently decided to move to an appointments system—12 hours a day, seven days a week—so that people can see a GP by appointment and not have to wait extraordinary lengths of time. That is a service improvement. May we therefore have a debate, in Government time, on how we can improve our NHS and ensure that our money is spent in the best way possible?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is necessary to ensure that everyone has access to GP services. With extended access, evening and weekend

[*Mr Rees-Mogg*]

appointments are now available across the country. The independent contractor model of general practice means that practices have a large degree of autonomy in deciding how to manage and run their practice to best suit the needs of their patient population. I am encouraged that he has noticed improvements. If he wishes to raise the matter at greater length—I hope that he will do so—the NHS debate is scheduled for Monday.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (LD): Further to the important question from my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), will we, in advance of the debate on Saturday, be privy to the full economic analyses of the declarations and the deal that has been secured today?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The paperwork will be available, as I have set out. With regard to economic analyses, there are all sorts of economic analyses—you pay your money and you take your choice with economists.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I thank the Government for putting the deal online and the Doorkeepers for putting a printed copy in my hands. I am delighted to see that co-operation on science and research remains a top priority. May we have a debate on delivering infrastructure, which is such a top priority in the Queen's Speech, because I want to ensure that critical projects in my constituency, such as securing a second railway station and mending our broken flyover, are delivered?

Mr Rees-Mogg: A broken flyover does sound extremely inconvenient. There will be any number of debates—as my hon. Friend knows, the Queen's Speech debate covers many of these issues. Transport questions will be on Thursday, so they can be raised again then. The Government are absolutely committed to an infrastructure programme that ensures that this country has workable infrastructure, with the beneficial economic effects that will follow.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I give the Leader of the House a little advice? All Leaders of the House have to get the House on their side. I thought that his disrespectful and rather patronising response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), the Chair of the Select Committee on Exiting the European Union, won him no friends. As a result of urgent business—this is not his fault, or your fault, Mr Speaker; it is no one's fault—today's Queen's Speech debate on the climate emergency will be truncated, so is there any way he can compensate for that?

Mr Rees-Mogg: If the hon. Gentleman had not asked his question, we would be getting on to that business sooner. It is up to Members to self-regulate, and then business questions would be shorter.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): May we have a debate on the policing of the Extinction Rebellion protests? That would give Members an opportunity to praise the Metropolitan police and other forces that lent their help, such as Kent police. We would also have an opportunity to rebut the shameful criticisms levelled against the police by the Mayor of London.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I must confess that I agree with my hon. Friend; it is really shameful that somebody who has a role with the police should criticise them when they have done everything possible to ensure that law and order is maintained, despite coming under enormous pressure. I spoke to some of the police officers who were around during the Extinction Rebellion protests. Some of them were getting up at 2 o'clock in the morning and then being on duty for 12 or 14-hour shifts, to ensure that we were kept safe. We should be enormously grateful to the police service of this country.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): Mr Speaker, I note that you did your bit for British-Irish relations at the weekend by appearing on “The Late Late Show” on RTÉ—it is good viewing, if anyone wants to watch it. This Sunday, as Vice-Chair of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I shall be meeting friends and colleagues from Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ireland and the Channel Islands as part of the Assembly's meeting. Will the right hon. Gentleman, as the Leader of this great House, join me in recognising that, at this critical and really difficult time in our relations across these islands, the gathering together of politicians of different views and from different parts of these islands is more crucial than ever, and will give an assurance that the full support of this House will be forthcoming in future years to ensure that the Assembly flourishes and that our conversations flourish, so that we can get through this particularly difficult time in our history?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Yes, I will absolutely do that. May I also hold up the hon. Lady as an example? She is a neighbour of mine, and despite our strongly different views of the world, we have always been able to have, whether on television or in hustings debates, very civilised conversations. I think that is a model for how debate should be carried out.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Many parents in Rugby have expressed concern about a sex and relationships education programme for primary schools, provided by Warwickshire County Council—it is called “All About Me”—that goes well beyond statutory guidance and involves sex education for children as young as nine years old, and potentially younger. It is important that parents are reassured that what their children are being taught in school is age-appropriate, so may we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Education on the appropriateness of that programme?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have read about this, and it is quite rightly a cause of controversy if schools give children messages that their parents are not happy with. I fully sympathise with my hon. Friend's concerns. Schools do have to make the choice themselves, but parents do have a choice about schools, and that is important. Parents and schools need to be happy that what is being taught is suitable and that both sides are content with it. Schools should not go off and do things that leave parents concerned about what their children are being taught, and I am glad to say that we do not have that sort of approach in this country. I share his concerns and will ensure that they are brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): Week after week, I have constituents coming to my surgery whose only crime is poverty. That does not just happen; it is a consequence of one of the Government's flagship policies: universal credit. They sometimes have to wait for weeks before receiving any money, which cannot be right. May we have yet another debate on the operation of universal credit, so that those of our constituents who are suffering poverty as a direct consequence of something the Government are implementing have a voice that can be heard in Parliament and so that we recognise the reality of what they are dealing with in their lives?

Mr Rees-Mogg: All of us are there in our constituency surgeries to be the advocate and champion of our constituents, and I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on doing so, because that is the ancient role of MPs: to seek redress of grievance. I appreciate that in difficult individual cases the generality of statistics is not the greatest comfort to the individual who is suffering, but the overall picture is one of considerable improvement: 400,000 fewer people are now in absolute poverty than were in 2010, and—this is crucial—730,000 fewer children are living in workless households. Work is the route out of poverty. The reduction in withdrawal rates from the switch to universal credit, bringing it down to 62p in the pound from the 90p-plus rate, has been fundamental in helping to reduce poverty, and the number of people in employment is at a record high. I absolutely accept that that is not much comfort to an individual who is in difficult circumstances, but the generality for the country is considerably improved.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): May we have a debate on the new Business Banking Resolution Service, which is a method of compensation for small and medium-sized enterprises that have suffered historical mistreatment by their banks? The Chancellor stated in his letter of 19 January that the system should carefully consider all cases brought before it, yet research by the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking has identified that 85% of cases are excluded from the scheme by the eligibility criteria.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that he has done on this issue. There is clear evidence that some businesses were treated extraordinarily badly. Some of us, including me, have had constituency cases where the bank in question seems to have behaved quite unfairly towards its business customers. It is important that the resolution system works effectively. I suggest that he takes this matter up again with the Chancellor, and he may also want to raise it during the economy debate on Tuesday. He makes a very powerful point, which I hope will be heard.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): My constituent Kirstie is a single mum of five, following the sad death of her partner. Owing to an erroneous data entry at the Department for Work and Pensions—through no fault of her own—her tax credits were stopped. They were reinstated after intervention by my office, but instead of paying Kirstie what she was due in one lump sum, payments were spread throughout the remainder of the year, causing her serious financial hardship. May we have a statement from the Work and Pensions Secretary on this issue, so we can discuss how to right these wrongs?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise issues of this kind. In my experience of dealing with the DWP as a constituency MP, I have found that it is good at putting right wrongs that it has made on the intervention of Members of Parliament.

Paula Sherriff indicated dissent.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I see the hon. Lady is shaking her head, and I encourage her to go back to the DWP. If there is anything that I or the Secretary of State can do to support her, I am sure that that will happen. This is one of our proper and right roles; we should always put pressure on the bureaucracy when it makes an error with constituents to ensure that that error is put right. If there is anything I can do to help, I absolutely assure her that I will do so.

Mr Speaker: I call James Cartlidge.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am used to waiting, but unfortunately so are my constituents—when it comes to the A14 in South Suffolk. The prospect of an independent trade policy is a great step forward for our economy, but we will only be able to take advantage of it if we support the infrastructure that our crucial ports rely on, including Felixstowe. All Felixstowe's freight comes out on the A14 so the Copdock interchange is crucial, but it is completely substandard. When does my right hon. Friend expect the Transport Secretary to announce the road investment strategy 2 funding allocations? Let me tell him that it will go down very well if includes funding for the Copdock interchange.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am sorry that my hon. Friend has been kept waiting—both for the A14 and to ask his very important question. Transport questions are on Thursday, so that will be another opportunity for him to raise this point. Road funding of this kind is also another opportunity for an Adjournment debate. That will get the relevant Minister here, who will have to respond. Frankly, if one makes enough of a nuisance of oneself, sometimes things happen, so I urge my hon. Friend to make a nuisance of himself.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): When can we have an urgent debate on steel? There are very pressing issues—not least the plan to save Tata's Orb works in Newport—to pursue with the new steel Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who I am pleased to see in his place, but time is of the essence.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is fortuitous that the Minister is sitting next to me, so the hon. Lady's point has been made. *[Interruption.]* He chunters at me that he is working hard on this. It is a very serious matter that is important to our whole economy. I reiterate that there will be an opportunity to debate the economy in the Queen's Speech early next week, which may be another good opportunity to raise this matter.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Has the confidence and supply arrangement that the Government reached with the Democratic Unionist party in 2017

[Patrick Grady]

expired? Has a new one been agreed? And when does the Leader of the House expect the next Queen's Speech to take place?

Mr Rees-Mogg: No. No. And wait and see.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (IGC): Every day, thousands of my constituents, many of whom are low paid, hard working and on zero-hours contracts—carers, cleaners, office workers—travel into London on the Jubilee line. This morning, many of them were disrupted and their lives very badly affected by a handful of extremist Extinction Rebellion idiots. This House has made it clear that there is a climate emergency, but can we have an early debate on the legitimate and illegitimate tactics to be pursued by peaceful protesters?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Second Reading of the Environment Bill will take place on Wednesday, which shows how seriously the House is taking these matters. I absolutely share the hon. Gentleman's worry about this issue. It is quite wrong that people who will not put themselves up for election, and who do not have the gumption to try to get into this House to change the law properly, think they can do so by bullying us. I am glad to say that our police force is operating so effectively that they will not succeed, but I am desperately sorry for the hon. Gentleman's constituents. Some of us in the place, when such protests inconvenience us, think, "Well, we're politicians and that's what we have to live with." I think there is a very good case for that. As politicians, there are things that we have to accept that people in private life should not be expected to accept, and the hon. Gentleman's constituents are in that category. They should not be disturbed on their way into work by hoodlums.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): May I press the Leader of the House a little further on the Barclays decision regarding the withdrawal of cash from post offices? I have co-ordinated a letter that has been signed by 124 colleagues from right across the House, asking Barclays representatives to meet me and a delegation so that we can ask them to reverse the decision. Would the Leader of the House ask a Treasury Minister to attend the House to update us on what the Government are doing to ensure that the most vulnerable in our communities—including the elderly and pensioners, especially in some of our more isolated communities—have access to cash?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on getting 124 MPs from across the House to sign such a letter. It shows the importance of the issue and the concern that there is. I will raise it with my friends in the Treasury. I do not know whether they will take any notice of me, but I will certainly encourage a Minister to attend the House.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Yesterday many 1950s-born women, including Angie and Rosie from Scunthorpe, came here to speak to MPs about the pension injustice that they have been experiencing and the impact on their lives. Can we have an urgent debate on how to deliver better pension justice and pension fairness for these 1950s-born women?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is a doughty campaigner, and raises an issue that is of concern to many of our constituents, but I do not believe that the Government policy is unfair. Some £1.1 billion has been committed to helping those affected, and no one will see her pension age change by more than 18 months relative to the 1995 timetable. The good news is that over 3 million women will gain an average of £550 by 2030 because of the pension reforms. With an ageing population, the reality is that the pension age simply has to rise.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): A young unemployed person living at home with parents and with no outgoings will collect £251 a month under universal credit. A young constituent of mine of the same age who has lost her job through ill health and has a small mortgage on a very modest flat—with council tax, gas and electricity bills, grocery costs and so on—will receive exactly the same amount of £251 a month. Can we have a debate on making universal credit fair and more appropriate to individual circumstances?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is very difficult for me to comment on the individual circumstances of a person I do not know and when I have not been privy to that information. I will go back to what I said earlier: universal credit has been an enormous contribution, helping people to get into work and ensuring that the rate of benefit withdrawal is significantly lower than it was under the old system. If the hon. Gentleman believes that there is any error in the calculation, he must take it up with Ministers.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): My constituent Sarah Kamara has just been saved from eviction. Her landlord, Hyde Housing Association, took her to court because of arrears built up largely as a result of universal credit. Can we have an urgent debate in this place to discuss the continued problems that universal credit is causing up and down the country, with debt, arrears, evictions and even homelessness?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave before—that universal credit is helping to people get into and stay in work, and the withdrawal rate of benefits has been reduced.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): If the Leader of the House is so confident that the revised text on Brexit that he referred to earlier is such a good deal, why does he not bring forward measures to make sure that we can have a confirmatory referendum so that the public can decide whether they think it is a good deal or they are better off remaining in the European Union?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have just been passed a note saying that it is the eve of the hon. Gentleman's birthday, so may I wish him a happy birthday for—

Kevin Brennan: It was yesterday.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Oh, it was yesterday—I am so sorry. Nevertheless, I hope that it will be officially noted in *Hansard* that there were great celebrations yesterday—and, belatedly, many happy returns.

The issue with a second referendum is that we had the 2015 general election that promised a referendum, we had the referendum, which was won by Vote Leave, and

then we had a general election when Labour and Conservative MPs alike stood on manifestos saying that they would implement the result. What the hon. Gentleman really wants is to have enough referendums until eventually he wins one. That is not really the purpose of democracy.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Bonfire night is almost upon us again, and my constituents in Pollokshields are already under firework bombardment. The Scottish Government have carried out a consultation which received over 16,000 responses, 94% of which wanted more control over sales. There is no evidence of action from the Leader of the House's colleagues in Government, so will he give me a statement on what his Government are going to do to protect my constituents?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Ah—

“Remember, remember, the Fifth of November

Gunpowder treason and plot

I see no reason why gunpowder treason

Should ever be forgot.”

There is always a balance in these things. People derive a great deal of pleasure from bonfire night, but there are some risks to fireworks, and it is a question of getting that balance right. But I do not want to deprive people of the pleasure and enjoyment they get, sadly, from celebrating the death of a papist, which always distresses me.

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): A number of my constituents in Steinbeck Grange, a development in Chapelford in Warrington South, have been mis-sold leasehold properties by David Wilson Holmes and face rip-off ground rents, punitive management fees and unclear contract conditions. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on compensation for existing leaseholders trapped in these contracts?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. Where there is mis-selling, there are procedures to deal with it. The Backbench Business Committee will be re-established very soon, and that would be an ideal debate for it.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Let me bring the Leader of the House back to the question by my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald). Can the right hon. Gentleman assure the House, because he will know of the cross-party and cross-House concern on Syria, that the Government will make regular statements on what international interventions they are making to try to fix this humanitarian catastrophe?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Foreign Secretary is making all the representations he can. He is gravely concerned about this. It is really troubling that a NATO ally is behaving in this way. Every possible pressure is being brought to bear, but it is unquestionably complicated by the fact that Turkey is a NATO ally.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): In the light of the growth in food banks, discretionary housing payments and reliance on high-rate payday lenders, does the Leader of the House agree that this House should debate the

importance of continuing council tax support payments for those with disabilities or on low incomes with children under five?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady raises a very important point. Everyone in this House wants the welfare system to work and to support people in the correct way. Everyone in this House also recognises that no human system is perfect. Therefore, having debates that raise problems and help to perfect what is fundamentally a good system is something that I, as Leader of the House, would encourage. What form that debate would take, I cannot promise her—whether it would be in Government time, which is probably unlikely considering the pressure of business. However, I think we are all keen to make the system work, and I therefore hope that the points she raises will be taken on board by the relevant Department.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Back in March, when the Leader of the House was reclining on the Back Benches, he gave as a reason for not supporting the previous withdrawal agreement that it did not have the support of the DUP, so could he make a statement today as to why that criterion no longer applies?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am more than happy to say that this deal is worth wholehearted and full-throated support from across the United Kingdom. It is a deal that delivers for the whole United Kingdom. It ensures that we will leave the European Union lock, stock and barrel. It makes special arrangements for Northern Ireland in relation to the Good Friday/Belfast agreement and the fact that there is a land border there between the United Kingdom and the European Union. Those special arrangements support and help the United Kingdom, and the opportunities for the United Kingdom outside the European Union are extraordinarily exciting. This is well worth supporting, and I would encourage the DUP to support it too.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): This week, the Communication Workers Union made history when it voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action against Royal Mail: 97% voted in favour of strike action on a turnout of 76%, defying the undemocratic Trade Union Act 2016. Will the Leader of the House stand with those postal workers as they fight for their jobs and terms and conditions, and against a proposed sale of Parcelforce? Can we have a debate on scrapping the Trade Union Act, which seems to undermine the right to strike in the UK?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I begin by paying tribute to people who work for Royal Mail? We are enormously well served by the service we have in this country. Actually, particularly in this House we are very well served by the postmen and postwomen who look after us. The issue of strike action is one where the Government expect both parties to engage in mediation and proper discussions. It is ultimately a matter between Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union. However, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is working with Royal Mail to understand its plans and to provide advice where appropriate. The Government are doing what they can, but it is essentially a matter between the two parties. I hope that it will be settled because we all want to get our Christmas cards.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is an almost universally observed convention of this House that there is a two-week period between the first laying of a Bill and its Second Reading, yet on Wednesday we have the Environment Bill, which is absolutely massive—it has 122 clauses and 20 schedules. In two of the Committees I sit on, we did pre-legislative scrutiny of the first bit, but there is a whole load of other stuff that we have not seen before. Does it really have to be brought back so quickly? Can we not give environmental groups and MPs the chance to scrutinise it before we get to Second Reading?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think there is a general feeling that it is really important to proceed with this Bill. I have a great desire to uphold the conventions of this House. I note, though, that a lot of Opposition Members voted for the Cooper-Boles Bill and for the surrender Bill, both of which were pushed through very rapidly, so this does happen. When we have major items of legislation that have widespread support, it is important that, as you might say, Mr Speaker, we do not allow convention to stand in the way of what is in the national interest.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Some 13 years after believing that he had paid all his contributions to the Child Support Agency, my constituent Ian Gemmell from Auchinleck was shocked to get a bill from the Child Maintenance Service demanding £3,500. While people should pay their way in terms of their children, this debatable £3,500 is not going to find its way to his now adult daughter. Can we have a Government statement so we get a case review for my constituent and an overall review of how the CMS is handling these historical cases?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that. As a constituency MP, taking off my Government hat, there is no organisation that I find it harder to deal with on behalf of my constituents or one that is less sympathetic to my constituents. I am glad that he has raised that point, because I think all of us in the House have the same interest which is that that organisation should provide a better and a fairer service, and I am sure that this will be noted by the relevant Minister.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): Campaigners fighting to save Pontllanfraith leisure centre were heartened by news this week that Caerphilly County Borough Council cabinet will pause the closure. However, that is not an isolated case. Other campaign groups have contacted me who are fighting to save their leisure services. With an obesity crisis in this country and participation in sport down, can we have an urgent debate in this House on access to sport and leisure?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think there is a general feeling that more exercise is a good thing, as long as I do not personally have to involve myself; I have never been the most energetic of individuals. The hon. Gentleman raises a serious point, and it is a good idea to secure a debate on that issue. The most exercise I used to take was bobbing to try to get called when I wanted to involve myself in a statement, and now that I am on the Front Bench, I do not even have to do that. He could request an Adjournment debate, but I think the best

route to go down would be a Backbench Business debate, because he may want a longer debate, and the issue has a wider application than purely his own constituency.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is four months since the Government announced a consultation on the introduction of mandatory accessible housing standards in building regulations. Will the Leader of the House urge the Housing Minister to begin the consultation without any further delay?

Mr Rees-Mogg: What the hon. Lady said is on the record, and I will ensure that the relevant copy of *Hansard* is sent to the Housing Minister, so that she knows what the situation is.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): In March 2013, Mr Anthony O'Sullivan, the chief executive of Caerphilly County Borough Council, was suspended by the council and put on special leave. At long last, Mr O'Sullivan has now been dismissed by the council for gross misconduct, but for over six years he has been on full pay and has received over £800,000 from the council, even though he has done no work. The council has had no alternative but to abide by the law, but if Mr O'Sullivan had any sense of morality and decency, he would repay the salary he received for doing absolutely nothing. Will the Leader of the House allow a debate to take place on how a situation like that could have arisen, to ensure that it never happens again?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I read about that case in the newspapers and am as shocked by it as the hon. Gentleman. It is not how taxpayers' money ought to be used. It has now been raised in the House. It has a political profile. Our job in this House is to seek redress of grievance. This is a serious grievance for the ratepayers of Caerphilly, who will want to understand why money has been spent so poorly. We in this House make the laws that lead to these types of payment being made, so we must look at the laws that we make.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): My constituent Shelley Kenny's late father had an arrangement with the green deal, which he was dealing with prior to passing away. She now has to deal with the case. I have written to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy a number of times, and it is asking for information that has already been provided. Given that I have had a lack of success with correspondence, and the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is sitting right next to the Leader of the House, would he be kind enough to use his good offices to organise a meeting between me and the Secretary of State, to try to sort this case for someone whose father has passed away?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am always happy to try to facilitate meetings where I can. I am willing to see all Members of this House about any issues they seek to raise. Secretaries of State and Ministers have a duty, in my view, to see Back-Bench Members when the issues are sufficiently serious.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and the 60 Back Benchers who questioned the Leader of the House.

Business of the House (Saturday 19 October)

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Leader of the House to move the motion, I should inform the House that I have selected amendment (a) in the name of Sir Oliver Letwin.

12.44 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): I beg to move,

That this House shall sit at 9.30am on Saturday 19 October and at that sitting:

(1) the first business shall be any statements to be made by Ministers; and

(2) the provisions of Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings), with the exception of paragraph (4), shall apply as if that day were a Friday.

The good news is that I do not intend to detain the House for long. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) seems delighted that I will be brief.

As Members will be aware, 19 October is a day of jubilee and song, because it is the anniversary of the birth of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), who, on a very rare occasion, is not in his place. Other than wishing him a happy birthday, we have to deal with the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019, in which Parliament has given the day additional meaning. It has set down a series of requirements that, if we are to leave the EU on 31 October, need to be fulfilled by this House and can only be fulfilled on Saturday, because the European Council will not have finished until the day before. I am sure that many Members can think of other things to be doing on a Saturday rather than coming here, but I admire their diligence in accepting that the basic principle is right. As I have said before, to meet three times in 70 years on a Saturday is not unduly onerous.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I'm only 49!

Mr Rees-Mogg: I meant the whole House.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, if this motion is passed, facilities in the Palace of Westminster that are normally open when the House of Commons is sitting will also be open on Saturday?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Not all the facilities will be open, but there will be sufficient facilities to ensure the culinary comfort of Members if they get a little bit peckish during the course of the day.

The Government have made quite remarkable progress in these negotiations, which will be reported to the House. This is a really inspiring negotiating triumph that the Prime Minister has achieved. The papers have been made available as early as possible, to be as courteous and helpful to the House as possible. The debate date is set by the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act.

