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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Monday 3 February 2020

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. BORIS JOHNSON, MP, DECEMBER 2019)

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 17 DECEMBER 2019]

SIXTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 671

THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 2019-2021

House of Commons

Monday 3 February 2020

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Armed Forces Personnel: Vexatious Claims

1. **Adam Afriyie** (Windsor) (Con): What steps his Department plans to take to tackle vexatious claims against armed forces personnel. [900535]

5. **Tom Randall** (Gedling) (Con): What steps his Department plans to take to tackle vexatious claims against armed forces personnel. [900539]

13. **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): What steps his Department plans to take to tackle vexatious claims against armed forces personnel. [900548]

24. **Laura Farris** (Newbury) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to tackle vexatious claims made against armed forces personnel. [900559]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): My thoughts are with the injured victims of the Streatham attack and their families, and I express my sympathy

and support on the Government's behalf. I also pay tribute to the brave police officers who so speedily confronted and dealt with the attacker and to the other emergency services who assisted the victims and others.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our armed forces, who perform exceptional feats to protect this country in incredibly difficult circumstances. While our servicemen and women are rightly held to the highest standards of behaviour, we must ensure that the law is applied consistently, promptly and fairly.

Adam Afriyie: With Combermere barracks and Victoria barracks in the Windsor constituency, we are proud to be home to the Irish Guards, the Welsh Guards and the Household Cavalry. Following their many years of service to our nation, I want them to feel safe and secure in the knowledge that they will not be hounded and harassed by vexatious litigation for decades to come. How soon will our veterans be able to stand at ease?

Mr Wallace: As Her Majesty said in the Gracious Speech, the Government will shortly introduce a legislative package to ensure that our service personnel and veterans have access to the legal protections they deserve. That will build on the consultation held last summer on proposed legal protections and measures for armed forces personnel and veterans who have served in operations outside the UK. We expect those measures to be brought forward soon.

Tom Randall: We owe an immense debt of gratitude to our armed forces, who should never face malicious or unfair treatment after their service when there is no reason to do so. Will my right hon. Friend join me in calling on all Members to back our troops and get behind our plans to tackle vexatious claims?

Mr Wallace: Many Members of this House support our troops, and I hope that they will be able to support all the measures that we bring forward to protect personnel from vexatious claims and inquests.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: What action is being taken to halt the prosecutions currently under way in Northern Ireland of those who served in our armed forces and in the police during the troubles while a review is being undertaken?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend will know that it is obviously not for the Executive or the Government to interfere once a prosecution is under way. Prosecutions are a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions, either here or in Northern Ireland. However, no one must be above the law where there is genuine evidence of wrongdoing, but when the process is abused for vexatious purposes, it is right that the Government step forward with measures to stop that happening.

Laura Farris: Protecting veterans is a priority for this Government, but their families are just as important. Changes to the war widows' pension scheme mean that, while the majority of war widows receive a pension for life, a small group, some of whom live in my constituency, whose husbands died after 1973 and who themselves remarried before 2005, fall outside the scheme. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to address that injustice?

Mr Wallace: The Government recognise the unique commitment that service families make to our country and remain sympathetic to the circumstances of those widows who remarried and cohabited before 1 April 2015. However, the Government currently have no plans to reinstate war widows' pensions for war widows who remarried between 1973 and 2005—before the 2015 changes took effect. However, I hear my hon. Friend's call, and my colleague the Minister for Defence People and Veterans has already met representatives from the War Widows' Association, and we are examining alternative methods to see whether we can mitigate the impact.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): The Opposition's thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by yesterday's attack in Streatham, and I pay tribute to the police and emergency services for all their heroic work.

The Government have repeatedly promised to take action on vexatious claims against personnel and veterans, but we are yet to see any concrete plans. I heard what the Secretary of State said today, but will he give us the exact date on which the Government will introduce legislation?