It is remarkable how far we have come, when everybody said it was impossible. In 85 days, the undemocratic backstop has been removed. At the end of the transition period—that is to say, on 31 December 2020—we will

no longer be under the imperial yoke of the European Union. We will be able to implement our own free trade deals. We will be able to set our own regulations. We will be in charge of our own laws. It is an incredible achievement and so much better than where we were at Easter.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Surely the right hon. Gentleman agrees with me that, as elected representatives, we would be failing in our duty to our constituents if we were to vote on a deal that would impact on their futures and the futures of their children without foresight of that likely impact. Can he therefore commit that he will do everything in his power to ensure that impact assessments are published and available for Members to see before Saturday?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The right hon. Lady raises an interesting question. There are any number of impact assessments that people have made, but let me give her my assessment of what will happen when we leave the European Union: it will be a golden age for the United Kingdom when we are free of the heavy yoke of the European Union, which has bowed us down for generations and made us less competitive, less efficient and higher-cost. All of that will be gone, and we will be singing hallelujahs.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: The right hon. Gentleman boasts that the backstop has gone. Of course, there is no need for the backstop now, given that the UK Government have capitulated on the customs union and the single market. Will they do the same for Scotland and keep us in the customs union and the single market? If it is good enough for Northern Ireland, it is good enough for Scotland.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman, who I thought was a feisty highlander, calls for capitulation. *[Interruption.]* All right, the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) is even higher. Her Majesty's Government have not capitulated, in the same way as the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar would be the last person to capitulate. The Government have, in fact, succeeded. We will be out of the customs union and out of the single market, and Northern Ireland will be in a single customs union area with the United Kingdom as a whole. This is fantastically exciting and a very important development.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Over the course of yesterday, we saw media appearances by the Leader of the House's former pals in the European Research Group, and the Democratic Unionist party going in and out of No. 10. While all of that was going on, how much were the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government kept up to date?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It was my pleasure and honour to brief the Scottish and Welsh Governments about the Queen's Speech on Monday, so I happen to know—*[Interruption.]* Well, the Queen's Speech's first point was that we would make sure that Brexit was delivered and legislated for. There are constant communications between the devolved authorities and the Government, and that is quite right.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my surprise that so many people are already commenting on the deal in the media and

[Mrs Anne Main]

indeed rejecting it out of hand, without giving it the thoughtful consideration that the 33 million people who engaged in the biggest democratic process ever would expect us to give to it? We should listen to this new deal, and actually take a thoughtful approach—not a tribal, but a thoughtful approach—to whether it has our support.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Absolutely. My hon. Friend is completely right that we want to respect democracy.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I know I gave the Leader of the House some advice earlier, but this is a very serious and sombre occasion—a historic moment for this House—and I believe that we should all talk very seriously. I beg him, please will he resist talking about “capitulation” and using words like “surrender”? It is a serious time for our country. Let us take it seriously.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his well-intentioned advice. I know it is intended to be helpful, but may I give him advice in return? Had he listened to the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar, he would have understood that he was suggesting a capitulation, to which I responded. This is the normal course of debate and it is traditional in this House, although I know the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) has been here a good deal longer than I have.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): A trade deal is very important to my constituency in the west midlands. I was on the Trade and Industry Committee when we negotiated with the World Trade Organisation, and such a negotiation takes a very long time. What is the right hon. Gentleman’s estimate of the time factor involved here?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is an astute negotiator, and it may be in the interests of the Government to get some tips from him about how to negotiate. The plan is to negotiate the free trade arrangement within the next year so that we can leave on 31 December 2020. That is the target.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Leader of the House has boasted on a number of occasions that the “undemocratic backstop”, as he described it, has been got rid of. Will the Leader of the House take a few moments to explain in some considerable detail how exactly the new proposals in this document about “Democratic consent in Northern Ireland”—it has now been made available to us, thank goodness—are going to operate?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I do not want to go too much into the details—[*Interruption*—]hold on, patience; because this will be the topic for Saturday. The Prime Minister will make a statement and answer no doubt many questions before we move on to the debate. What I would say is that the undemocratic backstop has been replaced by an arrangement that will be subject to the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, which seems only reasonable.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): May I ask my right hon. Friend to think about something he has just said and possibly reconsider it? He has said that the Prime Minister will make a statement. Would it be possible, rather than making a statement, for him to open the debate? That would give more opportunity for Members to speak, rather than just making a statement.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The wisdom of a former Chief Whip is very considerable, and I shall ensure that that point is passed on to the Prime Minister’s adviser.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): A moment ago, the right hon. Gentleman expressed confidence that the free trade agreement that is now the centrepiece of the political declaration could be negotiated between now and December 2020. Can he confirm to the House that if that proves not to be possible, it would be a no-deal Brexit—in effect, a hard Brexit—from 1 January 2021? We would be leaving the EU at that point on WTO terms, which the House has explicitly rejected in passing the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act.

Mr Rees-Mogg: These are the matters that will be discussed if we pass the motion to sit on Saturday, so I think we are getting slightly ahead of ourselves in trying to go into the details of the debate. Much though I should like to be the one dealing with that debate, that will belong to higher authorities than me, who will I am sure welcome questions from the right hon. Gentleman.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): May I seek some clarification before we decide whether to sit and have this debate on Saturday? The Government have published a declaration, a political declaration and a substantial protocol. However, the actual changes to the withdrawal agreement—in articles 184 and 185—are contained on a single page, which is the last page of the protocol. Those are the substantial—if one could call it that—changes. Can the Leader of the House confirm that, should we sit and debate this on Saturday, what we will actually be debating is fundamentally the same withdrawal agreement that has already failed to pass this House on a number of occasions?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am sorry to be distracted down this route, Mr Speaker, but I hope you will allow me a little leeway, because that point is so fundamentally wrong. The new agreement is of the greatest significance and the greatest change. The backstop, which has been excised, meant that we could be tied into the rules and regulations and the customs union of the European Union forever. It was harder to leave the backstop than to leave the European Union itself. Under article 4 of the previous treaty, that would then have been our senior law, in exactly the same way as EU law takes direct effect under the European Communities Act 1972.

That was not leaving the European Union; the change that has been made means that we will leave the European Union, and we will be in charge of our own destiny and of our own future. It does surprise me that the nationalist party wants independence yet wants to be under the yoke of Brussels, but we want to be free to make our own way because we have confidence in our ability to make our own way successfully, without being told what to do by others.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I do not wish to be ungracious, because I am an admirer of the hon. and learned Lady, who is a very impressive inquisitor—[*Interruption*]. The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar is also an impressive inquisitor. But I am not going to take further interventions, because the Queen's Speech debate is pressing and I have a few more words to say about the details of Saturday. I apologise to right hon. and hon. Members, but I think I have taken enough interventions.

I recognise that changes to the sittings of the House agreed at short notice can create inconvenience to Members, staff of the House and civil servants, but I am sure hon. Members will agree that it is important to continue to take these matters at greater pace at this important time. Her Majesty's Government did not choose the date of 19 October to hold this important debate, but it will provide the opportunity for this House to live up to the commitment made by all parties to deliver on the will of the people and to honour the result of the referendum.

If the House agrees to the motion, the arrangement for Saturday will be for the House to sit at 9.30 am. The day will begin with ministerial statements, and I can confirm that, as I have already mentioned, the Prime Minister will make a statement updating the House on the outcome of the negotiations at the European Union Council. The debate that follows will be either on a motion to approve a deal or on a motion to approve a no-deal exit. The debate on one or other of those motions would run for up to 90 minutes under the existing rules of this House. In the event of a motion to approve a deal, that motion, if passed, will meet the terms both of the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act and of section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I do apologise, but other people want to speak, there is an amendment to be moved and there is serious business to be discussed.

If I may, I will turn briefly to amendment (a) in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). It would provide for a debate on a statutory motion until 2.30 pm, rather than for 90 minutes. There is a risk that that might shorten the time for debate, because the Prime Minister will make a statement, and some of the statements in this House have been very long and I would guess that many people may want to question him. The 90 minutes is protected time, regardless of when the debate starts. As I have made clear, when the Prime Minister speaks there will be the opportunity to raise any number of questions on this issue.

Dare I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset that there is an eccentricity to his proposal? We have an Act of Parliament that requires us to vote on certain motions. That Act was supported by my right hon. Friend, yet he now does not want us to stick to the motion that he supported in the Bill that he voted for, before it became the law of the land. He wants us to vote on something else, which will simply cause confusion and delay. We want a yes or no answer from the House. Does it like the deal, or not? [*Interruption.*] There are

catcalls from across the Chamber, but that is the point of the debate. People will be able to say, "no", or "yes", but it will be clear and simple. The amendment will confuse the issue and make it harder for the House to make its opinion known.

Her Majesty's Government would not have chosen to meet on a Saturday. That date is directly because of the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 2) Act 2019. [*Interruption.*] I hear Members saying that is not true, but such catcalls are themselves false.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (LD): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Rees-Mogg: No, I will finish what I am saying. Other Members will have the chance to speak if they wish. These motions are required because the Benn Act inserted a deadline of 19 October—otherwise we had to ask for an extension to article 50. In what sort of fantasy world does someone ask for an extension when they already have a deal? If the deal is done, let us vote on it, let us get it through, and let us talk about other things.

1.1 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House—he initially said that he would not take long, but in fact he took quite a lengthy time to move a short motion. It is common convention and courtesy in this House to let hon. Members see the text of a draft agreement, and although the Leader of the House is polite when he speaks, many of his actions appear somewhat rude. Waving a piece of paper—the draft agreement—in front of Members and taunting them is not an appropriate way to behave. He is a great student of history, so he knows what happened the last time someone waved a white piece of paper around.

The Leader of the House said that there was a draft agreement. Will he confirm when that is likely to be agreed by the EU27? We have heard rumours that it has already been agreed—I am not sure whether he knows, as we have all been sitting in the House. When will the motion that he has just presented to the House be tabled? Will he confirm—he said this in business questions, but I am asking him again—whether it will be compliant with the legislation on the meaningful vote that was passed by the House?

1.3 pm

Sir Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Ind): I beg to move an amendment, at end add:

'(3) paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents) shall not apply to any motion on that day; and

(4) if an amendment to any motion has been disposed of (including at or after the moment of interruption), any further amendments selected by the Speaker may be moved, and the questions shall be put forthwith.'

For the avoidance of doubt, I agree with the Leader of the House that the deal, of which we have—admittedly very briefly—seen the text, looks admirable, and I shall support it and vote for its implementation in legislation, all the way to completion. That is not a very great concession on my part, as I have said for 18 months that I will vote for any deal, but I also think that this is rather a good deal, so there is nothing between me and the Leader of the House on that issue.

[*Sir Oliver Letwin*]

However, when we sit on Saturday 19 October—if we sit; ultimately it is up to the Government whether we sit, and they have moved this motion to ensure that—it is important that we can proceed in a way that leads to the result I am talking about: the final implementing legislation and the ratification of the deal. I do not doubt for a second that the Leader of the House and the Prime Minister, who, under the inspiration of the Benn Act, have taken huge steps to achieve a great deal with the EU, wish to complete that process, get to the end of the legislative process in both Houses of Parliament, and ratify the deal. I am absolutely persuaded that that is what Her Majesty's Government want to do, and I applaud them. I know that many colleagues in the House who take a different view will vote differently, but that is my view.

There is a problem, however. Neither I, the Leader of the House nor any of the rest of us can possibly know at this stage what strategies or tactics will be employed by some Members on Saturday. I make no accusations at all, as it is perfectly legitimate for Members of the House with a particular aim to deploy a set of strategies and vote accordingly—there is nothing dishonourable in that at all. One thing that could enter some people's heads—I do not mean any particular Member as I do not know whether this has happened, but it could enter several people's heads, and perhaps enough to make a difference to the voting—would be to vote in favour of a motion under section 13(1) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, thereby relieving the Government of the need to apply for an extension under the Benn Act, but then perhaps not follow through the following week by not voting in favour of the subsequent Bill's Second or Third Reading.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): What a suggestion!

Sir Oliver Letwin: My hon. Friend says that, and I make no allegation that anybody in the House at the moment intends to do so. In any case, doing so would not be in any way dishonourable. It would be a perfectly reputable strategy, but it would not be a strategy to which I or anyone who has put their name to the amendment could subscribe. I hope that, through its vote today, it will be a strategy to which the House will not subscribe.

The purpose of the amendment is simple: it would permit amendments—if selected by you, Mr Speaker—to be moved on Saturday and be voted on. That would enable those Members, such as me, who wish to support, carry through and eventually see the ratification of the deal to allow the Government off the Benn Act hook not on Saturday, but only once the relevant Bill has gone through both Houses of Parliament.

In his otherwise admirable summary, the Leader of the House missed one point. The scope for Members to debate this crucial matter during the 90 minutes will not be limited. That is because it is at your discretion, Mr Speaker, to decide how long to allow for statements and to protect the business for 90 minutes. The House ought to be confident that you will want to do that, Mr Speaker, so I do not think that this is a problem with the amendment.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I understand what my right hon. Friend is saying, but those who drafted the Benn Act could easily have required the passing of

legislation to implement any agreement, yet they chose not to. They merely said that a motion supporting a deal had to be agreed by Saturday. That is the law, and this is our best chance of complying with that requirement.

Sir Oliver Letwin: My hon. Friend makes a perfectly reasonable point. If we were endowed with the gift of foresight and omniscience, no doubt we would have ensured that all possible loopholes were blocked. I observe that the Government's tax legislation—not just this Government's, but that of every Government I have come across—is full of loopholes, because even the awesome might of parliamentary counsel and Her Majesty's Treasury fail to spot things that people might be able to do. As one of those involved in the drafting of the Benn Act, I admit it was an oversight not to do as my hon. Friend describes, and I apologise to the House for that. We must ensure that the process operates in a proper fashion, as intended, and that we get to the point of ratification before there is any question of not having an extension to article 50.

The last point I ever need to make about this otherwise rather dull procedural motion is that the terms of the letter in what is now popularly known as the Benn Act mean—if one reads the second paragraph which, of course, the Leader of the House will have done minutely—that the Government will be applying for a flexible extension that could be curtailed and evidently should come to an end the moment the deal is ratified. Evidently, nobody who is in favour of extension is in favour of an extension beyond the point of ratification. I am perfectly sure that if the letter gets written because this House does not end up letting the Government off the hook of the Benn Act, but does in spirit indicate its willingness to approve the deal, and then votes in favour of the legislation, after which there is ratification, the European Union, when responding to the request in the letter, will ensure that any extension is flexible and that it comes to an end the moment that we are out. I have to say to the Leader of the House that on this he and I will be together, and I shall sigh a great sigh of relief if that occurs.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), perhaps I should just say this for the elucidation of the House. The House will take its own view of the Government's motion and indeed of the amendment from the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), but it is important that colleagues do so with open eyes. The only point I want to make—it is a very simple procedural point—is that although theoretically, as the Leader of the House quite rightly said, the debate could end up being shorter if the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for West Dorset were passed because a lengthy exchange on a prime ministerial statement could truncate such a debate, that would be the result of a decision from the Chair, because the Chair has discretion. There is no way on earth that I would allow that to happen, manifestly because I am looking to serve the interests of the House. The debate would not be shorter—absolutely would not be shorter. Whether people want to support that amendment or not is another matter, but it is important that people are clear about what the implications are. I am best placed to say what the implications are and I have just said it.

1.11 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I think that the whole House is grateful for that ruling clarifying the issues relating to Saturday morning. I think that benefits us all and we now have a better idea of how events will transpire.

The Scottish National party has no issue with the motion and we will not be opposing it. It is worth noting that this will be the first time the House will have sat on a Saturday since 1982, when this House was recalled at the height of the Falklands crisis. I had a look at what other auspicious events have happened on 19 October. As an aficionado of political history, the Leader of the House may like to note that on 19 October, British forces under General Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington, ending the US revolutionary wars. The Leader of the House has a penchant for retreats, surrender and capitulation, so I know he will find that of great interest. He may find this interesting, too: it was also the day on which Napoleon's forces began their retreat from Moscow. Perhaps we will hear his views on those two issues, as he always entertains the House on these little notes of history.

The key issue—I think we are all grateful that the Leader of the House touched on it—relates to the arrangements that have to be put in place for staff who give up their weekend to come here to work. It should also be noted—the Leader of the House glibly accepted this—that the arrangements present a number of difficulties for Members from Scotland. I do not know how we are expected to get here for 9.30 in the morning. It seems like we will have to be here for the whole week to ensure we are in our place for that 9.30 am start.

On the specific arrangements, and I am glad that you clarified this, Mr Speaker, a 90-minute debate is clearly insufficient, given the issue and the whole range of matters we will have to consider—at least we have a deal to debate. We will support fully the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). It is right that we have the opportunity to debate all the issues relating to this matter and that we have an amendable motion. The SNP will table an amendment, and we will encourage right hon. and hon. Members to support us.

We will need to have all the relevant documents, and the Leader of the House has given us his commitment on that. I listened very carefully to his response regarding economic impacts and consequences. I think that the House would like to see them in advance, but I do not think the Government will be in a position where that will be considered. Scottish Members would like to see what the impact on Scotland will be, but again we have no commitment on whether that will be delivered.

As we come to consider this matter on Saturday, it is worth noting that Scotland wanted absolutely nothing to do with this chaotic Brexit project. We returned one Member of Parliament with a mandate to deliver on the EU referendum—one Member of Parliament. Every single one of Scotland's Members of Parliament bar one voted against the EU referendum Bill. Every single Member of Parliament from Scotland bar one voted against triggering article 50. When we tried to get a special arrangement for Scotland to meet Scotland's interests, it was totally ignored and rejected before the ink was even dry. Throughout this whole process, the

SNP and the vast majority of Members of Parliament have opposed this arrangement and the whole project. We are not going to start supporting it with the deal that will be presented today. The deal is, in fact, worse than the May deal that was rejected three times. It will leave Scotland at a particular disadvantage in relation to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland will have access to the single market and the benefits of the arrangements that will be put in place. Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain, so why can we not be included in those arrangements? On that basis, we will oppose the deal again on Saturday.

Scotland is being taken out of the European Union against its national collective will. Scotland will lose access to the customs union, the single market and freedom of movement, which is so important to the growth of our economy and to the many sectors in it. Scotland will never accept this Brexit deal. We refuse to accept that the Brexit Britain concocted by this deal is the best that Scotland could be or could aspire to be. We will oppose it on Saturday. We look forward to having the opportunity to express and explain Scotland's view.

1.16 pm

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I will keep my remarks brief because I am conscious that the House wishes to make a decision and the Leader of the House made such a comprehensive speech. I first want to reflect briefly on the timings for Saturday. I heard what the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) said. It is very clear under what is known as the Benn Act—I will give it that term, given that the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) is in the Chamber—that a decision has to be made by the House before the close of business on Saturday if an extension request is to be avoided. The reason why the drafting of the Act is so important is that now that the Prime Minister has secured a deal that has been recommended for approval by the Presidents of the Commission and the Council, an extension secured under the Act would be particularly perverse, because it would specifically require the Prime Minister to seek an extension not in order to pass the deal he has just achieved, but to go back and try to pass the deal rejected three times by this House. That seems to me to be remarkably foolish. I see the right hon. Member for Leeds Central looking at me quizzically, but that is what section 1(4) of his Act says, and it seems to me that that would be ridiculous. Avoiding that foolish eventuality does necessitate a sitting on Saturday.

My second point, in response to the amendment moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), is that the Benn Act requires the House to make a clear decision on whether it approves the deal. The cluttering up of a motion with lots of qualifications may not comply with the terms of the Act and it will be confusing. It may be that if my right hon. Friend's amendment were passed, Members might be tempted to try to frustrate reaching a deal by tacking on an amendment for a second referendum. I wish to avoid that outcome and would say that anybody who votes in favour of my right hon. Friend's amendment is helping those who wish not to carry out the democratic wishes of the British public.

The final point I want to make is for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to note—perhaps he can respond to us before Saturday—and it is about

[Mr Mark Harper]

ensuring that we are all able to be here. I understand that a march or a demonstration is to take place. First, will he make sure that the Metropolitan police take steps to ensure that Members may access the parliamentary estate and leave the estate in good order, and will that fact be communicated to Members? Secondly, will he not only ensure that all the documents are made available online, but reflect on how they will be made available to Members in hard copy in good time for the debate? Will he ensure that that information is communicated clearly? That will help to facilitate a good debate. I look forward to the House's approving that debate today and its taking place forthwith.

1.20 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): I assure the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) that those who come to this place in support of a people's vote will behave in exactly the way that they have in the past. Last time, when a million marched, there was not a single arrest, so everyone can be absolutely sure that these are good and true democrats who feel very strongly about the future of their country. Asking for a confirmatory referendum can in no way be described as being undemocratic.

I rise to support the amendment, and for this reason. As anyone who has had the opportunity to glance through the withdrawal agreement will know, this is now a very different agreement from the one that was negotiated by the former Prime Minister, in two distinct ways. First, I understand that the new provisions for Northern Ireland, in order to avoid the hard border between the Republic and the north, now create a new border across the North sea. [HON. MEMBERS: "The Irish sea."] Across the Irish sea. I am from the east coast; I used to do an awful lot of paddling in the North sea. What we are absolutely clear about, however, is that the Prime Minister said there was no way that he would ever agree to that. Well, he has quickly changed his mind on that, but he is very good at saying whatever suits him and his ambition. However, the matter really is very significant for the future Union of our United Kingdom, and it gives me no pleasure to say this. I was a proud member of the Conservative and Unionist party, which in my opinion has now become the Conservative and Brexit party. I actually now believe that in my lifetime we could see a united Ireland because of the way in which the border has been drawn in the Irish sea and the consequences for the island of Ireland.

The other important feature of this new agreement is that for England, and for Scotland and Wales, we are now deprived of a backstop that at least gave a bare-bones customs union and other protections. So, in effect, we now have in England, Wales and Scotland with the hardest Brexit available, and the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) is absolutely right about the need for impact assessments. She is right to say that this place should have documentation that is carefully thought through. What has happened to the scrutiny of the agreement that we would have expected from our Select Committees? In that context, to say that this place should have a debate of no longer than 90 minutes on Saturday is an outrage, and to say that we could not even amend the motion would compound

that outrage. I ask everybody who believes in this place—this sovereign Parliament and democracy—to support this very reasonable amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 275.

Division No. 2]

[1.23 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Dakin, Nic
Abrahams, Debbie	Davey, rh Sir Edward
Ali, Rushanara	David, Wayne
Allen, Heidi	Davies, Geraint
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Day, Martyn
Amesbury, Mike	De Cordova, Marsha
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Dent Coad, Emma
Ashworth, Jonathan	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Bardell, Hannah	Dodds, Anneliese
Bebb, Guto	Dodds, Jane
Beckett, rh Margaret	Doughty, Stephen
Benn, rh Hilary	Dowd, Peter
Berger, Luciana	Dromey, Jack
Betts, Mr Clive	Duffield, Rosie
Black, Mhairi	Eagle, Ms Angela
Blackford, rh Ian	Eagle, Maria
Blackman, Kirsty	Edwards, Jonathan
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Efford, Clive
Blomfield, Paul	Elliott, Julie
Boles, Nick	Ellman, Dame Louise
Brabin, Tracy	Elmore, Chris
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Evans, Chris
Brake, rh Tom	Farrelly, Paul
Brennan, Kevin	Farron, Tim
Brock, Deidre	Fellows, Marion
Brown, Alan	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Brown, Lyn	Fletcher, Colleen
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Forbes, Lisa
Bryant, Chris	Fovargue, Yvonne
Buck, Ms Karen	Foxcroft, Vicky
Burden, Richard	Frith, James
Burgon, Richard	Furniss, Gill
Butler, Dawn	Gaffney, Hugh
Byrne, rh Liam	Gapes, Mike
Cable, rh Sir Vince	Gardiner, Barry
Cadbury, Ruth	Gauke, rh Mr David
Cameron, Dr Lisa	George, Ruth
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Gethins, Stephen
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Gibson, Patricia
Carden, Dan	Gill, Preet Kaur
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Glindon, Mary
Champion, Sarah	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Chapman, Douglas	Goodman, Helen
Chapman, Jenny	Grady, Patrick
Cherry, Joanna	Grant, Peter
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth	Gray, Neil (<i>Proxy vote cast by</i> <i>Patrick Grady</i>)
Clwyd, rh Ann	Green, Kate
Coaker, Vernon	Greening, rh Justine
Coffey, Ann	Greenwood, Lilian
Cooper, Julie	Greenwood, Margaret
Cooper, rh Yvette	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Cowan, Ronnie	Griffith, Nia
Coyle, Neil	Grogan, John
Crausby, Sir David	Gwynne, Andrew
Crawley, Angela	Gyimah, Mr Sam
Creasy, Stella	Haigh, Louise
Cruddas, Jon	Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Cryer, John	Hanson, rh David
Cummins, Judith	Hardy, Emma
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Daby, Janet	

Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
James, Margot
Jardine, Christine
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Karen
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leslie, Mr Chris
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward

Milton, rh Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Murray, Ian
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pidcock, Laura
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Emma (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Pat McFadden*)
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Angela
Smith, Cat
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Swinson, Jo
Tami, rh Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna

Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, rh Valerie
Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin

Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Dr Paul
Wilson, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bambos Charalambous and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Austin, Ian
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi (*Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty*)
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Steve Baker*)
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Cairns, rh Alun
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Dinenage, Caroline
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, rh Mr Philip
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Frank
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, rh Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffiths, Andrew
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca

Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, Sir George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, rh Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lefroy, Jeremy
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Lidington, rh Sir David
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast
by Lee Rowley*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne

Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, John
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil (*Proxy vote cast
by Bim Afolami*)
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Redwood, rh John

Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rutley, David
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Chloe (*Proxy vote cast
by Jo Churchill*)
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Spencer, rh Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek

Thomson, Ross
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Tugendhat, Tom
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
**Mr Marcus Jones and
Iain Stewart**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That this House shall sit at 9.30am on Saturday 19 October and at that sitting:

(1) the first business shall be any statements to be made by Ministers;

(2) the provisions of Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings), with the exception of paragraph (4), shall apply as if that day were a Friday;

(3) paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents) shall not apply to any motion on that day; and

(4) if an amendment to any motion has been disposed of (including at or after the moment of interruption), any further amendments selected by the Speaker may be moved, and the questions shall be put forthwith.'

Debate on the Address

[4TH DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 16 October).

Question again proposed,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

The Climate Emergency

1.41 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Theresa Villiers): It is a great honour to open today's debate on Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. A cornerstone of the legislative programme set out in that speech is a landmark Environment Bill. The Bill will help us to make good our pledge to bequeath the environment in a better state than it was left to us, and it will play a crucial part in our efforts to meet the commitment made to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Leaving the EU is an historic opportunity for us to set our own course, and this Government are determined that this will include stepping up action to address both climate change and the decline of nature and biodiversity. These hugely important environmental issues of our time are two sides of the same coin; we cannot protect biodiversity without stabilising the climate, and we cannot tackle climate change without saving the wildlife and habitats that provide crucial life-giving carbon sinks. The trees, plants and peatlands that make up nature's very own carbon capture technology will become ever more important as we strive to bear down further on emissions to meet the net zero target.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Judging by the Secretary of State's voice, I think she is suffering from the same ailment as I am: a throat or chest infection.

Does the Secretary of State acknowledge the commitment by the National Farmers Union and the Ulster Farmers Union, which I am a member of back home—I declare that interest—to achieving net carbon zero by 2045, and does she recognise that that commitment by the NFU can make things happen? It is very helpful in trying to achieve the target that Europe wants, we want and everybody else wants.

Theresa Villiers *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before the Secretary of State comes back in, let me say that there is a lot of pressure on time this afternoon, so I urge hon. Members to make short interventions.

Theresa Villiers: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He correctly points out that the NFU has suggested going further and faster in meeting the net zero target in relation to farming, and I very much welcome that ambition, which is in tune with the reforms to farm support that I will come to in a moment.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Secretary of State mentioned that trees are a natural carbon sink. The Scottish Government have a target of 10,000 hectares of tree planting per annum, which they are currently exceeding. The UK Government's figure works out at an average of 5,000 hectares per year, and they are only delivering a third of that. Last year, 84% of trees planted in the UK were planted by the Scottish Government; when are the UK Government going to catch up?

Theresa Villiers: The UK Government have a strong record of protecting nature and biodiversity, and we will continue to build on that with the Environment Bill that I am talking about.

The trees, plants and peatlands that make up nature's own carbon capture technology are crucial in meeting the net zero target, and I welcome the opportunity today to reiterate the Government's determination to address the two massive environmental challenges of nature recovery and climate change. We were the first major developed economy to make the historic commitment to meeting net zero, and we are taking action right across government to deliver on our climate commitments. The Cabinet Committee announced today will co-ordinate that work under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, demonstrating his personal determination to safeguard the environment.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The Secretary of State is right to talk about the importance of biodiversity and climate change. On the last point she made about the Committee chaired by the Prime Minister, can she assure the House that the devolved Administrations will be part of this, so that we do not have England-only legislation on climate change but we have it right across the United Kingdom and so that we are working unitedly?

Theresa Villiers: Without going into the details of the make-up of that Committee, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the UK Government will continue to work closely with all the devolved Administrations on these hugely important tasks for us.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Theresa Villiers: I am going to make some progress.

We are a country that has shown that economic and environmental success can go hand in hand. We have cut our emissions by more than 40%—faster than any other G20 country—while growing our economy by more than two thirds. That includes a 25% cut in greenhouse gas emissions since the Conservatives returned to office in 2010.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way; she is making a powerful speech and being very generous with her time. Will she support my call that we introduce a net zero test so that we can ensure that at every fiscal event—Budgets and comprehensive spending reviews—we are investing to deliver, and perhaps we could get the Office for Budget Responsibility to scrutinise that so that everyone has confidence, as I do, that the Government are absolutely committed to delivering net zero?

Theresa Villiers: My hon. Friend makes an interesting suggestion, which I will consider carefully, and we might of course return to it when the Environment Bill is debated in Committee.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Theresa Villiers: I am going to make a little more progress.

Only six years ago, 40% of our electricity came from coal; now that figure is less than 5%. In 2018, more than a third of our electricity was generated by renewables, and earlier this year the UK went a whole fortnight without using electricity generated from coal, the first time this has happened since the industrial revolution. We have the largest installed offshore wind capacity in the world, and annual support for renewables will be over £10 billion by 2021.

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity just to say how wholeheartedly I support my right hon. Friend in what she is doing, particularly in the environmental space. Does she agree that the ability to take the leadership that the UK has demonstrated in so many areas to the rest of the world in the absolutely critical conference of the parties next year will help us to sell the benefits of the green transition and persuade every other country in the world to lift their eyes to the green prize?

Theresa Villiers: My right hon. Friend makes a hugely important point, and I wholeheartedly agree and will return to it in a few moments.

We have committed to building on the record of success I have outlined, and we will accelerate the low-carbon growth that already provides more than 400,000 jobs in the United Kingdom. For example, we are supporting clean growth with investment of more than £3 billion in research and development. As we look ahead to the date when we end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars, we are generating £2.7 billion in exporting ultra-low emission vehicles. One in five battery electric cars sold in Europe was built right here in this country.

A decade on from the landmark Climate Change Act 2008, which enshrined ambition in law and marshalled action across society, we are forging ahead with legislation for the second great environmental task: nature recovery.

Alan Brown: To go back to the number of low-carbon jobs in the UK, does the Secretary of State agree that more could be created if the licensing process for contracts for difference auctions looked not only at price, but at quality and value added in the use of local supply chains? That would help to get preferential treatment for UK companies.

Theresa Villiers: We will certainly look at all the options to create low-carbon jobs, including the ideas that the hon. Gentleman speaks about.

Just as the Climate Change Act set a path to reducing carbon emissions, so our Environment Bill will embed environmental principles at the heart of Government decision making. It will mandate the Government to set ambitious, legally binding targets on the pressing environmental concerns that we face as a nation, including air quality, water, resource efficiency, waste reduction and safeguarding nature and habitats.

Gareth Thomas: On waste reduction, the Secretary of State will know that plastic is one of the big sources of pollution in our natural environment—particularly in

our seas, but also on land. What pressure is she therefore applying to the manufacturers of soft drinks to move away from plastic, particularly single-use plastic?

Theresa Villiers: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the pressing concerns about single-use plastic. The Bill contains a number of provisions designed to cut down on avoidable plastic waste, which I will address in more detail in a moment. It includes the potential for the charges that apply to plastic bags to be extended to other plastics; it also includes better labelling to ensure that people are clear about whether the products that they buy are reusable or recyclable. It will help people to understand the best way to recycle by introducing a consistent approach to kerbside recycling, to increase the proportion of plastic that is recycled rather than ending up in landfill. We fully recognise the enthusiasm across our nation for tackling avoidable plastic waste, and our Environment Bill sets out a range of measures to help us to meet that challenge.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): In Wales, we have the third-best recycling rate in the world, but that recycling ends up across the oceans in other countries. Does the Secretary of State agree that what is actually needed is wholesale reform of the whole waste hierarchy to put pressure on our producers to ensure that they hold responsibility not only for what they produce, but for how they clear up at the end of the lifecycle?

Theresa Villiers: I agree that we need a real step change in moving to a much more circular economy, and I believe that our Bill will set us on that path. We are also funding programmes around the world to encourage a move to a more circular economy and more recycling across the world.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for being very generous in giving way. She mentions the targets that her Government have set. She will know that research has just come out that shows that the UK Government are set to miss their legally binding targets of reducing emissions by 51% by 2025. I am very concerned that there are no targets on carbon reduction as part of their strategy. Will the Government introduce any? Surely they are the most important thing we need.

Theresa Villiers: We are already subject to rigorous legal obligations in relation to our carbon budgets, and we are showing real progress towards meeting them.

Our Environment Bill will mandate setting ambitious targets rooted in science. A powerful new independent watchdog will be created to hold the Government to account on meeting the targets that we set. From a free-to-use complaints system to the authority to instigate and undertake investigations and the power to take the Government to court if necessary, the new office for environmental protection will have real teeth.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I want to take the Secretary of State back to the Environment Bill for two seconds, because it is important to set targets but even more important to have deadlines for meeting them. She will be aware of concerns raised today that there is a major loophole in the Bill that will essentially give the Government nearly two decades to

meet the legally binding future environmental targets. Will she comment on those concerns? It is all very well setting targets by 2022, but not having to meet them for 15 years seems absurd.

Theresa Villiers: I can reassure the hon. Lady by drawing her attention to clause 10, which provides for interim targets. The OEP will also have the authority to hold the Government to account on our progress towards meeting long-term targets.

Taking on board the recommendations of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and of the Environmental Audit Committee, the Bill extends the OEP's proposed remit to climate change. More than half the Bill's measures will apply beyond England, helping the environment across our Union from Shetland to the Scilly Isles. Measures requiring developers to deliver a net gain for biodiversity will provide millions of pounds to boost nature and access to open green spaces.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): My right hon. Friend is being very generous with her time. As a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, I am pleased to hear that she has taken some of our recommendations on board. When she looks at improving water quality, will she consider whether there is a role for Ofwat? Its periodic reviews of water companies' charging regimes should be linked to improvements in water quality in our rivers as a means of encouraging savings to customers.

Theresa Villiers: I assure my right hon. Friend that Ofwat and the Environment Agency work together closely in their complementary roles in regulating the water industry. Ensuring that the water companies play their part in protecting the environment is vital. Our Environment Bill will help us to maintain and increase the pressure on water companies to cut down on pollution and improve their record on water quality and the natural environment.

The local nature recovery strategies in the Bill will help to join up the network of habitats that the Government committed to delivering as part of our 25-year environment plan. We will boost recycling and cut down on avoidable plastic waste and litter by ensuring that businesses pay the whole cost of the packaging that they produce, including disposal.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The Secretary of State makes a good point about plastic waste. Does she agree that plastic waste getting into the wrong place and causing litter is an issue created by people and consumers, not by manufacturers and businesses?

Theresa Villiers: That is, of course, the case. I would always urge everyone not to drop litter; it is an eyesore that blights our communities and open spaces, and we are determined to tackle it. The Environment Bill includes significant new powers to crack down on fly-tipping and waste crime—those deeply antisocial crimes.

A range of measures in the Bill will help to ensure that more of the items that we consume are reusable, repairable or recyclable to help us to create the circular economy about which I was asked earlier. The Bill includes the power to create deposit return schemes for

drinks containers and an extension of charging schemes for certain types of single-use plastic. We want to replicate the success of the plastic bag charge, which has led use to plummet by 90%—a great illustration of the enthusiasm and commitment of so many people to addressing the tragedy of plastics pollution in our oceans.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): In more general terms, looking beyond the Environment Bill that we will have week, can the Secretary of State give a cast-iron guarantee from the Dispatch Box that if we were to leave the European Union, the UK's environmental protections, regulations and laws would be better than those we currently enjoy as a member state of the European Union?

Theresa Villiers: We are actually setting out a much more demanding programme for the environment than we would be required to undertake under EU law. We are proposing to go further and faster than EU laws, and as an illustration of that—

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Theresa Villiers: No; I want Back Benchers to have all the time they need, so I will have to cut down on the points of information.

We will, for example, go further and faster than ever before on air quality, because we will be setting a legally binding target on PM2.5 fine particulate matter. Poor air quality is the biggest environmental threat to public health that we face, and particulate pollution is the most damaging of all. Real progress has been made, but we need to do more if we are to ensure that children growing up today can live longer healthier lives. This Bill will drive that forward.

The UK is home to scientific excellence that has made us world leaders in environmental innovation, from Kew's millennium seed bank to climate-resilient crops, but as well as backing the science and research that we need to protect our environment, we are also embracing nature-based solutions to tackle climate change. We have recently announced that we will plant 1 million trees to create three new forests in Northumberland, in addition to the 11 million to which we are already committed. We are restoring almost 6,500 hectares of peat land. That is our biggest carbon store, and it is home to some of our most threatened and fastest declining bird species, including the golden plover and the curlew. Through our agriculture Bill, we will seize this once-in-a-generation chance to combine support for our hard-working, brilliant farmers with support for our natural environment.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the previous Agriculture Bill, which fell at Prorogation, struck a neat balance between the interests of farming and the interests of the environment, with both sides being broadly supportive. Can she confirm this afternoon that it is going to be broadly the same direction of travel for the new agriculture Bill?

Theresa Villiers: Yes, we would certainly envisage broadly the same direction of travel for the agriculture Bill when it is reintroduced. We very much value the

[Theresa Villiers]

input that Parliament previously provided, and all the fundamentals of the previous Agriculture Bill will remain intact.

Outside the EU, we can and will replace the common agricultural policy with a system that not only helps farm businesses to be more resilient, more productive and more internationally competitive but rewards environmental stewardship. From heathlands to hedgerows and from soils rich in carbon to better biodiversity, our farmers will be properly rewarded with public money for the public goods they provide. Breaking free of the CAP means that we can support a range of vital goals, including clean air and water, landscapes protected from floods, thriving plants and wildlife, and reduced carbon emissions and pollution. Brexit also means regaining control of our waters, so that we can manage our fish stocks sustainably, support our marine environment and give our fishing communities a much fairer deal than they have ever had from the common fisheries policy.

We are taking more action on climate change globally than any of our predecessors. We know that 70% of the world's poorest people are directly reliant on the natural environment for their livelihoods. We therefore believe that climate and nature programmes should be at the heart of our efforts to relieve poverty around the world. That is why the Prime Minister announced at the UN in September that we will double our international climate finance funding to at least £11.6 billion in the period up to 2025. He has confirmed £220 million of investment to protect international biodiversity and help to halt its decline. We share the grave public concern felt about plastics pollution in our oceans, and we are investing up to £70 million to fund global research to develop circular economies for waste around the world, working across the Commonwealth to keep plastics out of our ocean.

We are custodians of the fifth largest marine estate in the world, and we are on track to protect more than half of our UK and overseas territories waters by 2020, with a further £7 million recently announced to expand still further our highly successful blue belt programme. We are calling on the world to protect at least 30% of the ocean in marine protected areas by 2030, and 10 nations have already signed up to our new global ocean alliance. We are determined to make this happen.

Whatever our views on the climate protests, there can be no doubt that we as a nation find ourselves at a crucial turning point, and 2020 needs to be the year when the international community pulls together to agree time-bound, measurable and demanding environmental targets. We need targets for protecting biodiversity on land and in our ocean to help us to meet our climate objectives and tackle the tragedy of plastics pollution. That is what we will be asking for, as aspiring co-hosts of the crucial COP 26 conference in Glasgow next year, as we make nature-based solutions and biodiversity a central focus of our efforts to tackle the climate crisis at home and abroad.

In conclusion, the Government have one of the strongest records in the world on environment and climate issues. As the evidence becomes ever stronger, we are determined to escalate the UK's response to the climate and nature crisis, both domestically and internationally. We believe that the Environment Bill published this week will be a

big step forward in turning the tide on the degradation of nature and the natural environment. Combined with our legislation on fisheries, farming and improving the welfare of animals, this is a powerful reform package that will change things for the better in this country for decades to come.

There can be no doubt that we face a daunting task if we are to live up to our commitment to leave young people with a better natural inheritance than was bequeathed to us. We need a green economic revolution every bit as profound and far-reaching as the industrial revolution that this country once led. If we work together across the House and get this ground-breaking legislation on the statute book, we can lead global efforts to find solutions that work for climate, for nature and for people. I am happy to commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

2.8 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): We all know that we face a climate and environment emergency. We know that wildlife populations are collapsing, ecosystems are breaking down and temperatures are rising at an alarming rate. Since world war two, we have lost 97% of our meadows, 80% of our chalk grassland and more than half our ancient woodland. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' "State of Nature" report has also found that 41% of UK species that it studied had declined since 1970. It found that 15% were threatened with extinction and that 133 species were already extinct.

Public support for tackling this crisis is growing, and there are mounting calls for politicians to act now. Whatever anyone thinks about the recent protests, Extinction Rebellion has, alongside the youth climate strikes, dramatically shifted the conversation about climate and environmental breakdown. We must be under no illusion: this is also a matter of social justice. This year, one of the worst tropical storms on record killed over 1,000 people in Mozambique. There have been catastrophic fires right across the globe—in the Amazon rainforest, Siberia, Lebanon and Greenland—and record temperatures are being recorded all over the world.

We also know that, with just one degree of global warming, climate chaos will be a bigger cause of forced migration than poverty or political oppression. Poorer communities right across the world are the least responsible for the climate disaster, but they are the most likely to suffer its impacts. I was pleased that the Secretary of State mentioned international working and funding, because vulnerable communities in the global south are being hit the hardest. It is vital that those countries can receive financial support for any loss and damage. Will she confirm whether the Government will work with other donor countries to mobilise the financial support needed for those communities?

However, this debate is about the Queen's Speech, and I welcome the inclusion of an Environment Bill. Yet, in the face of this global crisis, it was unfortunate that the Queen's Speech itself did not contain serious proposals to tackle the threat of climate change. Where was the energy Bill to deliver the transformation to low carbon and renewable energy, which is essential to meet our climate targets? Where was the transport Bill, which would have delivered a transformation to a world-leading, clean transport economy?

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that one easy early win would be to do something quickly about engine idling? All of us could turn off our engines when stuck in traffic and at traffic lights. It costs nothing, and we could do it now.

Sue Hayman: That is an extremely important point, and we could do that straightaway, but we need a proper, comprehensive transport Bill to tackle things more widely.

My team will be going through the Environment Bill line by line, but there already seems to be evidence of some weaknesses. The proposals are weak on funding commitments, on enforcement, on genuine independence and on cross-departmental, centrally driven leadership. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has talked about the time it takes for things to come in, and Greenpeace has exposed the serious loophole in the Bill which means that no legal action could be taken against Ministers on any potential failings in air and water quality, plastics or nature restoration until 2037 at the earliest. The Secretary of State talked about interim targets, but we need serious action now and targets that come much earlier.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): If we are to reach the World Health Organisation's targets by 2030, does my hon. Friend agree that is imperative to bring forward the date on which we will stop selling new diesel and fossil-fuel cars from 2042 to 2030? We also need a staged plan of how to get to 10 micrograms per cubic metre by 2030, but there is no such detail in the Environment Bill at the moment.

Sue Hayman: I agree with my hon. Friend. The matter was mentioned during Labour's party conference this year, because we are taking this very seriously.

My concern is that the Conservative Government have a track record of missing environmental targets on air quality, major pollution incidents and biodiversity, and last year a leaked document showed that the Government had abandoned altogether an agreed target to restore 50% of England's sites of special scientific interest to a favourable condition by 2020. It is therefore disappointing, but unsurprising, that the legally binding targets will not apply for nearly two decades.

Once the Government's record on climate change and the environment is examined more closely, we find practices and policies that completely undermine and work against efforts to tackle the climate and ecological emergency. The Government continue to use UK export finance to support fossil fuels, but it is totally hypocritical for the UK to limit extraction at home while promoting extraction abroad. The Natural Capital Committee recently concluded that only half of our habitats currently meet minimum quality targets, with bees, butterflies, birds and many plants species continuing to decline.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): My hon. Friend has already mentioned the fact that we are financing fossil fuels overseas while trying to reduce their usage here, but we also consume 3.3 million tonnes of soya per year, 77% of which comes from high-risk deforestation areas in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. It is one thing to talk about protecting natural habitats here, but if our consumption habits are contributing to deforestation overseas, we are not really solving the problem.

Sue Hayman: Whatever we do to try to protect the environment and solve the climate and ecological emergency, it is incredibly important that we do that on a global level. If we do not, we will never achieve the results that the planet needs.

The Government had to be dragged through the courts time and again following their refusal to take adequate leadership on illegal levels of air pollution.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I have the dubious honour of representing the constituency with the most polluted road outside London. Large trucks go up Hafodyrynys Road spewing out all sorts of noxious fumes from diesel engines. However, the council is hamstrung because it cannot introduce emissions charging zones, as we have in London, and there is a lack of charging points for electric vehicles. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should grasp the nettle, invest in infrastructure and roll out emissions charging zones?

Sue Hayman: I agree. Air quality is referred to in the Environment Bill, and we will be pushing hard on those areas in Committee.

I am particularly concerned about Natural England's budget. For those who do not know, Natural England is the body responsible for protecting and enhancing our natural environment, and its budget has been cut in half. Staff tell me that they barely have the resources to cope with their basic statutory requirements. In addition, unprecedented cuts to local authorities mean that we have seen a boom in fly tipping, and local habitats are being neglected right across our communities.

The Government have effectively banned the cheapest form of renewable energy—new onshore wind—through restrictive planning measures and the removal of subsidies. There has also been a total failure to capitalise on the enormous potential of tidal power with the Severn barrage and now the Swansea Bay project failing to win Government support. Instead, the Government still seem intent on promoting fracking in the face of overwhelming local opposition. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether she personally still supports fracking?

Perhaps the most recent and telling anti-environmental Government decision is the scrapping of the UK's commitment to respect current EU environmental standards—the so-called “non-regression” provisions of the draft withdrawal agreement and political declaration. In his letter to Donald Tusk announcing the change in policy, the Prime Minister said that the right to diverge was

“the point of our exit and our ability to enable this is central to our future democracy.”

Ditching our current environmental standards is necessary only if the vision for the UK is of a race-to-the-bottom, deregulated country that prioritises free trade over high standards. Furthermore, research has predicted that a hard Brexit could see a rise in the UK's imported emissions roughly equal to the territorial emissions of the Netherlands in 2017.

Labour tabled a motion calling on this Parliament to declare a climate and environment emergency. The text of the motion, unopposed by Government, clearly stipulated that a fully costed cross-departmental plan to address the climate and environment emergency would need to

[Sue Hayman]

be brought before this House within six months. The deadline is 1 November—just two weeks away—so will the Secretary of State confirm that her Government will meet that commitment and bring a plan back to the House before the end of the month?

Labour has been calling for cross-departmental co-ordination on the climate and environment emergency for years. The Government have finally listened, as we hear that the Prime Minister will chair a new Cabinet committee on climate change. There is possibly no one more ill-suited to this role than a Prime Minister with a history of climate denial, from a Tory Government who have dismantled the UK's solar and onshore wind industries, overseen a collapse in household energy savings measures and stalled the UK's progress on cutting emissions. This new committee must be transparent in the frequency and outcomes of its meetings, and it must focus on species decline and the restoration of our biodiversity, as well as climate change adaptation. However, a committee is not a plan of action. The Government were charged with bringing back a fully costed, cross-departmental plan to the House of Commons, and that is what we need to see. When it comes to tackling the biggest issue of our time, this is simply not good enough. The Government need to act on this, and act urgently.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): As colleagues can see, there is massive interest in this debate. I will therefore impose a four-minute time limit. It will apply after the Scottish National party Front-Bencher, but I am sure the next speaker will bear it in mind.

2.20 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Ind): I will, Madam Deputy Speaker. Every time I stand up in this House now I am conscious that it could be the last time I speak here, but if it is, I cannot think of a better subject. There is something worth celebrating: the degree of cross-party consensus on this global issue. Although there are different nuances as to what the solutions are, what more the Government should be doing and what the record of the other side was, we should think about what happens in the United States, where this is a deeply partisan issue that divides on political grounds. We must welcome the fact that we agree with so much of the science behind this.

This is an international problem; the United Kingdom is responsible for 1.2% of global emissions, whereas China is responsible for 27.5%. In recognising the international nature of the global problem that we face, I celebrate the Prime Minister's announcement at the United Nations General Assembly in New York of a doubling, to £11.6 billion, in our contribution to the international climate fund. We are helping other countries to achieve the level of decarbonisation that we have achieved here. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), who was the climate change Minister, told me that she would frequently sit in Council meetings in Brussels looking across the table at people talking nice talk about carbon emissions but not achieving even half of what this country has achieved since 1990.

We have decarbonised by 37% whereas France has done so by just 13% and Spain has actually increased its emissions over that period.

Yesterday, I met a senior member of Extinction Rebellion and when discussing things with him and many of his colleagues in recent weeks around this part of town I have tried to understand what is going on. Is it a revolution? Is it a movement? I am with them in spirit, but not in effect. My worry is this: our constituents are, broadly speaking, sympathetic to what ER wants to achieve, and what we are trying to achieve here in the new legislation and on the other subjects we talk about relating to climate change, but they will soon start to turn a tin ear to an organisation that stops people travelling by public transport. I know this is a wonderfully free-flowing, slightly anarchic organisation, and there is something glorious about seeing it, but there is also something deeply worrying if it is going to turn people we need to be supporting our cause away from it.

I wish to make one final point. The ambitions in the Environment Bill are very high indeed. I have been involved in some aspects of it, and I am pleased to see that it has survived mauling by other Departments, Bill Committees and all the things that usually weaken legislation, and that it is strong. I am sure it will be improved as it goes through its process. I shall leave the House with this thought: we face a global problem, and Britain is currently a leader in decarbonising, in ocean protection and in trying to address the declines in biodiversity, but if we do that just within England and the UK, we will have failed. We need to keep the international focus and make sure that we are working with others. I hope that I will have the chance to vote the Environment Bill into law before the next election.

2.24 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The climate emergency seems to be the kind of emergency where a lot gets said and a lot less gets done. We meet here in this leaking, cavernous, old museum to discuss this climate emergency while outside it people have been banned from protesting about the possible extinction of us as a species. That is an interesting juxtaposition—one to note for our memoirs, should any of us ever get to write them.

I was in Aberdeen at the weekend, for the social event of the season, of course. There is something about the granite that whispers about the enormous length of time that this planet has been spinning around, changing, developing and surviving. You get to thinking about the species that no longer exist, about how some of the extinction events were on a massive scale and about how no species is guaranteed to survive any of those events—that means us too, whether the protests have been banned or not. But we would never know it from looking at the political and governmental response—or inaction—to this emergency.

This is not something that has been sprung on us, either. It is not as though this is news that no one saw coming. The man with the cleft stick has not just arrived, out of breath and anxious, with the news that we are all stuffed. Rachel Carson wrote "Silent Spring" nearly 60 years ago—something that we mark as one of the base cases of the modern environmental movement, but she was not the first voice. George Perkins Marsh

spoke about the urban heat island effect and the greenhouse effect, and called for a more considered and sustainable development. That was in 1847, three weeks and 162 years ago. In his lecture, he commented that the ideas were not new even then and that he had borrowed them from Peter Pallas, a Prussian zoologist of the 18th century.

The Irish physicist John Tyndall proved the link between atmospheric carbon dioxide and the greenhouse effect in 1859. Later that century, 1896 to be precise, the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius calculated how much atmospheric carbon dioxide contributes to global warming and published the first calculation of the global warming effects of human emissions of CO₂. His work inspired the American Thomas Chamberlin, who published the next year on the CO₂ feedback loop that drove the ice ages and might now be driving us to a tipping point. In 1934, the US Weather Bureau issued its first analysis of temperature change, which inspired the Englishman Guy Callendar to analyse historical temperature records and calculate a half-degree warming between 1890 and 1935. From there, he built the theory that burning fuel increases atmospheric CO₂ and he coined the term “greenhouse effect” in 1938. In 1965, Lyndon Johnson’s Science Advisory Committee said that pollutants were causing climate change and time was running out to turn it round.

The science is not new; it has been there for 250 years or so. It has, for sure, been developing, but it is not some fad; it is not a crazy fashion that the kids are all getting down to. It is dusty old stuff from the history tomes. But here we are talking again about the climate emergency, and protestors have been banned from London. There is a massive irony in the failure of this UK Government to take any sort of effective action, in that the greatest hero for many of them would be Margaret Thatcher, and she was the first leader of a major state to call for action on climate change. The 1988 Toronto conference was treated to some stark evidence produced by scientists. Thatcher, perhaps because her training as a chemist made it easier for her to understand the language, took up the baton and issued the call. She said it was a key issue and her Government allocated additional funding to climate research. It was, however, mainly relabelled or redirected from elsewhere—they were Tories, after all. Thatcher made that call 31 years ago, yet here we are once again talking about the climate emergency and the protests are banned.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was established in 1988 and in 1990 issued its first report, which confirmed the past scientific findings and issued warnings for the future. Those warnings have continued ever since, but I am starting to wonder whether familiarity is breeding contempt, because the warnings are getting starker and the flash headlines are getting scarier, but the action is not getting any more urgent.

The Environment Bill, which we finally got a sniff of this week, appears to be a howler of a missed opportunity. Apart from the toil of reintroducing EU protections into UK legislation, it misses the chance to be ambitious and claim a future worth having. It promises net zero emissions in 31 years—so, incredibly, we are at the halfway point between Thatcher pledging that the UK would get serious about the environment and the Government actually doing something. If the captain of the Titanic had been warned about the iceberg well in advance and started a discussion about what to do that carried on long enough to watch the thing tear a

hole in the side of the ship, while the debate was still about which way to turn, he would be in about the same position we are in now. It is past time for talking and long past time that we should have been doing. It is time to inject a sense of urgency into the climate emergency.

The House can take it as read that the Scottish Government are doing things better, but this should not really be about party political point scoring or engaging in the constitutional debate. Let us see what the UK Government could offer to help to address the problems we all face. It is time the Government introduced some real measures to address the UK’s greenhouse gas output. They could copy Scotland by being guided by the Committee on Climate Change. Members may have heard of that committee; it was set up by the UK Government, although its calls to action are little heard by Whitehall. They are heard in Scotland, though, and the Scottish Parliament and Government have taken action. The climate change Act kicked off a serious attempt at addressing the problems, and it has not abated since. That is why the United Nations climate action conference will be in Glasgow next year.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, because it is important that she puts it on the record in this House that the measures taken in Scotland have been taken on the basis of cross-party consensus. Does she agree that the way we achieve our targets in this country in respect of net zero is by working together, rather than doling out dollops of sarcasm in the form of a speech?

Deidre Brock: Me, sarcastic? The very idea! I appreciate the cross-party nature of some of the talks in the Scottish Parliament—that is of course welcome—but at a time when the UK Government are suggesting putting up VAT on renewable technologies, including solar, wind, biomass and heat pumps, from 5% to 20%, I think there is still a lot more discussion to be had between the different parties.

Alan Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that if there is such cross-party support, it is ridiculous and shameful that the previous Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell), continued to block onshore wind in Scotland? That is not cross-party consensus; that is affecting investment in Scotland.

Deidre Brock: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. When it is still the cheapest of renewable energy technologies, it is shameful that onshore wind is excluded from competing for Government-supported contracts. I hope the Secretary of State is paying full attention to that point.

The United Nations climate action conference will be in Glasgow next year, and I understand that the Prime Minister wants to take a day trip to it for flag-waving purposes. May I advise him to take the train, not the plane, and to take the time to listen, rather than just bluster? He might even come away from it with some ideas to start implementing a plan to help with the problem that the world faces.

Perhaps the Whitehall mandarins could take a leaf out of Scotland’s books and work towards zero-carbon aviation. Scotland is decarbonising Highlands and Islands

[Deidre Brock]

Airports and working with Norway on electric trains. We all know that transport is the second-biggest dumper of greenhouse gases, because we have all read the IPCC report. The same source tells us that, in fact, road transport is even more of a problem than air transport. Nearly three quarters of transport emissions are road-based, while around a 10th are accounted for by aviation. It is everyday transport that we have to address. Where is the UK Government initiative to copy the Scottish Government in supporting the roll-out of electric charging stations? Where is the parallel commitment to phase out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars in the next dozen years?

The biggest greenhouse gas pest is electricity and heat production. Where are the incentives for renewable energy production? Not only are there no new incentives, but the old ones were taken away, and the costs of connecting Scotland's vibrant and growing renewable energy producers to the grid are far too high. When will we see Government action to address those issues?

As the shadow Secretary of State asked, given that there is a climate emergency, to which the UK Government have finally admitted, where is the ban on fracking? This unconventional source of gas is banned in Scotland because there is no good case to be made for it. In some parts of England it is damaging people's houses, impinging on their lives and possibly damaging their health. Get rid of it—it is a nuisance at best.

The Environment Bill, over which we will cast a jaundiced eye next week, seeks to embed in law the 25-year environment plan that was created under a previous Government. It was unambitious at the time, became rapidly outdated and is now a bit of a joke. Ministers should not withdraw it—we have wasted enough time already—but they should be prepared to make major changes to it during its progress through Parliament, and to accept amendments from others to make it something worth passing. I have a suggestion to offer that the Government and the Secretary of State can do relatively free of charge: why do they not invite the climate protesters into the room, ask them what they would put in the Bill, see whether they can get a bit of support in the House, and then pass something that is actually worth passing?

In closing, we all know that really doing something will not be easy. We know that it will entail changes in lifestyles that we have not yet properly considered. We can call it pain if we really must be dramatic about it, but if we do, we should at least compare it to the pain that comes from doing nothing. If not enough is done, some of the people who park their comfortable bahookies on these Benches might find themselves representing constituencies that start to disappear. Frankly, I do not expect the Government to make any real moves in the near future—if Brexit has taught us anything, it is that denial and delusion sit comfortably on the Government Benches—but I do hope that somewhere over on that side of the Chamber exists someone who will raise a questioning voice and ask whether it might be a good idea to do something. Who knows—there might even be a Thatcher fan who thinks that some action should be taken in her name. In the name of the wee man, though: it is a climate emergency, not a coffee morning. It is time to start acting like it is important. Talking is always good, but action is even better.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I call Neil Parish, with a four-minute limit.

2.37 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock).

I very much welcome the Secretary of State's speech and the Government's proposed Bills, especially the Environment Bill. It is high time that we pulled everything together to get the environment right. I wish to make a plea—the Secretary of State referred to this in answer to a question—relating to the agriculture Bill, on which we have done a great deal of work. Can we make sure that the food we produce, animal welfare and environmental qualities all work together? We should work those things not only into the agriculture Bill, but into the Environment Bill.

As far as the fishing Bill is concerned, we can not only gain more access to waters and fish, but do things a bit more like the Norwegians, who shut down overfished areas overnight and open up other areas if there is plenty of fish there. There are many benefits to managing our own waters. The common fisheries policy was very cumbersome, as was the common agricultural policy.

I welcome the idea of the Prime Minister's chairing a cross-Cabinet committee to deliver on and help with climate change. The air quality debates and inquiries that we have done with four Committees show that we all have to work across Departments and local government—everywhere—to create better air quality, especially in 43 hotspots throughout the country. It is essential that we take action, not only with our vehicles, but in everything we do, including by improving air quality for all our citizens.

In my role as Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I want to find practical solutions that continue to decarbonise our economy and protect the environment by using more renewable energy, but without harming businesses or reducing standards. Since 2010, the Conservative party has invested more than £52 billion in renewable energy. As a result, we now have enough solar power for 2 million homes and a world-leading offshore wind sector generating more offshore wind than the rest of the world combined, though one would not have thought so, listening to the Opposition.

I commend the Government for listening to the EFRA Committee and including climate change in the remit of the new Office for Environmental Protection, but it must be answerable to Parliament, it must be independent and it must not just be about judicial review, which is very often about process, not the targets we need to meet.

I welcome the announcement today that the Prime Minister is to chair a new Cabinet committee dedicated to climate change in order to cut emissions across Government. When we conducted our joint air quality inquiry, we did so across four departmental Select Committees to show the Government that action across Government was needed to cut those emissions. I do not want to go into too much detail on the environment Bill today, but let me repeat that the new OEP must be strong and independent.

We need more investment in home insulation and energy efficiency schemes so that we can use less energy in the first place. As one of the wealthiest developed nations, the UK must continue to lead from the front and to demonstrate best practice for clean growth in the world.

2.41 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the cross-party consensus around stronger action on climate change, but action there does need to be, including in the environment Bill. In 2006, as Labour's Housing Minister, I put forward a 10-year plan for zero-carbon homes by 2016, including a regulatory timetable, that was backed by the housing industry and environmental groups, but sadly it was ditched in 2013. We still need that stronger action to cut emissions from new and existing homes as part of our action on climate change.

I want to talk about the importance of public transport as part of our action to cut carbon emissions and the desperate need for more support for public transport in our towns, which was missing from the Government's agenda, but first I want to make a point about the Government's Brexit plans. It is deeply disappointing that the Government seem to be moving away from a Brexit deal with a customs union, rather than towards one, as that idea lost by only three votes in Parliament in the spring and is something that many Opposition Members have argued for. Fundamentally, we have to make a choice about what kind of trading nation we wanted to be: do we want our closest trading relationships to be with our nearest neighbours, through a customs union approach, and built on safeguards, standards and workers' rights, or do we instead, as the Government seem now to argue, want the price to be deregulation and an opening up of markets to the biggest global corporations, risking cuts in environmental standards and prioritising a deal with Trump's America?

Kerry McCarthy: I tried to intervene on the Secretary of State about this. I and the Chair of the Select Committee tabled new clauses 1 and 4 to the Agriculture Bill to say there should be no lowering of standards in any future trade deal, which I think was one reason why we did not see the Bill after last December. Does my right hon. Friend agree it is important that when the Bill comes back, such provisions are back in there?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want rising standards and support for higher standards. It is the only way to cut carbon emissions, support our environment and protect our workers' rights.

There is nothing in the Queen's Speech to address the serious challenges facing our towns and the unfair deal they are getting. We see that particularly in public transport. Our bus services have been cut and our trains, particularly across our northern towns, are still rubbish. We are not getting our fair share of investment. Billions of pounds is locked up in transport investment in our cities, while in Normanton we still have only one train an hour to Leeds, even though it is just half an hour away, and we still do not have disabled access at busy stations such as Pontefract Monkhill and Knottingley. We had the awful situation of a constituent in a wheelchair having to crawl over a bridge because the Government,

despite our requests, refused to fund the basic disabled access. Moreover, we still have rubbish Pacer trains and no proper plan for transport in our towns.

That compounds the wider problem of the growing gap between our cities and towns. Our towns, which have strong communities, are great places to live and are proud of their history, are getting an unfair deal, and Tory austerity has hit them harder. As public services budgets have been cut, many public services providers have pulled services out of towns altogether. We have lost libraries, sports centres, magistrates courts, police stations, fire stations, hospital services, maternity units, swimming pools, Sure Starts, jobcentres and council services, as so many of these services have shrunk back into the cities. We are supposed to travel to the nearest cities instead, but the public transport is not there, because bus services have been cut and the trains are inadequate.

Private sector investment, always pursuing economies of scale, is pulling in the same direction. Banks, ATMs and post offices in our towns have closed. The big cities and shopping centres may still be able to compete with Amazon, but our smaller town centres are struggling with business rates and parking charges, and having their heart taken out. The numbers of new jobs are growing twice as fast in the cities as in the towns, and as our town centres have shown, foreign direct investment in the cities is accelerating and our towns are not getting a fair deal. The Government's stronger towns fund is still a top-down approach and only reaches a certain number of towns. Areas still have to bid and most towns still lose out.

We need a proper industrial strategy for our towns, which is why the Labour party's approach of more investment in our towns, listening to towns and putting power back in towns is so important. We need towns to be at the top of the list, not the bottom, so that they can get our fair share of funding. We need public services back in our towns with a proper guarantee. We need a fair deal for Britain's towns.

2.47 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I welcome this Queen's Speech, but before I talk about the environmental measures in it, I want to show my support for a couple of other measures, particularly the serious violence Bill. Serious violence is a concern in all our communities, so the Government's action is really important. I also look forward to supporting the Domestic Abuse Bill. The regulation of internet companies is long overdue and I am proud that a Conservative Government are pressing ahead with that. I also welcome the good work plan, which is looking at new ways of modernising the workplace. I am sure that Ministers will be look carefully at shared parental leave, flexible working and outlawing maternity discrimination so that more and more of the 2 million women in this country who are economically inactive can get back into the workplace and be productive members of our economy.

The Environment Bill represents a real step change in what is available in this country for protecting our environment. All Members of Parliament are trying to ensure that we have the right balance in our constituencies between protecting our environment and fulfilling our ambitions to create strong, vibrant and successful communities. I think that the measures in the Bill will help us go further in achieving that.

[Mrs Maria Miller]

In particular, I want to bring to the fore measures intended to improve air and water quality and to help to restore habitats. In Basingstoke, we are already working on such measures, so we welcome further support. My local authority is already campaigning to clear the air at a very local level by outlawing idling engines, and our local county council is working with schoolchildren through the “My Journey Hampshire” programme to ensure that they are aware of what we can all do to improve air quality.

On water quality, I would like Ministers to consider what we have achieved in Basingstoke to clean up our River Loddon. By working with local water companies to reduce phosphate levels in the river, we have achieved a step change in phosphate concentrations. Our river is now on the boundary between moderate and good in relation to the water framework directive, and all that was achieved by working together in the community with our water companies.

Restoring habitats is also very important in my borough, which is 95% rural—my constituency is predominantly urban. We can achieve those restorations only as a result of the incredible work of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and the local catchment partnerships. We need to ensure that those organisations continue to get the support they need for the work they do. I am proud to have worked with the wildlife trust recently to undertake “pollinator promise” programmes with my local schools and communities, because that sort of thing can really raise awareness. I urge Ministers to consider what more can be done to support bus companies in areas such as Basingstoke to clean up their buses, to improve water quality through new technology and to restore habitats.

The Chineham Brownies asked me to mention that they applaud the Government’s plastics strategy and work to ensure that we reduce the use of plastics through a plastic deposit scheme. I urge Ministers to follow that programme through. My local authority has been named by Friends of the Earth as the fifth best local authority in England for tackling climate change. I am proud of that, but there is more to do.

2.51 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): In the summer, Parliament declared a climate emergency and required the Government to bring forward a cross-departmental plan of action. In July, Parliament agreed to amend the Climate Change Act 2008 target for greenhouse gas emissions from 80% by 2050 to net zero. The Minister at the time emphasised the importance of crafting new policies to address the change.

One might have thought that the Government would be hard at work doing that. One might have thought that there would be a lively understanding of the pitiful state of our emissions in relation to the task, even if Ministers are fond of telling us how well we have done previously in driving down emissions. As a country, we produced 428 million tonnes of CO₂ in 2018, so we will need permanently to cancel at least 12 million tonnes every single year if the net zero target is to be achieved in good time.

One might have thought that the Government would be hard at work anyway, in the light of that change to the legislation, addressing the manifest failings that they are experiencing in implementing existing targets under old legislation. Let us remember that the clean growth plan, introduced in October 2017 as a response to Parliament’s agreement to the fifth carbon budget, was, by its own admission, well short of meeting that budget, drawn up under the original 80% emissions target—equivalent to 141 megatonnes of CO₂, or a 9% overhang in admissions. One might have thought that addressing that manifest dereliction of duty and putting us back to the starting line for making the accelerated progress in emissions reduction that is an imperative under the net zero target would be a priority for the Government.

One might therefore have thought that the Queen’s Speech would set out a sturdy list of measures explaining how the Government will legislate to underpin this enhanced ambition and put us back in a position to take the urgent measures needed to meet our own and international targets. I am sure that Her Majesty the Queen anticipated being able to read out something like, “My Government will introduce a series of measures in this Parliament that will give effect to our agreed ambition of securing net zero emissions by 2050.” She might have added, “or even earlier.”

Well, there was no such luck. With the marginal exception of the Environment Bill, which is important but will not lead to much in the way of carbon emission reductions in its own right, instead what the Queen did read out bore no relation to that, except for the following phrase in the very last sentence of the speech, when she said that her Government

“will prioritise tackling climate change”.

I am sure that Her Majesty was far too polite even to conceive of articulating the thought, “Well, if that is so, how come there is not a hint of any actual priority being given in the 1,500 words I have just read out prior to the five words I now have to add on to my speech—almost, as it were, as an afterthought when it had been realised by someone who wrote the speech that nothing had been said about climate change up to that point?”

We have, after all, a different Government. It does not escape notice that some of those who were working the hardest in government to make a reality of our climate change ambitions are now not only out of government, but in a number of instances are out of the parliamentary Conservative party entirely. Perhaps it is just that the new Government do not think very much about climate change, but it would have been rather more honest to have said that, rather than doing nothing and then sticking five words at the end of the speech to assure us all that they are very serious about it all.

So what might a Queen’s Speech that did take climate change seriously have included? The Government might have brought in legislation to ensure that sales of internal combustion engine cars ceased by 2030. That measure alone would save us 98 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per annum from then onwards. They might have introduced legislation requiring all homes over the next 20 years to have available to them the means to become fully insulated and energy efficient. That would save about 100 megatonnes of CO₂ annually. They might have introduced legislation that set in motion the decarbonisation of heat in those homes, mandating

electrification of heat, the introduction of biogas into heating supply and hydrogen supply in urban circumstances. That would save about 50 megatonnes—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

2.55 pm

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): I welcome the Queen's Speech and some of the many measures that it contains. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for mentioning from the Front Bench the curlew—a bird that is the symbol of the Staffordshire Moorlands district. We are delighted to hear that it is going to be protected. Given the time limit, I will not go through the many elements of the Queen's Speech that I did want to cover. There is much that should be celebrated, and I am sure that we can get the cross-Chamber consensus that the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) spoke about to get these measures through.

I want to mention just two points that are particularly pertinent. The first is a subject that the right hon. Lady also mentioned, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller)—that is, buses. Rural buses in constituencies such as mine have suffered dreadfully over the past few years. Bus services and routes are being reduced or eliminated, and routes are going. This is not good for our towns and villages. Regular, clean buses make for vibrant towns and villages. May I ask that a real emphasis is put on ensuring that there is support for rural bus services, especially given the impact on climate change and carbon emissions in our rural areas?

Staffordshire Moorlands experiences a particular issue with regard to school transport provision. A recent case, which I have raised with the Transport Secretary, has meant that county councils are unable to allow children to travel on school buses if they are paying passengers unless those buses are fully disability compliant, because the payment for the empty space turns the bus into public transport. From next month, children in some villages in my constituency will be unable to get to school. A bus will leave their village with empty seats on it, and they will be unable to get on it, causing more carbon emissions as their parents have to find alternative arrangements. I urge the Government to look for some form of exemption in the short term for these county councils, and then to provide support for the county councils—this is an issue not just in Staffordshire—so that they can replace the buses with disability-compliant, green buses that will help us all.

My second point concerns the immigration Bill, and it is a subject with which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be very familiar: the rights of those people in Northern Ireland who identify as Irish. The Belfast/Good Friday agreement was in no way a result of both the United Kingdom and Ireland being members of the European Union; it would have happened anyway because of the determination and strength of resolve of so many people across Northern Ireland. But the fact that we were both members of the European Union meant that some issues regarding the rights of citizens did not need to be codified because the citizens' rights accrued to citizens of the European Union were accrued to everybody.

Those people in Northern Ireland who choose to identify as Irish—which they are absolutely entitled to do—are therefore now extremely concerned about how they will be able to maintain their Irish citizenship, living in Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, but not wanting to be British. I urge the Government to ensure that measures are included in the immigration Bill to ensure that those rights are respected and that people in Northern Ireland who choose to identify as Irish can continue to live in their homes as they have done for years and years—peacefully and happily, prospering after the Good Friday agreement and able to exercise their rights.

2.59 pm

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this debate today. There is no more important issue facing us than protecting the planet for future generations. We must test the measures in the Queen's Speech against their ability to effectively tackle climate change and ensure that they go beyond warm words. In the short time that I have, I want to raise a number of issues that emerge from the Queen's Speech.

It is good to see social care mentioned again in the Queen's Speech, but little precise information is available about how the Government intend to fund it adequately and to standards that uphold dignity in old age and are befitting of the 21st century. Given the huge delays to the social care Green Paper, the Government must set out in detail how they intend to fix the crisis in social care that is affecting many of our constituents. Labour has committed to ending zero-hours contracts, ensuring that carers are paid a real living wage, giving access to training and ending 15-minute care visits. As a start, the Government must commit to this also.

It is good that additional money is available for education, but it is not clear how it will be distributed. We need a new policy from the Government that will rebuild and refurbish schools that desperately need it, whether or not they are in areas of high growth.

It is interesting that the Government have somewhat belatedly turned their attention to the problems in the justice system. I have three prisons and a youth offending institution in my constituency, and perhaps know more than most the devastating impact that cuts to prisons over the past decade have had on staff and prisoner safety. Years of cuts to prison services have left our staff and prisons in an increasingly pressured and violent state. Prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and rates of self-harm among inmates are at record highs, and this must be addressed.

It is interesting that there is no mention in the Queen's Speech of specific issues facing women prisoners. We know that many women in prison should not be there, particularly those who have children or who are pregnant. Offender management policy needs to be reviewed, with much more emphasis placed on women's centres and less on sending women to prison, especially as the Government seem so reluctant to invest in the women's prison estate.

The Government have announced that they will publish a national infrastructure strategy to set out their plans in all areas of economic infrastructure. So far, so good, but how will this be delivered? Changes to building

[*Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods*]

regulations are long overdue to take on board the Hackitt review proposals for improving safety. The response to date from the Government has been too slow. I hope the changes to the regulatory framework can be made as quickly as possible. It is also amazing that the Queen's Speech contains no new measures to deliver the genuinely affordable housing that the country needs to address the housing crisis.

It is also interesting that there is a pensions Bill but nothing on WASPI—the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign. That is surely a disgrace. It is good to see that the Department for International Development will champion action on climate change and girls' education, but it will be able to do this only if its budget is not constantly raided or reduced. Finally, I would have liked to see more about how universities will benefit from more money going into science and technology, and what the Government intend to do about the Augar review of post-18 education and its impact on the future of university funding.

3.3 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Durham (*Dr Blackman-Woods*) and to hear her talk so movingly about prisons, which, as she knows, is a great interest of mine. However, climate change, as even I—and she, I think—would admit, is the most important issue we have to deal with at the moment.

As the smallholder, cider-maker and beekeeper, as well as farmer's daughter, that I am, this subject comes very naturally to me. I am thrilled to welcome the new Environment Bill, which is the first major legislation in this area for 20 years. It is interesting how this Bill looks to manage the impact of human activity on the environment. That is something we see a lot of locally. We are a very high-growth area in Banbury and Bicester. We are proud to top the leader board for new housing, and we are proud that at least some of that housing—not all yet, but we hope that it will be—is what is referred to as passive housing. We think that environmental standards can go hand in hand with good growth.

We are pleased with the east-west corridor. We are not nimbies. However, as the Secretary of State for Transport is in his place, let me say that I will continue to lobby on behalf of those of us who oppose High Speed 2 passionately. We are pleased to see the Oakervee review, and we hope that clear recommendations will come out of it. We oppose HS2 because we feel that the business case has never been satisfactorily made, but we are of course worried about environmental damage as well. I have always talked a great deal about ancient pasture and ancient woodland being important, and I am grateful to the Secretary of State for Transport for helping us to stop immediate works on ancient woodland. Once they are gone, we can never get them back.

On that note, I am the corn bunting species champion. There has been a 90% reduction in that creature in my lifetime because of loss of food sources. Once it has gone, it can never be got back, so I welcome the nature recovery strategies, which should assist with that. Everybody knows that I am a keen litter picker, because I make most colleagues join me annually on the Great British Spring Clean, so I will not go into that now.

In the time available to me, I would like to talk about today's announcement that the Prime Minister has managed to achieve a deal. It is great to be in this debate, where there is a lot of coming together across the green Benches. Climate change need not be a party political issue, and "MPs for a Deal", which I am proud to be involved with, has shown me that brave and principled Members from across the House are willing to come together in the national good.

I gently say to party leaders on both sides of the House that we are all stronger if we permit dissent. We survive in this country with broad church political parties, rather than endless coalitions. That is a strong and useful feature of our democracy. I cannot be the only one who is kept awake worrying about what will happen in the next fortnight. Counting "MPs for a Deal" members going through the Lobby in support of the deal is what helps me get to sleep. I have a dream—I think that line has been used before—which is that we pass a deal and move on to a world where HS2 phase 1 is cancelled, and we can all debate climate change.

3.7 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): There is so little time that I will just make one main point, and it is a very simple one: the Government should tell the truth on the climate crisis. Telling the truth on climate is one of the demands of Extinction Rebellion and the youth climate strikers. These are strange times indeed when telling the truth is a radical act, and yet on this issue, that is exactly what it is.

We could make a start by telling the truth about our climate record. Ministers regularly claim that greenhouse gas emissions have fallen in the UK by 42% since 1990. But that is not the whole truth, because the Government's own figures show that if we calculate emissions based on consumption over the past 20 years, our emissions have fallen by just 10%. That is relevant to the comparison with China made by the right hon. Member for Newbury (*Richard Benyon*), completely overlooking the fact that many of China's emissions are linked to producing goods that we then import. Of course, if we simply outsource our manufacturing, it is not surprising that our emissions appear to go down, but that is not a globally just and responsible attitude to emissions reduction.

What is more, historical reductions are no indicator of future progress. Coal is all but gone from the power sector, which means that the biggest source of reduction so far has now been exhausted, and there is little sign of the policy required to ensure that the necessary reductions continue.

The UK was the first member of the G7 to legislate for a net zero emissions target. I welcome that, of course, but other countries have more ambitious goals. Norway has committed to net zero by 2030, Finland by 2035, Iceland by 2040 and Sweden by 2045. My point is that 2050 is not global leadership. In an emergency, you do not dial 999 and ask for the emergency services to come in 30 years' time; you want them to come now, because the emergency is now.

A target on its own does not bring down emissions—action does. What does the Committee on Climate Change say about the Government's actual actions? In one of its most recent progress reports to Parliament, it states that

"actions to date have fallen short of what is needed for the previous targets and well short of those required for the net-zero target".

The Government of course know it, because their own projections show that we do not have policy in place to meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets and that the gap to meeting them is getting wider.

That matters not least because what is scientifically relevant is not just reaching net zero, but the amount of carbon emitted before we reach it. The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimate of the available global carbon budget for a 66% chance of remaining within 1.5° of warming is 420 gigatonnes of CO₂. Professor Tim Jackson from the University of Surrey has estimated that the UK's fair share of that remaining budget is just 2.5 gigatonnes. On current reduction trends, our production-based emissions will exceed our fair budget in 2026—in just seven years' time. Using consumption-based accounting, which I have argued is a fairer way of doing it, we would actually exhaust our available budget in 2023—in just four years' time. That means reaching net zero is not enough; we need deep carbon reductions in the next few years to stand a chance of staying within a safe and fair budget.

When the Government claim that they are acting with the required urgency, I think we need to bear in mind these stronger figures. When they say that they are going to bring forward action, we need to say that we need that action now. For example, they say they have a document on transport coming up, but we want action now: bring forward the ban on the sale of petrol cars and end aviation expansion now.

3.11 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): At the beginning of last year, I was moved when I visited Calais and listened to the stories of some of the refugees there who had been forced to move from their homelands against their will—some because of violence and conflict, some because of persecution, some because of a lack of jobs and some because of climate change.

It is now acknowledged that climate change is one of the biggest drivers of forced migration. Indeed, the European Union predicts a tripling of refugees for this reason by the end of the century, and the World Bank predicts 143 million climate migrants escaping crop failure, water insecurity and sea level rises. That is why it is essential that the UK's effort—not just, but primarily through our international development work—focuses on all these matters: on conflict, jobs, and climate change and the impact of climate change.

I regretted the fact that the Green Investment Bank was sold into the private sector. I thought that it was a great institution and could have been developed. That is why I would ask the Government to consider the introduction of a UK investment and development bank, which could put a lot of effort and money into tackling climate change both within the UK and indeed internationally, particularly in developing countries.

One of the most remarkable projects I visited when I was a member of the International Development Committee was the community forestry programme in Nepal, which has been going for more than 30 years. It is a combined effort of the British and Nepali Governments. What I saw there were forests right alongside cities that were not being cut down for firewood or charcoal, but being preserved and providing jobs because they were owned and managed by the community themselves. This

is something the Department for International Development should be proud of and should seek to establish in conjunction with local communities elsewhere in the world.

As the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Ethiopia, I have seen that country make remarkable progress in renewable energy—whether hydro, geothermal, solar or wind. In fact, it wants 100% of its energy production to be green. It is through the creation of green jobs, climate-smart agriculture and much else that we can tackle both the shortage of jobs in the developing world and help with the mitigation of climate change.

Locally, I very much agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) on the point she made about school buses. That needs to be tackled immediately, as does the lack of rural and town transport. There I agree very much with what the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) said about the importance of such transport to the development of towns.

As a party—I admit that I have been too slow to support this in the past for various reasons—we also need to push onshore wind, which is the cheapest form of energy. I ask the Government to look again at their attitude towards that, and indeed towards tidal. We must also look at planning regulations and at how we can encourage and perhaps legislate for new homes to have inbuilt solar panels and electrical charging points. All those things are much more expensive to retrofit than to put in new.

Finally, I welcome the inclusion of the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch in the Queen's Speech. I have seen the impact of a lack of concentration on patient safety in Stafford. Patient safety is critical, but this is not just about healthcare investigations; it is also about our culture, and I welcome the new culture on patient safety that I see now percolating through the NHS, particularly in Stafford.

3.13 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) who I believe is one of the few Conservative Members who gets the scale of the challenge before us. Most Members of the House agree that something needs to be done, but the difference between many Conservative Members and Labour Members comes down to the speed, scale and ambition of that challenge. For example, in 2017 the Government's manifesto stated that they would plant 11 million trees over five years in their efforts to challenge and tackle the climate crisis. Compare that with Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries in the world, which has just planted 350 million trees in 12 hours. That tells us everything we need to know about the Government's scale of ambition when it comes to tackling the climate crisis.

Jeremy Lefroy: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and Ethiopia has pledged to plant 4 billion trees in the next year.

Clive Lewis: You took the words out of my mouth.

Labour Members are committed to nothing less than the total transformation of our economy—not just how it works, but for whom it works. So many of us who

[Clive Lewis]

came into politics as Labour Members understand that the fight against the climate crisis is the fight against inequality. Why? Because we know that the poorest 50% of people in this country, and between countries, consume just 10% of the resources and emit just 10% of the carbon. The wealthiest 10% consume 50% of the resources and emit 50% of the carbon. It is therefore clear that the fight against climate change is also the fight against global and domestic inequality. The poor cannot give up what they do not have; they cannot give up carbon that they are not emitting. The people who can are those at the top—the top 10%; the top 1%. Those are the people who must give up their carbon and their use of resources.

My hon. Friend—I will call her that—the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has said that the Queen's Speech contained just six words about the environment, and there was not a single mention of the climate and ecological crisis facing our planet. That is hardly surprising, given this Government's track record on the climate emergency. We have had a green light for fracking, and fossil fuel subsidies have been boosted by billions. Onshore wind has been scrapped and solar support axed. The green homes scheme has been eviscerated, and zero-carbon homes abandoned. The Green Bank has been sold, Swansea tidal lagoon stuffed, and Heathrow expansion approved. After 10 years of that, the Government tell us to trust them to tackle the climate crisis, but many Labour Members, and many members of the public, are extremely sceptical about their claims.

Even though we face a climate and ecological crisis, that is not a collapse. This is a turning point—that is what a crisis is—and things may go one way or another. This is a crossroads. That is why Extinction Rebellion, youth climate strikers and all those who understand the scale and urgency of the issue are fighting so hard for the future. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion and I have introduced the green new deal, and why Labour Members are pushing forward the green industrial revolution. If that is to be the future for our economy, we need a transformation in our transport system, housing, heat and energy, and a complete modal shift in the way we live, work and consume. Let us take, for example, electric cars. We know that we cannot build 31 million electric cars. That is how many petrol and diesel cars there are on our roads. There is not enough cobalt on the planet for us to be able to build all those cars, so we will require a complete transformation of how we travel.

I will finish with a quote from someone who has already been mentioned today, Rachel Carson, the author of "Silent Spring". She was one of the first people to alert us to this environmental catastrophe. She said:

"Humankind is challenged as it has never been challenged before, to prove its mastery—not of nature, but of itself."

That is the challenge. Can the Government prove mastery not just of themselves but of their ability to tackle the climate crisis? It is time to get a grip.

3.20 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis). I recognise the passion with which he speaks about these issues and I share his concern.

I am pleased to be able to speak briefly today in this important debate. I very much welcome the measures contained in the Queen's Speech. Other Members have covered the urgency of the need to tackle climate change so I will not repeat that argument, but it is right that this place is prioritising climate change and it is right that our constituents continue to contact us about climate change. I believe that this Government are prioritising measures to address climate change.

The new Environment Bill will ensure that environmental principles are at the centre of every decision the Government take. Tackling climate change is one of the issues that Scotland's two Governments need to work on together. I believe they need to work better at it. The UK and the Scottish Governments are both world leaders in reacting to our climate change emergency, and they must continue their joined-up approach. That is why I was so disappointed by the opening speech by the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock). It was full of sarcasm and weak political point scoring, rather than recognising that both Governments need to work together on this issue. Our constituents expect us to work together and not engage in cheap party political point scoring.

It is important to acknowledge that the UK is a world leader in meeting the challenge of climate change face on. The UK was the first major economy to introduce legally binding long-term emissions targets and the first to announce a legally binding net zero target. We have cut emissions by more than 40% since and decarbonised faster than any other G20 country. We need to continue and step up those efforts, but they are remarkable achievements and as a nation we do not always give ourselves credit for them. I am optimistic that humanity will overcome this climate emergency. The way we will do that will not, I am afraid, be by spraying fake blood on Government buildings. It will be by changing our habits as a nation and through advances in technology: electric car battery improvements, advances in carbon capture and finding more sustainable ways of growing food.

Much of that work can start at home. I am pleased to see much going on in my own constituency in the Scottish borders. Scottish Borders Council, for example, has saved over 250,000 staff miles with its fleet of hybrid cars. Its newest high school, in Jedburgh, will be one of the first plastic-free schools in the UK. I have met community organisations such as A Greener Hawick and A Greener Melrose, which are passionate about encouraging people to live more sustainably. Alice and her team at Sea the Change in Eyemouth run beach cleans and outdoor explorer programmes, and organisations like Plastic Free Borders are sharing ideas about how to reduce the use of single use plastics. Such groups, which are encouraging changes in habit and capitalising on increased public awareness, have a huge role to play in how we tackle this emergency.

The final issue I want to raise is electric cars and how we ensure that every part of the country, particularly rural areas like those in the Scottish borders that I represent, can take advantage of them. I would very much like the UK and Scottish Governments to do more to ensure that all communities, regardless of whether they are rural or urban, have sufficient electric charging points to ensure that every resident who wishes to make the change to electric car use can do so.

3.24 pm

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Since I was first elected, I have received thousands of emails and letters about climate change—about animal extinction, air pollution and rising sea levels—but I am sure I speak for many of my colleagues when I say that the most heartbreaking letters that I receive are the ones from schoolchildren. It is the topic that children write to me about most often, and I have had letters from children as young as five. I shall quote just a couple.

Lila, who is eight, wrote to me in February:

“I am worried about higher sea levels, hurricanes and animals becoming extinct. We have written a list of things we can do to help. My sister is vegetarian and I do not eat red meat any more. My family are giving money to a reforestation programme”.

Jayda, from St James Hatcham Primary School, wrote to me in July:

“I have an idea to save the planet. People need to stop using plastic. They should use paper instead and recycle. Maybe we could plant more trees and we’ll have more oxygen as well”.

With the help of her teacher, Chiamaka, who is just five, wrote to me about flooding:

“I feel sad when I see floods and when people lose their houses. How can you help them?”

We are all terrified about the future of the planet, but it is children and future generations that will pay the price if we continue on this track. The UN predicts that by the time the children writing to me have left school and are starting jobs or university, global warming will be close to reaching 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels. Extreme heatwaves and floods will have become widespread. Wildfires will be more common. Fresh water availability will continue to fall, and droughts will have increased. By the time those children are my age, temperatures could have risen by 2° C. Melting icecaps, warming seas and deforestation could trigger a “hothouse” state—meaning that human actions will no longer have any impact on rising global temperatures.

By the time those children have retired and potentially have grandchildren of their own to worry about, the global temperature could be close to 4° C above pre-industrial levels. Two thirds of the world’s glaciers will have melted, increasing sea levels and drying up rivers across the world. Heatwaves will be intolerable and deserts will have stretched into much of Europe. The world’s population will be close to 11 billion and entire nations will be uninhabitable, triggering a migrant crisis on a scale we can barely apprehend.

The environment must be at the heart of economic and industrial policies. A Labour Government would drastically reduce greenhouse gases by investing in new green industries and technologies. Not only would that create thousands of new green jobs, but it would reduce our country’s carbon footprint.

I want to end by pointing out something that I have noticed about the letters that I get from the children, which usually have one thing in common: they are hopeful. They suggest ways that we can make a difference and they tell me about the changes they are making themselves—eating less meat; recycling; planting trees. The actions of individuals must be matched with bold actions from Government. We cannot let this generation down—the time to act is now

3.28 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft). I welcome the Queen’s Speech in its entirety.

I have raised environmental concerns on around 25 occasions in the past two years. From that you can deduce, Mr Deputy Speaker, that it is a subject that I feel very strongly about. Of course, this Government are already doing a great deal in relation to climate change, and I applaud them for that. As we have all been reminded today, the UK was the first country to raise climate change as an issue on the international stage. As a nation we have cut emissions faster than all other major economies, and we have quadrupled our use of renewable electricity sources in recent years. We can be proud of those efforts.

Nevertheless, the measures proposed in this Queen’s Speech lead me for the first time to feel truly optimistic about our future. I know that some of us would prefer even faster action, but these measures propose a sensible and sensitive approach to change. We cannot change an entire nation, replacing our power stations, gas boilers, every car, every bus, every train and every plane overnight, but we are on our way.

The Environment Bill contains useful measures for green governance, including the establishment of an office for environmental protection, more powers to tackle air pollution, and charges for certain single-use plastic items. We can look forward to legally binding targets for improvements in air and water quality, wildlife habitats, and waste and resource efficiency as part of the 25-year environment plan drawn up by the Government, supported by a “polluter pays” principle, which will allow us to restore the habitats in which plants and wildlife have an opportunity not simply to survive but to thrive. These are bold and welcome measures, and they cannot come soon enough. Mother Nature needs our help, and the Government will ensure that she receives it.

In tandem, the agriculture Bill will replace the common agricultural policy with a post-Brexit system of support that will reward farmers for encouraging biodiversity and access to the countryside rather than simply focusing on yield. I have spoken to young farmers in the last few weeks, at an agri innovation day event at Laigh Tarbeg Farm, Ochiltree—as ever, I thank the Watson family for their hospitality—and it is clear to me that they are ready to support that proposal. They are already embracing new technology to secure environmental protections.

The fisheries Bill will deal with an issue that is close to the heart of many of my constituents. The fishermen of our south-west coast fleet have been pressing me about it for some time, and I am glad that their persistence, and that of their colleagues around the UK, has paid off, particularly today. There will no longer be open access for foreign boats in British waters, which will not only support our fishing fleet but will help to restore species to more sustainable levels.

Let us view clean growth not as a burden on the economy, but as a boost to the economy. We can become a world leader in clean growth. As my colleagues and I have seen from our work on the Science and Technology Committee, that goal is entirely feasible and achievable. Let us, through the measures proposed in the Queen’s

[Bill Grant]

Speech, build on the progress that we have already made in recent years, and provide the certainty of a cleaner, greener future that the planet and the generations who will follow us so richly deserve. We must and we will put right the wrongs of the past.

3.31 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant).

Climate change is without doubt the most important issue that all of us face. We simply need to care about and look after our common home, our Mother Earth, better than we are at present. The damage, the harm, that we have inflicted on the Earth through our irresponsible behaviour and our abuse of the planet's natural resources has resulted in the climate emergency that we all now face. There is a global conversion to the realisation that the plundering of the natural resources of this Earth must cease. Individually and collectively, we are to blame for the mess that we are leaving behind. It is simply not good enough for us to leave it to future generations.

The Queen's Speech promises much, but for many it falls short on ambition. The behavioural change that we need to make, whether as individuals or as Governments, is the right thing to do, whether it is done by small business or a large multinational company. The destruction of the environment and the resulting climate change crisis are registering with people and businesses alike. The establishment of a social impact stock exchange bourse in Edinburgh is a great example of "moral money" being at the forefront of a new investor thinking by a new type of investor. It is no longer acceptable for companies and businesses to carry on as they have been. Our behaviour—the bad practices—is being righted bit by bit, and so it should be. The pollution, the waste and the throwaway culture are, we all hope, finally coming to an end. An impartial observer in the not too distant future may look back on our behaviour and ask, "Why did these people create such immense pile of filth on this beautiful planet?"

So what can we do? What actions can the Government take? The UK consumes 3.3 million tonnes of soy per annum, most of which is used as feed for the livestock that we consume, and 77% of which comes from areas in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay that are at a high risk of deforestation. The UK Government could halt that practice, and start to save the lungs of the world immediately. In contrast, the Scottish Government are now a world leader on climate change. Our ambitious targets have been set, and our climate change legislation is the most stringent in the world.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Mc Nally: No, I will not.

Roseanna Cunningham, Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, and other Cabinet Secretaries, have what it takes for long-term planning, and are changing minds to address climate change concerns. There was a charge on plastic

bags and a ban on the sale of plastic cotton buds, we have created the first deposit return scheme in the UK, and we have just announced that the Scottish Government will support the establishment of a Scottish office on climate change, taking the lead on behavioural change. We have introduced a new public transport initiative as well, to encourage better use of bus services, with £500 million being spent on a new bus infrastructure, making local journeys faster and greener—acting locally, leading globally.

The Scottish Government have listened to young people and are active in visiting towns and cities, listening to concerns about the planet's future, and they have established climate action towns. But I want to finish with my constituency of Falkirk. We are getting on with the day job; we are setting up a climate change school ambassadors network, and I am certain that these climate ambassadors will be in attendance to welcome the conference of the parties summit in Glasgow next year.

That is why so many colleagues in this place from all parties are all in agreement: we realise the responsibility to act now where we can have an impact. With that in mind I have arranged for the inaugural meeting of the all-party group on youth action and climate change to take place on 5 November at 11.30 am in Room P, Portcullis House. Its aim is to educate young people, to make voices on climate issues heard in this Parliament, and to provide a forum for young people to engage with parliamentarians and climate change experts.

3.35 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): It was encouraging that at the very outset of the Queen's Speech the Government committed to seize the opportunities for agriculture that will arise from leaving the European Union. Cheshire farmers support the Government's endeavours to obtain a good deal, but are deeply concerned about the possibility of no deal. They are concerned in particular about three areas: tariffs, welfare standards and farm labour. They want a deal to end the current uncertainty. An egg manufacturer in Congleton has bought in extra packaging three times now due to uncertainty. So they and I very much support the Prime Minister in his endeavours to achieve a deal.

With regard to tariffs, the UK dairy industry produces 14 billion litres of milk a year, of which 3.25 billion litres are exported to the EU. A dairy farmer said that if a deal cannot be achieved and milk exported to the EU attracts a tariff of around 40% while imported milk could attract no tariff at all, this would be unsustainable, saturating our milk markets and risking a collapse in milk prices. This could result in a milk price reduction of 1p or more per litre, which could cost a dairy farmer £20,000 a year—the difference between survival and closure.

The tariff on eggs being exported from the UK into Europe could be 19% in the event of no deal, whereas there would be no tariff on imports. An egg producer in my constituency fears a major flood on to the market of eggs, particularly dried eggs and eggs in products, which constitute almost 50% of egg sales and may not have been produced to the high welfare standards we have in this country. Farmers locally are saying the proposed tariffs could be damaging not only to farmers' livelihoods but to consumers' health if imports are not up to UK standards.

On the issue of farm labour, there is already a shortage of workers, for example in horticultural businesses. Farmers are concerned that the situation will be exacerbated unless it is addressed. Already, some horticultural crops cannot be harvested.

The pressure of those concerns and the current uncertainty is impacting on farmers' mental health. Farmers are our strongest environmentalists; without them we simply would not have the environment we enjoy, and it is interesting that the National Farmers Union target year for net zero carbon is 2040, not 2050. Government working together with farmers will be key to achieving such environmental targets, and farmers want to do so. Will Ministers meet me and Cheshire farmers to discuss that?

Finally, I regret to say that while I support my farmers, as a result my constituency office is to be targeted with a demonstration. It is a wholly inappropriate and relatively confined location for a demonstration, with a children's mental health charity opposite and a doctor's surgery next door, not to mention the potential impact on constituents visiting my surgeries and on my staff. The local Labour party activists who have organised this demonstration appear to have joined forces with those opposing the Government tuberculosis eradication strategy in Cheshire. Farmers in my constituency are experiencing the worst difficulties with TB in their cattle of anywhere in the county; it is a big problem to local farmers and is taking its toll financially and emotionally. In 2018, some 2,231 cows had to be put down in Cheshire because they were infected with TB. Culling has been effective in the Republic of Ireland, and a peer-reviewed scientific report published just this week and endorsed by DEFRA shows a 66% reduction in new TB rates in cattle after badger culling. Cheshire farmers support this, and I agree.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee, I have now been informed that a withdrawal agreement has been agreed. I have been to the Library to ask for a copy to indicate the difference between the document in my hand, which is from March 2019, and the new agreement. I put it on record that this is a matter of extreme importance to the United Kingdom and to our Parliament. We need a copy of the new withdrawal agreement at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I totally concur that we need hon. Members to know what is in the new document. The hon. Gentleman's point is on the record, and people will have heard it. Let us hope that the document is available very shortly.

3.40 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The climate emergency is real, and we must act now to get to net zero as soon as possible. While the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is warning of huge dangers to the planet, while our own Committee on Climate Change is reminding the Government that they are not even reaching their old target, while our young people are worrying about their future, and while climate protesters have been on our streets for the past two weeks, what is the Government's response to the crisis? Nothing. There was no mention in the Queen's Speech of how to get to net zero—not a line.

Unless we have a clear, decisive plan to decarbonise our energy, our heating, our travel, our food production and all our industries—including decarbonising capitalism—the planet will warm up to unsustainable levels. We will create huge global inequalities, displacement and possibly wars. We cannot just do business as usual. We need to act locally, nationally and internationally, and we need to act now.

But the Government have no plan. The energy White Paper was promised for more than a year, but it has now been dropped altogether—there was no mention of it in the Queen's Speech. There was only a warm-up of the Environment Bill, which lacks ambition, urgency and, most of all, measures to create a proper regulator to ensure that our environment is properly protected. What an utter failure from this Tory Government, and what a wake-up call to all climate change campaigners not to rely on this Tory Government for climate action.

In contrast, the Liberal Democrats have a proper, ambitious and realistic plan to cut most of our carbon emissions by 2030 and get to net zero by 2045. The power of the future is electricity from renewable energy, from which we can make hydrogen and other net-zero fuels. There will be no place for fossil fuels in our energy future. The Liberal Democrats would ban fracking now. Our target is to make 80% of our electricity from renewables by 2030. By 2030, we cannot be heating our homes with natural gas. Providing warm homes for all at a price that everybody can afford will be a big challenge. The priority for our Liberal Democrat Government will be to make all homes highly energy-efficient and to put an end to fuel poverty.

We will create a just transition commission to advise on how to deliver a net-zero economy that works for everyone, and just transition funds to support development in the regions and communities most affected by the transition. Surface transport is still the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, and volume has hardly fallen since 1990. Electricity is likely to be the power for cars, with hydrogen for heavier vehicles. There will be no sales of new petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030. We must ensure that the electric grid can deliver the additional power needed.

There are other sectors in which we do not yet have the solutions to get to net zero, such as by taking fossil fuels out of some industrial processes, aviation and agriculture. Where we cannot avoid carbon emissions completely, negative emissions technologies need to be in place. Nature has its own way to absorb emissions. We must re-wild our environment, and most of all we must plant millions of new trees. Our plan is to plant 60 million every year, which would be the biggest replanting project ever.

The Liberal Democrats are ready to face the climate emergency. We understand that getting to net zero is a challenge, but with the right political will and with a plan, we can tackle the climate crisis. We need climate action now. I ask the Government to publish their plan for getting to net zero as soon as possible.

3.44 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), but I have to say that while it is a great thing that we have generally seen more consensus on this issue in the

[James Cartlidge]

House recently, she and the hon. Members for Workington (Sue Hayman) and for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) have constantly made the point that the Government are doing nothing about climate change. That is a quite extraordinary accusation. We have just had the first ever quarter in history in which the energy produced from renewables exceeded that produced from fossil fuels. That is real; it is what happened in July, August and September this year for the first time ever.

I want to refer also to the speech made by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), whose passion on these matters I admire. She said that it was all well and good to have historical reductions in emissions, but I must point out that the 40% reduction since 1990 did not happen by magic. The biggest part of that—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith is speaking from a sedentary position. She would not take my intervention on Margaret Thatcher earlier, but the point is that the biggest part of that reduction, by far, was due to the move from coal to gas. The closure of the coal mines in this country was the single most divisive and bitter industrial dispute that this country has ever had. We know what happened in the miners' strike and what happened in the 1990s with the miners' march through central London. We did not want that to happen, and I say this with no relish, but it was a necessary policy to put through in the national interest. There is an idea that people can jump on top of a Jubilee line train or spray fake blood on Government buildings to cut CO₂ emissions, but it takes real action.

Alan Brown: I know that the hon. Gentleman is trying to wind Members up, but he knows that when Margaret Thatcher shut down our indigenous coalmines and imported coal from abroad, that was an ideological attack. It had nothing to do with a gas strategy, and he should tell the truth.

James Cartlidge: I was being generous in giving way but, with hindsight, perhaps I should not have been. The point is that coal use has definitively slumped massively and our CO₂ emissions have fallen massively.

The good news is that I do not think we will ever need to take such difficult, divisive decisions again, because of what is happening around our coasts, and particularly—I am proud to say this as a Suffolk MP—off the coast of East Anglia. Now, 52% of our 4 GW of offshore wind-produced electricity is coming from the East Anglian shore. This debate falls at a timely moment. Had it not been for the Supreme Court decision, I would have been able to speak, during the original planned Prorogation, at the launch of Norfolk & Suffolk Unlimited. That is a new enterprise from the New Anglia local enterprise partnership based in Norfolk and Suffolk to promote inward investment into our region and to promote exports. At the heart of that will be clean growth and a drive for even more wattage to come from offshore wind.

I have a question for Ministers. We are incredibly ambitious about seeing more growth, more jobs and more electricity being produced from offshore wind, but will he assure me that investment in the grid and support from the National Grid for the greater electricity output will be sustained? There needs to be a co-ordinated

strategy if we are to make the most of our potential off the coast of East Anglia and around the whole of the United Kingdom.

Having started back in the dark days of the miners' strike, I now have another positive thought for the House. Whenever I visit primary schools in my constituency, of which there are 40, I find it incredibly uplifting to see that the next generation is so besotted with this issue. My last four primary school visits were about the issues of waste, cutting down on plastic use and using renewable energy. I think that we can be positive and optimistic about the next generation. Seeing as I took an intervention, I am now going to wind up and give others a chance to speak. The picture that needs to be painted is very positive, and this Government have played a huge historic role in that, of which I am very proud. Now we need consensus so that we can continue with these positive measures.

3.49 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge). I start by echoing my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) in relation to the sentencing Bill. The Prime Minister boasted over the summer that the Government would create 10,000 more prison places, but we do not need them. We already lock up more prisoners than other European countries, and I hope that not a single one of those places will be for women and that the Government will stick with the female offender strategy that they published last year.

Greater Manchester is making good progress towards dealing with the climate emergency thanks to the initiatives of the Mayor and the combined authority. Our clean air, transport and industrial strategies will help to improve the climate in which we live, but we need the support of Government. We need help to plant more trees, and I particularly support the northern forest initiative promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). Manchester Friends of the Earth tells me that we need 11 million more trees in Greater Manchester, and I hope the Government will be able to assist. We also need help to remove polluting vehicles from our roads and to green our bus fleet, and we need help with scrappage schemes for older commercial vehicles, so I am pleased to see the Secretary of State for Transport in his place.

As others have said, climate change will have a disproportionate effect on the poorest, particularly in Greater Manchester due to our older and disproportionately poor-quality housing stock, which leaks heat into the outdoor environment. Fuel poverty is a real issue for us, yet fewer than half of houses that are currently energy inefficient will be brought up to efficiency standards by 2020, which is a particular problem in the private rented sector. I hope that the Government will come forward with a strategy that will not just improve the environment, but create green jobs, and improve health and wellbeing and children's development.

As others have said, the climate emergency will set up huge population displacement across the world, and the immigration Bill needs to set the foundations for how our response includes a system that affords people rights and dignity, and that meets the needs of business and employers. The Government say that they want to

introduce an Australian-style points system. That is a handy slogan, but what will it mean? After all, we have already tried a points-based system for tier 1 and tier 2 visas, but it was abandoned, so what will be different this time?

The Australian points-based system supports a young mobile labour force. Someone gets zero points if they are over 55 unless they have a partner under 45—I am afraid that that rules me out—but is that what we need here for our NHS, our social care sector or our university labs? While it is right to recognise the different labour needs of the UK's regions, what is most important for employers is ensuring that they have access to a pool of workers with the appropriate skills, which may not necessarily be demonstrated by formal qualifications. For individuals, the protection of workers' rights is paramount, so what assurances can the Government give us on that?

We cannot stop migration. Indeed, we should not want to. Migration has brought huge benefits to this country and will continue to do so. However, it must be accompanied by investment in the individuals who come to this country. We need to support the reunion of families and give them the opportunity to integrate, and we need them to be able to avoid destitution, including by affording asylum seekers the right to work. I conclude by asking Ministers to report to the House urgently on what is happening to the asylum and migration integration fund. It is crucial both for individuals who come to this country and for the communities in which they live, and the time to give us that information is rapidly running out.

3.52 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I begin by picking up where my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) left off by paying tribute to my younger constituents and their engagement on climate change. They want more ambition and more action, and they are engaging in the political process like no previous rising generation in my lifetime because they care passionately about the planet and the poorest people on it. They inspired me, so I decided to conduct a wider survey among my constituents on climate change, and I can report to the House that in Stirling we want our homes insulated, we want to use electric cars, we want public transport options, we want more trees planted, and we want our energy to come from clean sources. The people of Stirling want the UK to take a lead on decarbonisation and extend a helping hand to the rest of the world.

The Gracious Speech confirmed once again that this Government and this House are committed not only to the rhetoric of taking action on climate change, but to taking positive action to stem and mitigate the effects of the developing global crisis, but we need to do more. When the Prime Minister and the Chancellor talk about the need for an infrastructure revolution, they are right. We have shown that it is possible to decarbonise the economy and to have clean growth—it is not an either/or. However, we must invest in the reconfiguration of our national infrastructure. There has never been a greater need to get on with it, and there has never been a better time to make that investment. Investment in infrastructure is critical, which is why I hope the Chancellor will come forward with a proposal for a national infrastructure bank in the Budget early next month.

We need a national crusade to level up our housing stock to the highest energy efficiency standards. By every measurement, that is the right thing to do—for the environment, for our economy and, most importantly of all, for people and their wellbeing, especially the most vulnerable people in our society. Let us make housing an infrastructure priority. We need a national endeavour to insulate our homes and upgrade our electricity distribution network to meet future demand, and to put in place green measures to incentivise property owners to do the right things.

We need to see innovation in farm support payments, with a focus on both caring for the environment and the production of good food. Again, that is not an either/or. We need much more ambition, especially in England, to do much more tree planting. Let me be the first to say it: there are lessons for England in the ambition and delivery of what is happening in Scotland. I am proud of what we are doing in Scotland on a cross-party basis.

However, there is one thing I want to major on: we need more action across the UK on buses. I am delighted that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor are big on buses. I have long concluded that the deregulation of rural bus services was a mistake. Bus services in rural areas should be classified as an essential public good. We need to regulate bus services, especially in rural areas such as Stirling, to give rural communities proper public transport options. I could go on at length about the complete lack of anything approaching a bus service in the communities I serve. A bus service is a part of the connectivity matrix, as people need to be able to move around more freely. We cannot talk about being serious about net zero unless we invest more in low emission buses and making the bus a viable mode of public transport, as part of a joined-up public transport network.

I do not have anything like enough time to talk about the failures of Scotrail, under the stewardship of the Scottish National party, so I will conclude by saying how proud I am that we have managed to secure COP 26. It is going to happen in Glasgow, and what a magnificent opportunity for Scotland that is.

3.57 pm

Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) (Lab): The climate emergency will not be resolved with combustible cladding and insulation, and there is nothing in the Queen's Speech to offer alternatives or address the performance of insulation products. The decision to cover Grenfell Tower with cladding and insulation was less to do with energy saving than with an attempt to improve the tower's appearance—this is all on record. We are where we are, but will the Government ever bring forward plans to tackle energy use? The plans for a building safety regulator are fine as far as they go, but they do not go very far at all; after 28 months, this is a paltry response to a local, nationwide and worldwide problem. The announcement merited half a sentence in the Queen's Speech. Despite the hours spent by my community on campaigning, the sleepless nights and the crippling anxiety of many of them, the Government played snakes and ladders with them, and the end was pre-ordained. This announcement could have been made two years ago and we could have made some progress by now. Is this the best the Government can do?

The plan for a building safety regulator appears to be set up to fail. It has come about due to failings in the insulation and cladding industry, but there is nothing

[Emma Dent Coad]

here about energy saving performance. Some will see the announcement of the regulator as progress, but it could take years to implement. As we speak, the legal teams of worldwide corporations will be finding ways to circumvent whatever regulations we put in place. Whereas Arconic, Rydon and the like, in their international headquarters, have multi-million-pound legal protection, it is my neighbours who burned to death for the sake of appearance.

So let us ask some questions about this regulator. How will it function? Will it be proactive? What kind of funds will it have? Who will monitor its activities? Where some materials are banned, what will be the alternatives and where will they come from, particularly given that we have a world where we already have a shortage of building materials, particularly bricks. Many of the materials are sourced abroad, so how will we check that their quality comes up to our standards? Again, there is no mention of performance in any of this. The UK construction industry is already teetering on the brink of recession and there seems to be no awareness of that, let alone of the skills shortage to do the work that needs to be done.

Many professional organisations have responded to the announcement, including the Federation of Master Builders, the National Housing Federation, the Local Government Association, the London Fire Brigade and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, which has set up a worldwide organisation of 80 professional bodies that is setting standards that we can only dream the Government will catch up with eventually. The Royal Institute of British Architects has also been way ahead of the game, demanding sprinklers, alternative means of escape, fire alarms and a ban on combustible cladding.

Most of all, we come back to the issue of cheap materials. We need insulation with good energy performance, but where will the money come from? We cannot sacrifice safety to cost ever again. With a generation of poorly insulated social homes, we desperately need solutions. I will meet Fuel Poverty Action shortly, and I really do not know what to say to the group.

As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, on the 14th of every month, we join in our silent walk, in rain or snow. We did so on Monday, in the pouring rain, and people were saying, "Where are the voices of the dead? Where are the voices of their families and neighbours?" There is nothing for them. There is no way forward. How will we keep low-income families warm and safe in their homes? As it is, the plan is not only a huge disappointment in terms of safety and improving energy use and performance; it is a betrayal of everything we have fought for over the past 28 months.

4 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): I am in no doubt that all colleagues from all parties agree on the importance of taking action to halt and reverse the damaging effects of climate change. I am sure we are all delighted that that is one of the central messages of the Queen's Speech and that it will remain at the centre of our politics. The announcement of a new watchdog for environmental protection, with real teeth, is crucial, as

it will ensure that policy decisions at every level of government genuinely improve and protect our vital natural resources—air, land and water.

I am very proud of those in the Chichester community back home, as they are highly engaged with addressing climate change at every level. Chichester District Council has declared a climate emergency and is already developing plans to make our area greener. Just recently, the council received a grant to install new electric charging points throughout my constituency, and I thank the Secretary of State for that. I know that the council will appreciate the measures in the Environment Bill to improve air quality, which is critical to my constituents in Chichester and around Midhurst. Similarly, at every school I visit, the children I meet are passionate about the planet, and tackling climate change is their No. 1 priority.

We recently held an open meeting in Chichester, and a number of environmental groups came along. During that meeting, I was invited to visit a local Passivhaus. The house is a role model for low-energy living, with thick insulation and triple glazing. It is air-tight, draft-free and the best in class for efficiency. The houses look fantastic, and what will really sell them is the energy bill, which is less than £200 a year. More than 65,000 houses worldwide have now been built to this new standard, and we need many more in the UK. I fully support such an energy-efficient approach when it comes to addressing our future housing needs.

Education is also key. I recently visited Tuppenny Barn, a local charity that educates children about sustainable living, with a focus on growing, cooking and eating organic, ethical local produce. That is a theme I come across often among the farming community. One farm that I visited over the summer, the Woodhorn Group, has ambitious plans to be 100% carbon neutral by 2025, which would meet the calls of Extinction Rebellion and require moving even faster than the NFU target to be net zero by 2040. What was exciting was the farm's drive to instil sustainable practice and innovation in every element of the business, including the development of new cattle feed that reduces the amount of methane produced. There is much innovation in every sector, and I hope that, as we head towards spending 2.4% of GDP on research and development by 2027, a significant element of the Government's investment in R&D is used for sustainably focused projects.

I am proud of the UK's record as a leader in climate change. Times have changed. I come from a coalmining family: my grandfather was a coalminer. I can well remember going down the mine with him as a young girl and being absolutely appalled at the dirty and challenging environment in which he and his colleagues worked on a daily basis. I am encouraged by the fact that by 2025 we will have no coal-powered electricity in this country whatsoever. We will have transformed our energy economy in that short time.

I fear that some of those present are trying to make this a bit of a left/right issue. It is important that we do not do that. We, as politicians, have a duty to be honest and to set realistic goals we can deliver. Net carbon neutrality by 2025 is not achievable and there is no point setting a goal we cannot achieve. We would lose the public's support and score a spectacular own goal. We must, however, remain climate champions at every level, from the primary school children reusing their wrapping paper this Christmas to the Prime Minister

and the UK at COP 26 next year. The world rests on all our shoulders, and I am proud the UK will continue to lead the way.

4.4 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): On 1 May, the Labour Party, led ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), forced the Government to declare a climate emergency. The motion gave the Government six months to bring forward urgent proposals to restore our natural environment and deliver a circular zero-waste economy. Six months on, the clock is ticking, and what did we see in the Queen's Speech: piecemeal measures—some welcome—to tinker around the edges while the rate of climate change accelerates in the UK at an alarming rate.

This Queen's Speech was used for propaganda by the Conservative party. The Prime Minister promises the earth, but he will deliver nothing and continue to ignore the enormity of the threat. Obviously, recycling and plastic waste are important, but they are not the critical issues facing people in my constituency. We need urgent support and investment in energy-saving measures—in solar, heat and water heating—and in our housing stock. This is a massive infrastructure issue. It is also a massive opportunity to bring decent jobs to the people I represent, but it is being missed by the Government.

In Bristol South, my focus has always been on post-16 educational opportunities, health and housing. Those are the key things that matter to my constituents, some of whom face the greatest deprivation in this country. Transport—to get jobs to them and them to jobs—is the other key issue. They can all be improved with better policy proposals and investment, which could also help us to meet the climate change challenge, but the Government are not bringing forward any measures for them.

There are some measures that we can welcome in the Environment Bill. In particular, I and my Bristol colleagues welcome the location of the new office for environmental protection, but that body needs teeth. At the moment, it is not truly independent or set up to really hold the Government to account, so we have some concerns about that. I hope that it will bring decent jobs to my constituency and that it focuses on the issues I have identified, as this would help people, particularly those in fuel poverty and in poor-quality housing, to achieve the standards we desperately need to meet.

When I first entered this place in 2015, my surgery was full of young entrepreneurs in Bristol South who had had the legs cut out from under their businesses by the Government's changes to the infrastructure support, particularly for solar heating and so on. The Government have never supported businesses in Bristol South. I would really like to see them start to reverse that type of policy. Brexit dominates most of our debates at the moment. The idea that the Environment Secretary and the Prime Minister want stronger protections and greater investment in communities facing poverty, particularly fuel poverty, and the devastating effects of climate change is for the birds.

4.8 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I have two things to declare. First, I am the vice-chair of the all-party group on fair fuel for UK motorists and UK hauliers. Secondly, on a more personal note, I was recently diagnosed with

cough variant asthma, which was quite a shock. Eighteen months previously, I was climbing up the Mont Blanc stage of the Tour de France, and then I was in a Mongolian clinic—of all places—struggling for breath. There is nothing like being unable to breathe to bring home to you the truth, or at least the danger, that emissions pose to our environments, our society and the way we live our lives. It made me look into the subject more deeply.

As an MP representing one of the country's major car-making centres, I want to urge people when they talk about emissions to have an honest and rounded debate. We have to look at things scientifically and practically. We have to think about things in the round and find the right solutions. Unfortunately, companies that are genuinely trying to be at the forefront of reducing emissions, such as Jaguar Land Rover, sometimes face moves that could damage their business and be counterproductive to the green agenda and local taxes.

We would undoubtedly be in a much better place if previous Governments had not spent years encouraging drivers to switch to diesel, but we cannot escape the fact that millions did so in good faith, believing that they were making the responsible choice. Reducing the trade-in or resale value of their cars actually makes it harder for diesel drivers to transition to cleaner alternatives, and that risks keeping older and more polluting models on the road for longer.

We have to carry people with us. What we want to achieve is not strict denial or a luddite attitude towards the economy. Spain has seen an increase in emissions over the past 10 years, whereas since 1985 the UK has seen a reduction. That is the result of economic growth and technology. We have been a successful country during that time, and that is reflected in our environmental policy.

I share the Government's enthusiasm for the age of electric vehicles, which is surely coming, but Britain does not have anything like the infrastructure required for a rapid transition to widespread electric car use. Over the next decade, we will need to see a huge expansion in charge points and manufacturing capacity, not to mention ensuring that the national grid is ready for what could be a fundamental shift in demand. I speak regularly with car manufacturers, and I know that they are more than ready to play their part and invest, often exceptionally heavily, in the research and development programmes needed to make that a reality. But to do that they need stable revenues in the here and now, and that means a healthy market for cars, which we can build with today's technology and infrastructure. If Governments, of whichever hue, stamp too hard on the accelerator, they risk stalling progress towards electric cars altogether.

This is by no means a counsel of despair. As I mentioned, diesel engines have made huge strides. We have the Euro 6 engines, for example, and last year *What Car?* magazine named a diesel car as "car of the year". There are real opportunities in the near term to harness technology and dial down emissions.

Meanwhile, there is plenty of action that the Government can take in other areas to bring down harmful emissions in the here and now. Two areas that warrant special mention are construction and mass transit. Retrofitting older buses and lorries with cleaner engines would

[Julian Knight]

make a significant contribution to reducing emissions, but without penalising ordinary motorists or auto manufacturers.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I am afraid that I have to reduce the time limit to three minutes, because otherwise it will not be possible to get everybody in.

4.12 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): The Members sitting on the Government Benches look comfortable, unruffled and complacent, while the Extinction Rebellion protests are being fiercely suppressed on the streets just outside this House. Amnesty International has called this move “chilling and unlawful”. The Government seem unbothered by September’s UN report that waters are rising, ice is melting, and species, including pathogens, are moving.

The Government can point to successes started under Labour, such as cheaper offshore wind and the phasing out of coal, but they are failing in imagination, they are failing in ambition, and they are failing because they think they are acting fast enough, but they are not. I implore them to be braver in their policy making if they are going to bring forward solutions commensurate with the climate challenge.

The Committee on Climate Change—the Government’s own advisers—wrote recently that the Government had completed only one of their 25 headline policy actions, and on 10 of them they had not even made partial progress. The report goes on to say that the policy gap has widened and the Government are going backwards. The Government have no right to be complacent, given that they are going to miss their own climate change targets. We are scientifically sure that this will cost millions of lives globally.

In the short time available, I will talk about what we need to achieve. I will start with energy. Why are we seeing an effective ban on onshore wind in England? Why is the new solar smart export not guaranteeing surety of income or contracts? Why are we seeing solar projects being cancelled right across the country? Why are we not seeing a fracking ban?

The flipside of that is demand. Why are we not seeing a big roll-out of super insulation across the country? Why are so many homes still leaky? That is just in one sector, but in other sectors the same problems abound.

Transport emissions increased by 1% last year. Where is the cycling infrastructure? Why is bus patronage dropping? Why is the train still so expensive that people choose to use their cars? One of the largest sources of transport emissions is aviation. The Prime Minister himself said that he was going to lie in front of the bulldozers at Heathrow, but we have seen no evidence of the Government acting against aviation. Seventy per cent. of all flights are taken by 15% of the people; the Government need to introduce a frequent flyer tax to start rolling that back.

If the Government are worried about public support, they should stop suppressing Extinction Rebellion and the youth climate strikers, and start listening to them.

They should make citizens’ assemblies, test the ideas, learn from the people and engage with them in a positive way. My final message is: stop the complacency; act ambitiously.

4.15 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), I went outside to meet Extinction Rebellion. It was not very difficult to find somebody who was intelligent and with whom I could have a meaningful conversation, which has to contrast with some of the others we have seen in the press, who have defaced buildings and chained themselves to tube carriages. As a result of that meeting I was given a tree, which I took back to my constituency. I have worked with the local climate action group in one village, who are helping me to find somewhere to plant the tree, and I think that is an important thing to be able to say. I also bring a request to the House from somebody who was at the climate action group meeting that I attended—that this House has a meat-free day. Now that I have passed on the request, I hope the idea will be picked up.

One of the things that we often forget about climate change is that it needs to be tackled at an international level. We have heard about the amount of money that the Government have made available to help countries overseas to tackle the issue, but I am also a delegate at the Council of Europe, which has shown me the value of cross-party co-operation. I have been involved in debates there on climate change with Members of the Opposition, including Lord Prescott. Let us not forget that Lord Prescott was involved in producing the Kyoto climate agreement—right at the beginning of the process. He and I have spent many a long time talking about and supporting the Paris agreement and the agreements made in Marrakesh, all of which are important for tackling climate change at a global level.

Allow me to mention technology in the context of the national infrastructure strategy. If we are going to judge the impact of things such as roads, it is important that we do so with reference to tomorrow’s technology or the technology that will exist at the time such infrastructure is built, rather than today’s technology. Driverless electric cars are not part of tomorrow’s technology; they are part of today’s. Driverless cars are being made at the Culham Science Centre in my constituency and are running around Oxford now, as we speak. In fact, some are about to make a journey from Oxford to London and back again as part of the demonstration of that project.

The last point I will mention is that at the Council of Europe we heard about New Zealand admitting climate refugees, and that is something that we should bear in mind.

4.18 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (LD): I welcome this opportunity to speak on the inclusion of the Environment Bill in the Queen’s Speech. The commitments to improving air quality, restoring nature and transforming waste management are certainly long overdue. I particularly welcome the proposals for improving water quality and securing the resilience of water supply. I am hugely disappointed, however, by the powers available

for the proposed new office of environmental protection. At present, the Government can be taken to the European Court of Justice if they fail to meet their legal obligations to the environment. Under the proposals in the Bill, these rights are significantly reduced. Judicial review is not a satisfactory replacement for the rights we currently enjoy.

My principal concern remains the lack of Government commitment to tackling the climate emergency in the round. This demands action on a range of measures if we are to meet the 2050 target, but the detail on achieving that remains vague. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Government's approach to water resilience. Yes, the Environment Bill promises to improve water quality and to secure resilient water services in the long term, but I just do not think the Government are taking the challenge seriously enough. Parts of the country are already suffering water stress. In March, the chief executive of the Environment Agency warned that if we do not act now, within the next 25 years the UK will be facing "the jaws of death". In the context of climate change and projected population increases, we face not just a climate emergency but a water emergency, and we must act to tackle both. The need for action amounts to much more than building new hard infrastructure, and it is also about much more than tackling leakage; it is about looking at water in a holistic way.

I am not convinced that the Government will act comprehensively to tackle the water emergency. Their current consultation on reform of building regulations, for example, does nothing to promise higher water efficiency standards. When will it be understood that tackling climate change is not just about energy efficiency? We also need a road map for retro-fitting the domestic housing stock in the context of both energy and water efficiency.

The Government's Bill is vague on other key water issues. Improving water resilience demands better management of surface water, and yet we still have no statutory compulsion to use sustainable drainage for new developments, and no commitment to developing rainwater or greywater harvesting, or to a per capita consumption target for water. It is this absence of a comprehensive approach to securing water resilience that makes me so sceptical of the measures in the Environment Bill. Targets are great, but they need to be backed by concrete commitments and plans to deliver the changes necessary.

4.21 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith).

I welcome many things within the Queen's Speech, but particularly the theme of preparing the country for life outside the EU. My constituents in Rugby and Bulkington will be delighted by the progress made today, which means that they can see the light at the end of the tunnel in the negotiations with the EU. That enables the referendum to be respected and provides some certainty, but also, very importantly for my constituency, retains close trading links with our European partners that would be lost if we left with no deal.

In respect of the provisions on climate and the environment, I am very supportive of the Government's policy commitment to get to net zero emissions by 2050,

but that needs to be proportionate. I hear calls from Opposition Members to bring these targets forward—there is almost a bidding war—but they need to be reasonable, proportionate and achievable. We really do need to think long and hard about the effects of decarbonisation, particularly on our transport, and the move to electric heating of our buildings.

Transport infrastructure is a very important issue. I note that the Transport Secretary is in his place. He is a great advocate of electric vehicles, but he will know all about range anxiety. I must share with him that I was absolutely horrified to discover that a brand new motorway service area being built in Rugby at junction 1 of the M6 was originally proposed to have only two electric charging stations as a consequence of lack of capacity within the grid. Intervention and shouting and talking to people mean that it will open in the middle of the summer with 22 charging points, but even that is lacking in ambition. Given that this is the halfway point between London and Manchester where people will want to stop and charge their cars, we need to provide that facility.

We need to consider reinforcing the grid in respect of heating our buildings. There is a weakness in the way that we redevelop the infrastructure. We need to make certain that there is sufficient power to do all the things we want to do. We will be able to do something on vehicles by using smart metering technology to encourage people to charge overnight if they want to be able to heat their homes when they return from work. On power generation, I hope that the Government will look once again at tidal power. We have fabulous knowledge and expertise in Rugby at GE Energy, and I am hopeful that tidal lagoons will be reconsidered.

I have a whole range of issues to raise in respect of the Environment Bill. I will clearly now have to save my defence of plastic packaging for the Second Reading debate next week.

4.24 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It does not say much about the self-proclaimed world leader in climate change that there are no definitive proposals in the Queen's Speech on this subject. We still await a long overdue White Paper on energy policy. We need to recognise that it was a Tory Government who pulled the plug on carbon capture at Peterhead, but meanwhile, all 2050 zero emissions projections rely on carbon capture.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): My hon. Friend is talking about carbon capture. Does he agree that, instead of wasting billions of pounds of the public's money on new nuclear, the Government should be investing in projects like St Fergus, which in a very few years could be storing at least 5.7 gigatonnes of carbon, or 150 times Scotland's 2016 emissions?

Alan Brown: I agree wholeheartedly. The Government should be moving heaven and earth to get these carbon capture schemes up and running, making use of redundant North sea oil assets and taking advantage of the skills base in the oil and gas industry, which can be transferred over. It is ridiculous that we have a nuclear sector deal but no sector deal for marine or tidal energy. There should be a focus on those too.

[Alan Brown]

This is a Government who continue to block onshore wind. At the last auction, offshore wind was £40 per megawatt-hour, so it is madness not to allow onshore wind to bid in the contracts for difference auction process. A RenewableUK report by Vivid Economics estimates that new onshore wind projects in Scotland will create more than 2,000 jobs by 2035, so why did the previous Scottish Secretary fail Scotland by blocking those jobs and that investment in environmentally friendly projects?

Meanwhile, as my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) said, this Government still have a nuclear obsession. Hinkley has a strike rate of £92.50 per megawatt-hour for a 35-year concession. It is sucking money away from other projects that will count towards tackling climate change. Given that the UK Government pledged to respond to the National Infrastructure Commission this autumn, I hope a Minister will confirm that they will take on board the recommendation of abandoning new nuclear in favour of renewables.

With onshore and offshore prices at an all-time low, it is time that the UK Government considered the UK supply chain when it comes to the licensing process of the CfD auctions. Rather than concentrating on price only, bids should also be considered in terms of quality and added value if using local suppliers. Not only could that allow greater continuity of work for yards such as BiFab and suppliers such as CS Wind in Campbeltown, but it avoids the absurdness of bringing kit in from around the world when we are trying to clamp down on climate change and emissions.

Another National Infrastructure Commission recommendation is that there should be an energy efficiency infrastructure programme, which it is estimated could reduce home energy demand by up to 25%. Scotland already has an energy efficiency programme, with the programme and energy advice set-ups complemented by not only the industry but the third sector. Wales is also doing its bit. When will the UK Government invest directly in home energy efficiency measures?

Heat accounts for approximately one third of greenhouse gas emissions, which shows not only the value of energy efficiency measures but the need for a long-overdue strategy to decarbonise heat. I co-chaired a cross-party inquiry that produced a report on heat decarbonisation. I have the report here, printed by Policy Connect and Carbon Connect. I really recommend it to the House, because it contains recommendations that the Government will have to adopt.

Another simple measure related to transport is the introduction of E10 fuels. Cars are designed to run on E10, and the Department for Transport estimates that it reduces vehicle CO₂ emissions by 2%, so why prevaricate? The Government should get on with it and make it mandatory.

Our environment can be improved with tree planting. The Scottish Government lead the way on that, and it is another measure that the UK Government need to step up to the plate on. Scotland has the most ambitious targets in the world with regard to climate change. We cannot afford to be dragged down by the UK Government's inaction.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I beg colleagues not to take interventions, which increases their time. If they do, the Member who is meant to speak last will not get to speak at all, which is just not fair.

4.29 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): We have heard lots about what we have not achieved, but it is worth pointing out that in the last two weeks the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has sold at auction the ability to deliver a quarter of our energy from wind power by 2025, so that is good news.

In Cornwall, and on Scilly in particular, we have the smart islands initiative. It is not new; it was in the industrial strategy. It is a commitment to understand how we can generate energy and use the electricity generated by renewable means in all our homes and everywhere else. We have had a geothermal project announced at the Eden Project this week, and we have £23.5 million to get our buses working in a greener and much more effective way in Cornwall.

I am delighted that the Environment Bill was in the Queen's Speech. I had a debate in April calling on the Government to bring it forward, and I am glad it was there. The ambition for nature recovery is fantastic. It has the potential of improving lives and neighbourhoods in every corner of our nation. I am the species champion for the Manx shearwater. It is an example of how, when we bring people together to work together—in this case, to get rid of rats and litter, because these are ground-nesting birds—we enhance nature. Nature recovery is a really good opportunity to bring communities together in a united cause.

Adequately addressing the climate change crisis requires some joined-up thinking, so I am glad that the Prime Minister is to chair the new Cabinet Committee on Climate Change.

The Government—again, this has not been said this afternoon—have set out ambitious infrastructure investment commitments for public services and ambitious plans to decarbonise the existing the Government estate. Will the Government work in harmony between Departments to make sure that infrastructure investment and decarbonisation are done together? Across this Parliament, we work in offices that are far too hot, so we open all the windows. There is an enormous amount of work to be done in Parliament, as there is in the NHS, the Government estate, local government, fire services, schools and the police. With all infrastructure, we must make sure that as we invest in it, we decarbonise it. That will improve the Government estate, reduce carbon emissions, reduce the running costs of buildings and contribute to the skills agenda.

On the subject of skills, one way to skill up people across the country is to get on top of the situation with homes and make sure that new legislation is brought forward quickly to ensure that new homes are carbon neutral. We cannot continue to build homes that are leaky and inefficient. We must also properly retrofit our homes so that we can reduce their carbon footprint, improve people's lives and reduce pressure on health and social care.

In my last 20 seconds, let me say that smart meters are a critical part of making sure that we use energy more efficiently. If everyone—every business and every home—had a smart meter, it is estimated that we would reduce the demand for energy by 11%. Alongside that, a piece of equipment has been designed to combust our rubbish in our own home. It is called the HERU, and it enables us never to have to take waste away from home.

4.32 pm

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker,

“There is no planet B.”

These are not my words; they are the words of eight-year-old Poppy from Portsmouth. We owe it to Poppy and others across our country to ensure the planet we pass on is fit for the future. We see our children take to the streets, giving up their school attendance for politicians’ attention. However, the perception that this is a problem for future generations could not be further from the truth. It is affecting people now, and none more so than the people of Portsmouth. As the British Heart Foundation has warned, harmful pollutants in my city are breaching World Health Organisation limits, meaning that due to the poor air quality the 11,000 people with a heart condition living in Portsmouth South are at far greater risk. It is no wonder that the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has described this illegal air pollution crisis as a “public health emergency”.

It is not just air pollution that must be addressed. As a coastal community, people in my city disproportionately bear the brunt of climate change. The report by the IPCC said that if we do not act to stop a temperature increase of more than 2° C, we will see severe coastal flooding. In my city, the local authority is engaged in a programme of building the largest sea defence scheme this nation has ever seen. Without it, nearly 9,000 residential properties, 800 commercial buildings and millions of pounds-worth of essential infrastructure run the risk of ruin.

But it is not all doom and gloom. On 1 May, Labour forced the Government to agree to the UK Parliament becoming the first in the world to declare a climate emergency. With that trailblazing motion, pressure was rightly applied to force the Government to bring forward urgent proposals. Last year, Labour published plans for a green transformation, in which we set out how we would decarbonise our economy. That has been followed by exciting policy announcements, such as the promise to build 37 new wind farms and a fleet of 30,000 electric vehicles for hire.

The mildly technical nature and distant-sounding threat of climate change may not be enough to invoke people to come out fighting from their beds, but pretty much all of us would do so to protect our loved ones, homes and livelihoods, and to build a better planet. The Government owe it to young people such as Poppy from Portsmouth to tackle this priority once and for all.

4.34 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The next time a young person asks me how seriously Parliament takes climate change I will struggle to answer, given that this morning we ate into our time with a discussion on pornography, followed by a debate about whether we

should have a debate on Saturday. When Parliament starts providing a proportion of its time that is commensurate with the importance of the issues out there in the country at large, those people will have more respect and regard for us and what we do.

It is a great shame that we have not had more time to discuss climate change, because so much progress was made by all three mainstream political parties when they were in government. Emissions have reduced by 44% since the 1990s, for which we credit the Labour Government. Since 2010, the proportion of renewables in our energy supply has gone from 4% to almost 40%, and we can credit the Liberal Democrats and the coalition Government for that, as well as this Conservative Government. We are making great strides, and we have the best record on emissions of all G20 countries. When we speak to young people it is important to reassure them that we are on a good road, but that we need to do more and must not be complacent. It is also important to debate this issue with the transport sector, because 33% of our carbon dioxide emissions come from that.

There are reasons to be positive. Through the Transport Committee I had the pleasure of visiting Porterbrook, and its amazing engineer, Helen Simpson, who has a real passion for the environment and for getting more women into engineering. Together with the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education at the University of Birmingham, she has come up with the first retrofitted hydrogen train. That is a green train; that is the future for this country. Indeed, it is not just about this country, because we can sell our industry to other countries, making them greener in our one planet, and making our economy better in this country. I fully support that.

I am also excited about the airline industry. I am a supporter of Heathrow expansion, but the future of air travel should involve solar or battery power, and we should look to a time when at least short-haul flights can be green. I do not believe that we have to slow our economy down; I believe that if we grow the economy and unleash our great innovators, entrepreneurs and engineers, we will not only fix climate issues in this country but be a groundbreaker for the rest of the world.

4.37 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It has been galling this afternoon to listen to Government Members welcome the environmental commitments in the Gracious Speech as a step change in our commitment to the environment. In reality, those commitments are partial and incomplete, and they sit in the context of a decade of failure and a climate emergency. We already have legally binding carbon reduction targets, and the Government are failing to meet them—indeed, we are currently predicted to miss the fourth and fifth carbon budgets.

The Government are still investing billions of pounds in fossil fuel extraction overseas, when an emergency demands that fossil fuels are kept in the ground. They have announced a paltry package of measures in response to intense public pressure and anxiety about their failure to act. The Gracious Speech ignores the Government’s utter complacency, and nowhere is that more evident than in relation to the built environment. Some 14% of

[Helen Hayes]

UK carbon emissions come from residential buildings, yet over the past 10 years, the Government have scrapped the zero-carbon homes programme, which means that every new home currently being built is a lost opportunity to deliver carbon reductions.

The removal of subsidies for domestic solar power has all but halted the installation of solar panels by private individual homeowners. The introduction and then closure, just two years later, of the disastrous green deal for retrofitting, means that next to no progress has been made on reducing carbon emissions from existing homes. There is no programme to reduce our reliance on gas to heat our homes, and one in 10 UK households are still living in fuel poverty. Deregulation of the planning system has reduced the quality of many new homes, as well as the quantum of new urban green space being built alongside new homes.

Finally, the Government talk in the Gracious Speech about a world-leading approach, but the UK is already world-leading because of our role in the EU. Within the EU, we have helped to weight the balance of power towards greater ambition on climate change, and we will have helped to push EU states that are reluctant to do more. If we leave the EU, that ability to lead will be lost and the UK will be stuck between a European Union where we have no seat at the table and the America of Donald Trump, one of the greatest climate vandals of our time. Dressing up some minimalist commitments after 10 years of failure and negligence, in a policy context in which whatever we do will be diminished by Brexit, is simply not an adequate response to an emergency.

4.40 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Air quality is an issue of huge importance to my constituents in Lewisham East, to London and to the country. It is a key part of efforts to tackle the climate emergency. The concentration of nitrogen dioxide in the air in many areas of my community exceeds World Health Organisation standards, which are designed to protect us. People living in London's most deprived areas and disadvantaged communities are, on average, exposed to a quarter more nitrogen dioxide than others. According to the British Health Foundation, air pollution is now linked to 36,000 deaths a year nationwide. That is tragic.

Lewisham Council is due to trial school streets, which is a pilot scheme in Lee Green in my constituency to reduce air pollution and traffic congestion around several schools in the area. Last month, I visited Brindishe Lee primary school to meet the local community, teachers and children who closed the road near their school for a car-free day. It was an absolute joy to see them playing and enjoying their local street outside their school. The Mayor of London's ultra low emission zone will improve air quality, meaning that by 2025 there will be no primary or secondary schools in areas exceeding legal high quality limits. That means the gap in quality between high and low-income areas of London will be reduced by a significant 71%. The Government need to support that, however, with new air quality laws.

Earlier this week, the Government published their Environment Bill. Some of its content was welcome, but there were few details on the Government's apparently ambitious air quality target. If, as the Government

constantly claim, leaving the European Union will be an opportunity to legislate better, why have they have not proudly announced that measures in one of their flagship Bills will exceed existing EU standards? Why do they fail to take advantage of the opportunity to reach the higher standards set by the WHO? Why does the proposed new watchdog move backwards on measures designed to enforce these targets, such as fines? The Government must not shift the responsibility to local authorities while continuing to cut funding to avoid the difficult decisions.

The Government are not moving far or fast enough to improve our air quality and protect our children. I have marched, I have visited, and I have spoken at a number of climate change and air quality events across my constituency. We are passionate about this issue. In many cases it is children, the next generation, who are leading the way for cleaner air. Let us make it easier for them.

4.43 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): There is little dispute that we are living in a climate crisis. If serious action is not agreed on and embedded soon, we will reach a tipping point where it will be impossible to reverse global temperature rises. We know that those who will suffer most from a lack of action on the environment will be those who are least well off. Whether they are farmers in low-lying Bangladesh hit by flash floods or children in cities growing up breathing polluted air, the poorest are hit hardest by our lack of action.

I recently met the children at Belmont primary school in Chiswick during their amazing climate awareness week. They are already urging their parents to switch energy providers to renewable sources and to use their cars less, but however much individual households change their habits, change needs to start from the top. To have any hope of achieving net zero by 2050 we need clear Government targets now.

No issue is more totemic than transport. It is responsible for 27% of greenhouse gas emissions, yet the sector is the slowest in addressing emissions. Replacing all petrol and diesel vehicles with electric will not scratch the surface of the challenge. Also, how can we make a difference when it is far cheaper to fly 400 km than to travel that distance by train? I am disappointed that the Queen's Speech mentioned no legislation to cut transport emissions.

If the Government want to take one simple step towards the carbon target for the UK, they can scrap the third runway proposal for Heathrow. That scheme means an additional 6 million tonnes of CO₂. Yet Government figures show that the net economic benefit of the scheme is zero. Seventy per cent. of UK flights are made by just 15% of the population. Runway 3 is not even being built to fulfil business needs, as international business travel is flatlining. Almost all the additional passengers at Heathrow after expansion will be UK-based people taking leisure flights abroad—and those are Department for Transport figures. Yesterday, the Government rejected the recommendation of the Committee on Climate Change, which had said that they should assess their airport capacity strategy in the context of net zero. The Government's response stated that the matter should instead be addressed by the UN.

Zero-emission planes will not come on stream until 2050 at the earliest—far too late to address aviation’s disproportionate impact on UK emissions. In other words, in the UK’s response, the Government are not accepting responsibility for getting UK aviation emissions down to net zero. They say they may do so “at a later date”. That is deeply disappointing.

Cycling and walking can also make a significant contribution to cuts in air pollution and carbon emissions. People young and old regularly tell me that they want to cycle more but feel unsafe doing so. That needs ring-fenced capital funding for segregated cycle paths, and safe crossings for those on foot or riding bicycles.

4.46 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): We have had a thoughtful, well-informed debate, with some excellent contributions, but sadly the Government are in denial about the most important issue of our time. Warm words from Ministers do not change the fact that this Queen’s Speech included only six words about climate change, thrown in as an afterthought. Earlier this year Parliament declared a climate emergency, but the Conservative Party again went missing, failing to back Labour’s motion committing the Government to act in the face of an impending catastrophe. The policies of this Government to delay action on climate change are condemning our children and grandchildren to a more dangerous and insecure world.

Transport is the UK’s single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions and the worst-performing sector when it comes to reducing carbon emissions. What is more, there has been a rising trend in emissions in recent years. A Labour Government will, from day one, align the priorities of the Department for Transport with our commitment to tackle climate change.

Under my leadership, I want the Department for Transport to set a carbon budget that is consistent with the aspirations of the Paris agreement. We will reallocate departmental spending to achieve the changes required. What that means in practice for policy development is a shift away from modes of transport that are dependent on fossil fuels and towards sustainable modes.

The failure to tackle transport emissions is the result of deliberate Conservative Government policy, which encourages traffic growth through an ever-expanding multibillion-pound programme of road building. At the same time, public transport subsidies have been slashed. To reverse that trend, Labour will oversee a radical shift of resources towards public transport, as well as cycling and walking, along with an acceleration of the transition from diesel and petrol to electric vehicles.

Even since Parliament declared a climate emergency, the Government have continued to boast that they are investing more than ever in England’s major road network. That colossal road-building programme is environmentally unsustainable, and will drive traffic growth and create congestion, failing even on its own terms. Worse still, the Government plan to spend all the vehicle excise duty revenue—almost £30 billion—on building new motorways. Labour would instead hypothecate that money into a sustainable transport fund to improve buses, rail, cycling and walking.

More journeys are made on buses than on any other form of public transport, but colossal cuts to bus budgets have caused a 10% decline in patronage in England

outside London, leading to over 3,000 routes being cut and withdrawn. That attack on bus services is leaving people and communities isolated and increasing car dependency. So we will also give funds for free travel for under-25s to local authorities that bring local services under public control or ownership—*[Interruption.]* I am glad you like it. That will also transform services and deliver significant environmental benefits.

Labour’s policy of nationalising the railways is also central to our plans to boost public transport use. Tinkering around the edges of a broken system will not suffice. Public ownership will allow for improvements to increase patronage which are frustrated under privatisation, such as reforming fares and ticketing to create a simple, easy-to-use system that can be integrated with other modes of transport. We would commit ourselves to a long-term vision of upgrades and improvements, including major projects such as a £39 billion Crossrail for the north to connect and transform the economies of the north of England. Labour has said that it would cap fares at inflation, but I believe that we can and should go further.

The role that cycling and walking can play in modal shift is underappreciated. Indeed, under Government plans, spending on cycling in England outside London is set to fall to 37p per person per head in 2020-21. Were the UK to achieve the same cycling culture and levels of infrastructure as the Netherlands, we could reduce greenhouse gas emissions from car travel by as much as a third. There must be significant investment in cycling infrastructure to develop dense, continuous networks of cycle paths that are physically separated from traffic. That will include building cycling and pedestrian bridges or tunnels, because cycling should be for the many, not just the brave. Cycling and walking ought to be a priority at every level of government, which would mean an end to developments planned around car use to the exclusion of sustainable transport. The Labour party understands the strategic importance of cycling in driving down emissions.

Reducing the number of car journeys by improving public and sustainable transport is the priority, but research shows that that alone is not enough to meet emission targets. No country in the world has a less ambitious date for the phasing out of vehicles with internal combustion engines than the UK; 2040 is too late, so Labour will work towards a 2030 phase-out, and will give industry the investment and support that it needs to make that transition. Those plans and future announcements are central to Labour’s green industrial revolution.

I voted against the expansion of Heathrow because it would ignore the climate crisis. When anti-expansion campaigners challenged the plans in the High Court, they argued that the Government had acted unlawfully by not considering the Paris climate change agreement. However, the court ruled that while the Government had ratified the agreement, it did not form part of UK law. It is a disgrace that the Government signed it while forcing through policies that they knew would cause the UK to miss its targets.

The Government are condemning the country to economic stagnation and a climate crisis. The Labour party has a plan to deliver a green industrial revolution to address the climate crisis and revitalise our economy. By improving public transport, investing in active travel

[*Andy McDonald*]

and decarbonising road transport, Labour will create transport networks that are sustainable, encourage economic development and create a more socially just society. I am tremendously proud of the way in which the Labour movement is rising to the challenge of the climate crisis, in contrast to the defeatism of the Conservative party, and I cannot wait to deliver our programme in government.

4.53 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): This has been a very good debate. While it was kicked off by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, it has also dealt with many of the transport issues that concern me daily. However, we could have been forgiven for thinking that we were living in a parallel universe, having listened to the concerns expressed by some Members in what I thought should have been a much more consensual debate. After all, the House voted very strongly for net-zero emissions by 2050.

Members suggest that nothing has happened, but this is the only major country—the only major economy—that has legislated for net-zero emissions. Last year, this country generated more than half its electricity from low and zero-carbon means. Since we came to power in 2010, 99% of all the solar power available in this country has been installed. We have already ruled that there will be an end to petrol and diesel vehicles by 2040, and I am sure that many Opposition Members are already driving electric vehicles. Some of my hon. Friends have also expressed concern about that date. I am, as an electric car driver, investigating bringing that date forward, but we have to be considerate of the jobs in the supply chain in which there is already investment for the next period of production. As a responsible Government, unlike Members who just want to barrack over the Dispatch Box, we realise we have to balance these things in order to make them happen. I encourage everyone across the House to get an electric car. Range anxiety has now been tackled because there are now more charging locations than petrol stations in this country.

Nitrous oxides have fallen by over a quarter since 2010. We have reduced the use of single-use plastic bags by 90% since we took action on them. This year, for the first time ever in this country, we had over two weeks in which we burnt no coal to generate our energy. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we will be phasing out those coal stations altogether by 2025. We are the country with the most offshore wind farms in the world. Opposition Members repeatedly talked about the Queen's Speech containing only six words about the environment, but they seem to have forgotten that there is an entire Environment Bill, which will contain thousands of words and be the subject of hours of debate, quite rightly, as it is the first Environment Bill before the House for 30 years.

I want to cover some of the comments raised, many of which were very good. The hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (*Angela Smith*) asked about the Office for Environmental Protection. Its role will be to provide scrutiny and advice, and to offer an up-to-date system for complaints. It will be the delivery mechanism for environmental law and will also enforce delivery.

Angela Smith rose—

Grant Shapps: I will not take an intervention as I have only three or four minutes to get through everybody else's contributions.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (*Deidre Brock*) asked what we have done to support renewable energy through incentives. Well, there is the £557 million on contracts for difference, the £900 million of public funds for innovation, the £177 million to reduce the costs of renewables, including innovation and offshore wind, and the £3 billion to support low-carbon innovation in the UK up to 2021. Madam Deputy Speaker, what have the Romans ever done for us?

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (*Alan Brown*) asked about the National Infrastructure Commission's recommendations. The next steps of the national infrastructure assessment will be to agree on the Government's programme.

Members on both sides of the House expressed concern about the speed at which we can move to a decarbonised transport economy. I disagree with the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (*Ruth Cadbury*) that simply decarbonising vehicles would do nothing. That is simply not true; we have already heard that 33% of all our CO₂ comes from transport and 90% of that comes from vehicles, so it is clearly the case that decarbonising will make a very big difference, and that is not technology we have to wait for. The phrase she used was "scratch the surface", which I disagree with; it would do far more than that.

A number of hon. Members talked passionately about the need to decarbonise our housing; as a former Housing Minister, I entirely agree. This Government are taking that very seriously, including through the ending of gas to power our homes, for example. As a number of my hon. and right hon. Friends mentioned, it is now perfectly possible to power a home without the need for any power input other than ground-source heating.

Angela Smith rose—

Grant Shapps: I will not give way. As I said, I only have a minute to deal with many colleagues' contributions.

I do think that the way forward is to ensure that we build homes to a quality where we do not require external heating other than things such as solar water or ground-source heating.

The overall picture that was painted by some Members, during what I thought was an otherwise excellent debate, tended to go to the negatives. There are a lot of things to do, and this country and this Government have recognised them. Only today, the Prime Minister said that he will chair a Committee to tackle the issues—our first Cabinet Sub-Committee on climate change. Only yesterday, I published a decarbonisation plan for transport. I am not sure how many Opposition Members have read it, but it was difficult to get it published, because somebody was trying to chisel the front window of the Department for Transport.

I think the best contribution was from eight-year-old Poppy, who said that there is no planet B. We absolutely agree.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(James Morris.)

Debate to be resumed on Monday 21 October.

Eden Project North (Morecambe)

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

5 pm

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): This is yet another momentous day for the people of Morecambe in our quest to get the Eden Project to our shores. This debate follows our last successful Adjournment debate on 6 June.

The Eden Project is now at a critical stage. With this internationally significant project for Morecambe and the north-west region, the site is an area of international environmental importance. Morecambe bay is a designated Ramsar site, as it is the largest continuous intertidal area in Britain; it is also a special area of conservation and within a special protection area. It is key to environmental studies in Britain.

Local funding partners, the county council, Lancashire local enterprise partnership, the city council and Lancaster University are leading investment, with the involvement of Lancaster and Morecambe College to train a future workforce for the future in green initiatives in the Morecambe and Lancaster area. Stakeholder progress is well under way: I can exclusively confirm that the city council and all the other stakeholders that I mentioned are now in agreement and that the process for releasing the land required for building, along with further millions in funding to Eden, will begin when the proposal to the Treasury is taken forward. On that condition, part-funding will come forward from Eden and from central Government, and the land can then be released. The land allocation is welcomed by Eden, in line with what has been reflected in public consultations with it. Indeed, responses to my own survey are still arriving in my office, reinforcing the fact that thousands of people locally and throughout our Lancaster and Morecambe area would like to see the Eden Project become a reality.

The imminent Budget provides the opportunity for a signal that further demonstrates, on top of the £100,000 in the last Budget, the Government's commitment to this game-changing project. I have had repeated meetings with the CEO of Eden, David Harland, and with the Chancellor; further meetings with the Treasury are ongoing. Lancashire and Eden will collectively lead, but the Government's commitment is now vital to create a genuinely transformational project for my area.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a strong case for Eden of the north. I was very touched by his comments about Morecambe bay, but he forgot to mention one thing: quite how stunning it is. I might be biased—I was born on one side of it, and now I live on the other—but it is the most beautiful part of the country. Does he agree that Eden Project North has the potential to transform not just the Morecambe bay area, but the whole north-west economy? The proposed visitor numbers are not small. Would he like to tell us more?

David Morris: I thank the hon. Lady for describing so eloquently the beauty of our area; she is right. Environmental, economic and social transformation is required on the back of the M6 link road, which was started in 2013. The road has proven to be an economic

catalyst for Morecambe, but we now need the Eden Project to complement the existing investment and regenerate the immediate Morecambe area.

The recent case for investment in a report undertaken by Grant Thornton and submitted to the Minister, the Chancellor and even the Prime Minister has provided compelling evidence for Government investment. For every £1 invested, £4.20 will be returned to the immediate regional economy, including the creation of 6,500 jobs in the district and supply chain, with a further £116 million net contribution to the local GDP every year. This is further reinforced by the Eden Project's operational expertise, which has proven to be such a catalyst for the south-west regional economy during the last 20 years of the Eden Project in Cornwall, creating economic vibrancy and confidence. Eden Project North will be a destination of pride for the north-west and a new anchor of destination from which further growth in employment and skills can and will flow.

It is universally agreed across government that the green agenda must be addressed, and it will be at the forefront of any policies in the future. Government backing for Eden Project North will demonstrate that commitment. In the current climate in this country, the project is also a symbol that says that optimism, ecology, education and community have a place in our future planning. A clear direction from the Government to support the plan will ensure that it will remain on track to open in late spring 2023. That will bring benefits that will lift Morecambe up to full employment and prosperity and will have results beyond the economic areas for health and wellbeing, enhanced education and new skills development, not just for the Morecambe area but for Lancaster as well.

Bluntly, what is needed is for the Government to contribute in the region of £40 million to £50 million in funding, in lesser blocks to be secured, to ensure the opening in spring 2023. At this stage of development, the proposal is estimated at a complete total of £101 million, of which £1.1 million has already been committed in equal parts by the four commissioning partners: roughly £250,000 each from Lancaster City Council, Lancashire County Council, the Lancashire local enterprise partnership and Lancaster University, plus the £100,000 that was allocated in the last Budget by the Chancellor.

Cat Smith: The hon. Gentleman is making a strong case for the collaboration that is truly going on to try to make Eden Project North happen. I hope that he can see, while he is reading his speech, that the Minister is making some very positive nods of the head. I hope that means that the Minister has his cheque book ready to ensure that the project can be delivered. The hon. Gentleman has made some points about the different stakeholders that are involved, but he has also touched on the green agenda. Does he agree that First Group, which now has the franchise for the west coast main line, should also be part of the conversation, to ensure that public transport solutions for getting to Eden Project North become a reality? We do not want more cars on our roads in Lancaster and Morecambe.

David Morris: I totally agree with the hon. Lady. From what I can gather, this issue is being dealt with by the planning office at Lancaster City Hall as well. She is

[David Morris]

correct to say that we need better infrastructure in the area to accommodate the large demand when the Eden centre is built.

The commissioning partners have also committed to funding circa £2.3 million to fund the completion of the concept design phase, which will ensure that the project submits a planning application by spring 2020. In essence, Lancashire will lead if the Government confirm their commitment. Following Treasury approval of £100,000 in the autumn Budget 2018, an additional investment of £40 million to £50 million is being sought, closely linked to the wider industrial strategy for the region. A further announcement of investment commitment at the autumn Budget in 2019 is critical to progressing this project.

Eden Project North will be a catalyst to drive regeneration for Morecambe and the wider area, and not just for the Morecambe and Lancaster area but for the wider north-west economy. This can be done. Since opening in 2001, the Eden Project in Cornwall has contributed £2 billion to the economy of Devon and Cornwall. This proposal is in line with Government policy for seaside town regeneration and with environmental policies, with the Government's 2050 plan, with the national tourism strategy and with the northern powerhouse policy. It will be a high-quality, year-round attraction and wet weather destination—a crowd-puller that engages all ages.

Eden Project North shares much with the hugely successful Eden Project in Cornwall, but the difference is that it will be a sustainable and transformative marine-based, ticketed, eco-park attraction. At its heart will be a large indoor environment housed within iconic pavilions, building on the Eden Project's particular mix of entertainment and education, leaving visitors with lasting memories and driving positive behavioural change, which everybody in this House will welcome.

As in Cornwall, Eden Project North will combine exhibits, performance, learning, play, immersive experiences, world-class horticulture and art, and food, beverage and retail spaces—all integrated as essential parts of the overall experience. With nearly 20 years of operational expertise, we are blessed that Eden is coming to Morecambe. The design will include specific zones housed in a series of mussel-shaped domes that will be linked together by an entrance known as the bay hall. Above the hall will be an environment filled with plants and art exhibits, showcasing natural abundance and the rhythms of life linked to the sun and the tidal flow. Below the hall will be immersive theatrical experiences that bring the lunar rhythms and tides to life. The natural sanctuary area will focus on the health-giving aspects of the seaside, with bookable wellbeing treatments. The natural observatory area will be the home of the Eden Project North's research and education programmes. Eden also has plans to create, in time, satellite elements on the promenade that runs along the seafront, which will be a major game changer in Morecambe.

Owing to the link road, Morecambe is now the quickest route to the coast anywhere off the M6. According to Eden's founder, Tim Smit, the link road is the reason why Eden came to Morecambe. Market analysis has identified a catchment of approximately 11 million

people within two hours of Morecambe that will support annual visitors of 760,000 to the project—a conservative estimate at this moment in time.

Cat Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is not just about the population who live in the area? The Lake district, which is just up the road from both our constituencies, will also offer plenty of visitors who could visit Eden Project North.

David Morris: Very well said. The two-hour catchment area could probably stretch all the way from Glasgow over to Yorkshire and the Humber and to Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham. The potential for our area will be vast. The consequent direct and indirect economic benefits will further be sustained by repeated school visits, year in, year out, from that catchment area. Eden Project North will be a financially sustainable, revenue-generating social enterprise and a long-term employment anchor for the region. As I have said, the project will create 6,500 jobs in Lancaster and Morecambe.

The proven integration of research facilities and activities is a pioneering model of partnership between communities and academia. The college and the university have memorandums of understanding right now with Eden to provide a workforce that could create the Aberdeen effect and gospelise the whole world with what they will be learning in the Morecambe bay area.

In conclusion, I would like the Minister to indicate the Government's commitment to capital investment for Eden Project North and, in doing so, signal that Lancashire can be confident in leading the scheme through to a planning application submission in spring 2020. The Minister has been to Morecambe on many occasions, but I want to give him an open invitation. Perhaps he can bring along our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has indicated that he would like to come to Morecambe for a picture with the Eric Morecambe statue. We have a lot going for us in the Morecambe and Lancaster area, and we now need to sweat our assets of the link road, the beauty of the bay and—dare I say?—the city of Lancaster itself. Minister, please help us to make Eden a reality.

5.14 pm

The Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth (Jake Berry): What a brilliant debate, Madam Deputy Speaker; isn't it fantastic to have a Parliament for the north, with all of us, except you and the Government Whip, representing north-west constituencies? While we are here to talk about the Eden Project, we may as well push a few other of our pet projects in the north-west of England. As a Lancastrian, I am delighted to have the opportunity to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris), whom I congratulate on securing this debate.

One can travel anywhere in Lancashire and find that because of the support of partners, including the local enterprise partnership, Lancashire County Council, Lancaster City Council and Morecambe itself, people are really starting to talk about this hugely exciting opportunity we have in the north-west of England and, more importantly, in Lancashire to have the Eden of the north. It is great that this project enjoys cross-party support, because wherever one goes, one finds that

people are excited and passionate about driving forward Lancashire's economy and they want to see this project delivered.

Of course, this is not the only thing that is happening in Morecambe. I am delighted that we have constructed the new link road with the M6, which is a significant driver of the economy. My hon. Friend has really campaigned on behalf of his constituents, as has the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), to transform the west coast of Lancashire, and I hope and believe that this can be the next project that drives the economy forward. Since the inception of this project, he has shown a dedication to the vision, and it is a bold vision; if someone were to approach an MP in their constituency and say, "I want to build giant mussel shells on the sand looking out to sea," the MP could, if they were a doubter or they did not have the vision and passion of my hon. Friend, think that that person may be pulling their leg. But of course they are not, because the Eden Project has a track record of delivering these inspiring structures and inspiring the next generation about helping our environment.

Of course, more is happening in Morecambe, and I was delighted that it has recently secured the funding to go forward to the next phase of the Government's future high streets fund. I was particularly pleased that in the last round of coastal community funding we were also able to support the Winter Gardens to have a new central heating system, which will transform it to a year-round venue. My hon. Friend is no stranger to the Winter Gardens, because he has a long history of supporting it. I believe I am correct in saying that he appeared there playing a guitar with members of Whitesnake—you may be a fan, Madam Deputy Speaker—to raise funds for the Morecambe Winter Gardens in its darker days, before we managed to support it with the coastal communities fund. He is passionate and he has a record to be proud of in his constituency, and I know he is valued by local residents from my many visits to the area.

I recognise, as do the Government, that the Eden Project North is not significant only to Lancashire—all of us Lancastrians know that it is significant to us—but is regionally and nationally significant, and can be seen as one of those big projects that can be a wider driver of our ambition for the northern powerhouse. That is why at the last Budget the Government committed £100,000 to work forward the business case, as my hon. Friend and the hon. Lady pointed out. The business case, which now sits on the Treasury desk, with a copy having been sent to me and to the Prime Minister, is exceptionally good work and draws a good plan for the future. The hon. Lady invited me to get out my cheque book this evening, but, as both she and my hon. Friend know, there is a Budget next month and decisions on funding on this scale would normally and naturally be made at a Budget. I know that both of them have been actively lobbying the Chancellor to make sure that he is as excited about this project as all of us already are. I hope that they will continue to do that, and I wish them success with their active lobbying work on behalf of their constituents and more widely on behalf of the whole of Lancashire.

It is extraordinary that the Eden Project chose Morecambe when it started to look for a site for an Eden North. Little old Morecambe is a wonderful

place—anyone who has visited the Midland hotel will know what a wonderful place it is to spend time with friends and family on a holiday, or even on a day out—but it would not necessarily be the first place that came to mind for this. The project might have thought of better known resorts such as Blackpool, or of the Lake district, which is a UNESCO world heritage site. Morecambe was chosen, though, because the local authority and Members of Parliament were extremely active in engaging and lobbying the Eden Project to make sure that the opportunity came to Lancashire.

Morecambe is, of course, an extraordinary place. It has a tide that comes in faster than a horse can gallop. Anyone who has ever been on a guided tour from Morecambe over to what I think in modern parlance is referred to as Cumbria, but was always known as "Lancashire over the sands", will have seen the extraordinary coastal beauty of the area. Anyone who has done that will, of course, want the project to come to Morecambe.

The economic case is compelling because of the potential economic benefits from bringing the Eden Project to Morecambe. The north has many areas of outstanding natural beauty, and this project could be an important part of the wider tourism offer that we can make from Lancashire and, of course, from the north-west more widely, as we leave the European Union on 31 October. Many people have spoken about the potential for visitors to the north of England—I encourage anyone to go there at any time, without waiting until we leave on 31 October. Other than Members of Parliament, who have to be here on Saturday, everyone else is free to go this weekend—but if the Eden Project was to be delivered, we would see a projected 750,000 visitors to Morecambe and Eden North in just the first few years of operation. It would create more than 6,000 jobs, and, as has been pointed out already, the economic case shows that for every pound spent—whether it be Government money, private money, local authority money or growth funding from the LEP—we will see a return of £4.20, which I can tell the House, as a good Lancastrian, is a good bit of brass for a bit of money that the Government are spending. I hope the Chancellor will be cognisant and mindful of the good economic case for the project as he looks forward to his next Budget.

The Eden Project North has the potential to be a transformational project for the north of England, and for Lancashire more widely. That is why it is very much supported by all Members of Parliament in Lancashire and all tiers of local government. In order to achieve it, I understand that the aim is to find £101 million of investment, which is what will be required to see the project through to completion. It will naturally be a cocktail of funding that comes forward to make sure this happens—I am sure there will be a requirement for some private sector funding and for some public sector funding—and we have some work ahead of us to make sure that we can blend that cocktail and see the project delivered.

As I have said, I believe the investment case for Eden is a compelling argument. There is a strong economic case for bringing the Eden Project to Morecambe. I am happy to work with Lancashire Members of Parliament from across the House on a cross-governmental basis to try to make sure that we can deliver not only the

[*Jake Berry*]

ambition of the Eden Project in the north, but the wider ambition that we all share for the county we are so passionate about. Officials in my Department are already working with the Eden Project, and local partners have today written—I was handed a copy of a letter at the start of the debate—to express the continuing support of local government partners, educational establishments and the LEP. That is an acknowledgment of the wide benefits, including the training and economic impacts, that would come out of this fantastic project.

Over the months and years ahead, I am looking forward to hearing more about the Eden Project, and to seeing the economic benefits that can be achieved. I wish all hon. Members good luck in their negotiations with the Treasury. I will happily work with them, because this is a crucial part of delivering the northern powerhouse that can transform the lives of everyone living in the north of England, and especially in Lancashire.

I end with a quote from Morecambe's most famous son—after my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale, of course, so Morecambe's second-most famous son, Eric Morecambe. This is the approach we need to take to the cocktail of funding that we are going to blend. He famously said:

“I'm playing all the right notes. But not necessarily in the right order.”

I hope that we will get all the right money, albeit not necessarily in the right order. Let us work together to make sure that this happens.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): That was an excellent debate, totally different from and in contrast to the rest of the day, and so much better.

Question put and agreed to.

5.24 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 17 October 2019

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Radioactive Waste: Geological Disposal

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Nadhim Zahawi): Today I am pleased to designate the “National Policy Statement for Geological Disposal Infrastructure”, which was laid in parliament on 4 July.

This is an important milestone in finding a solution to manage the UK’s higher activity radioactive waste and this marks the final step in the parliamentary process for the national policy statement.

It is important that we who have benefited from nuclear technology take appropriate steps now to manage the waste created from using that technology. Nuclear technology has provided clean energy to our homes and businesses and will continue to play an important role as we transition to a carbon-neutral economy. For a long time, we have also used radioactive materials to treat and diagnose serious illnesses, to deliver research and development and to help deliver industrial processes. Radioactive waste is created from a variety of sources including electricity generation, defence and healthcare, and geological disposal is internationally recognised as the safest and most secure means of permanently managing a proportion of this waste not suitable for other management regimes.

The “National Policy Statement For Geological Disposal Infrastructure” sets out the need for such disposal infrastructure to safely and securely manage the UK’s higher activity radioactive wastes. The national policy statement provides an appropriate and effective framework for the Planning Inspectorate and the Secretary of State for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to examine and make decisions on development consent applications for geological disposal infrastructure in England

In order to support the requirements for the designation of “The National Policy Statement for Geological Disposal Infrastructure”, I am also publishing the “Final Habitats Regulations Assessment Report” and the post-adoption statement for the appraisal of sustainability on the Department’s website.

[HCWS18]

TREASURY

Double Taxation Agreement: Gibraltar

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Simon Clarke): A new double taxation agreement with Gibraltar was mutually accepted in an exchange of letters signed

in London on 1 October 2019 and in Gibraltar on 15 October 2019. The texts of the letters will be deposited in the Library of both Houses and made available on the gov.uk website. The texts will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

[HCWS19]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Modern Slavery: Annual Report

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Today, I am publishing the 2019 UK annual report on modern slavery. The report covers the whole of the UK and has been drafted in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government. This report sets out an assessment of the scale of modern slavery in the UK and outlines the actions that have been taken to combat it over the last year.

A copy of the report will be available on gov.uk and placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS20]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Right to Shared Ownership

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): Two thirds of social housing tenants would like to buy a home, yet only a quarter believe they will ever be able to do so. That is why I have announced today the Government’s intention to reinvigorate the home ownership offer for social housing tenants, by introducing a new right to shared ownership.

This will help reduce the gap between ambition and expectation, and make home ownership attainable and affordable for many more social housing tenants. It is part of the Government’s wider commitment to support people and families from all backgrounds to realise their ambition to own their own home.

The right to shared ownership will give housing association tenants the right to purchase a share of the home they rent and to purchase further shares in future when they can afford to do so. Alongside this, the Government will also cut the minimum initial ownership stake from 25% to 10% for all shared ownership homes, making the tenure even more accessible for aspiring homeowners who are struggling to raise a deposit.

This will build on the Government’s existing proposals to introduce a new national model for shared ownership. This new model will be redesigned to work effectively for aspiring home owners in today’s housing market, for example, by allowing shared owners to buy further shares in smaller increments, cutting the costly fees charged for additional shares and introducing a standardised

preferred model to improve mortgage availability. The combined package will make it much easier to buy an initial share and to purchase additional shares in order to build up to full ownership.

The Government intend to make the right to shared ownership available to tenants in all new social homes delivered with grant in the future. Future investment will be considered at a future fiscal event.

We will also work with the housing association sector on a voluntary basis to determine what offer can be made to tenants in existing homes, so that the new right to shared ownership is extended as widely as possible. The right to shared ownership will not apply to tenants living in existing local authority homes, who already have the statutory right to buy.

[HCWS21]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aid Sector: Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): This week marks one year on since the UK Department for International Development hosted the 2018 safeguarding summit, “Putting People First: tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector”.

In early 2018 the aid sector’s failure over many years to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) came into sharp relief.

The shocking stories that emerged exposed how aid workers had been allowed to get away with sexual misconduct. Their actions undermined trust in the whole sector and all the positive work that it does.

So from February 2018 DFID set out to work with others to change the way the aid sector tackles SEAH, from root to branch.

The October 2018 summit in London was an important milestone. More than 500 organisations came together to make commitments for change. This included 22 donors—who provide 90% of global ODA. We committed to global standards on prevention and improved processes covering ethical behaviour, robust recruitment and complaints processes.

These were not empty promises. Work is ongoing to put victims and survivors first and drive real culture change across the aid sector. This includes:

DFID’s £10 million project with Interpol to help stop perpetrators of SEAH moving around the aid sector by strengthening criminal record checks and information sharing between countries. Regional hubs are being set up and priority countries have been identified.

The misconduct disclosure scheme, which means employers can share data on conduct and disciplinary records related to sexual misconduct with greater confidence. It is still early days, but the over 1,500 requests for information since January have prevented the hiring of at least 10 individuals.

Awarding the contract this month for DFID’s £10 million resource and support hub to provide guidance, support and training to NGOs and others and access to independent investigators for smaller charities.

Today, DFID is publishing three reports showing some of the progress made and the challenges remaining.

The first has updates from each of the eight groups which made commitments at the summit: donors, UK NGOs, private sector suppliers, the United Nations, international financial institutions, CDC, research funders, and Gavi and the Global Fund. Initiatives include new tools and guidance for NGOs; mechanisms to collaborate and learn lessons among private sector suppliers; a new reporting tool for United Nations staff; the development of a good guidance note by international financial institutions and CDC; an evidence review of safeguarding challenges by research funders; and the roll-out of new training by Gavi and the Global Fund.

The second covers how donors are meeting their commitments. This includes the adoption of a new OECD development assistance committee recommendation on ending SEAH in the aid sector; work to align donor SEAH clauses in funding agreements with multilateral agencies; and collective leverage to drive change across the UN. Donors are continuing to strengthen accountability, build more robust systems and drive culture change across the whole international system. The third gives more details about what DFID has done.

We have been clear that any sexual misconduct is totally unacceptable. But we know that sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector still happens far too often.

The international work led by DFID over the last year has generated good momentum and is starting to deliver results. But we must collectively keep working until every individual feels able to speak up and challenge abuses of power wherever they occur.

We must continue to do all we reasonably can to make zero tolerance a reality, by which we mean responding appropriately to every single report or case.

We must prevent SEAH from happening, listen to those affected, respond appropriately when allegations are made, and learn from every single case.

This is just the beginning of a long-term process.

I will build on the work of my predecessors to maintain momentum, to ensure the failings of the past do not happen again and to deliver better results for the people we serve.

If we do not get things right on safeguarding, and ensure the protection of the most vulnerable, then we fail in our ultimate goal to support the world’s poorest and jeopardise all the positive work aid does.

The commitments made at the London summit are having a positive impact. But more is required by every organisation and every programme if we are going to stop sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector—something which we must achieve.

[HCWS17]

JUSTICE

Boundary Commission for Wales: Deputy Chair

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): I should like to inform the House that I have made the following re-appointment under schedule 1 to the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986:

The Honourable Mr Justice Lewis has been re-appointed as deputy chair of the Boundary Commission for Wales, effective until 31 December 2019.

[HCWS22]

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