Mr Wallace: The Government made a commitment in our manifesto and in other statements to bring forward measures within 100 days to deal with vexatious claims against our veterans. That 100-day period ends towards the end of March, which is when the timetable will be in place.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment regarding our armed services personnel and look forward to that working out in the fullness of time. Will he ensure that other Cabinet colleagues are aware of the implications of vexatious claims for police officers who served in Northern Ireland?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point. I served alongside RUC Special Branch in my time, and I have the highest regard for the RUC officers, many of whom lost their lives in fighting during the troubles. Obviously, we will look at what we can do around other Crown servants to make sure that they are protected from that same vexatious industry that is going on at the moment in Northern Ireland.

Frigates and Destroyers

2. **Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): What plans he has to increase the number of Royal Navy (a) frigates and (b) destroyers. [900536]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heappey): The Prime Minister has announced that the Government will undertake the deepest review of Britain's security, defence and foreign policy since the end of the cold war. We remain committed to ensuring that the Royal Navy will have the ships required to fulfil its defence commitments.

Andrew Bowie: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. While I welcome that commitment, may I raise concerns that many are bringing to me—that at the minute we simply do not have enough ships to protect our two new aircraft carriers should they ever have to go to sea at the same time? Is it still the commitment of the Government to have two wholly UK sovereign deployable carrier groups to deploy at the same time, should we ever have to, while maintaining our other commitments overseas?

James Heappey: Although that has never been the policy of the Government, both aircraft carriers have been brought into service to ensure that one is always available 100% of the time. Although the precise number and mix of vessels deployed within a maritime task group would depend on operational circumstances, we will be able to draw from a range of highly capable vessels, such as Type 45 destroyers, Type 23 frigates, and the Astute class submarines—and, in the near future, Type 26 frigates as well.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I associate myself with the words of the Secretary of State about what happened yesterday; our thoughts and prayers are with the emergency services and those involved. I also congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) on an excellent question.

The Secretary of State will not know that I am the son of a coppersmith in what was the greatest yard in the Clyde, John Brown's—my own constituency office now occupies that land. I am very much aware of the vagaries of shipbuilding and the skills involved in it across the UK. I am heartened to hear what the Minister said to his hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, but I want to ask about Fleet Solid Support Ships—

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): How long is this going to go on?

Mr Speaker: Order. Questions should be sharp and punchy, because there are people further down the Order Paper.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Unless the Minister starts baying at me.

The Fleet Solid Support Ships have the ability to use skills and create work across yards not currently involved in the Type 26 or 31. Will the Under-Secretary assure me that he will maximise that public delivery by taking it across and then keeping it within the UK?

James Heapey: In November, the Secretary of State agreed that the Fleet Solid Support Ship competition should be stopped as it had become clear that a value-for-money solution could not be reached. The Department is now considering the most appropriate way forward.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Further to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), does the Minister agree that it would be an unwise inefficiency for there to be too little protection for our aircraft carriers? Given that we have taken this important decision to project airpower, we must have adequate surface ships to keep those aircraft carriers safe.

James Heapey: Of course these assets of huge national importance must be properly protected. The Royal Navy will make sure that the required number of ships are available for exactly that purpose.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The issue is not just about the number of ships that the Royal Navy possesses, but whether they are operationally effective or not. From July 2018 to July 2019, two of the six Type 45 destroyers did not put to sea, and a third spent fewer than 100 days at sea. What will the Minister be doing to ensure that the existing ships are operationally ready?

James Heapey: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question and very much share the sentiment in it. Since being appointed in December, I have been more concerned by the number of ships tied up against walls in Plymouth and Portsmouth than by those at sea. The Secretary of State has made the delivery of more ships for the fleet his priority for the Navy.

Defence Manufacturing

3. **Simon Fell** (Barrow and Furness) (Con): What recent assessment his Department has made of the economic effect on local communities of UK defence manufacturing. [900537]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heapey): In the financial year 2018-19, expenditure across the UK was £19.2 billion, supporting around 119,000 jobs. In my hon. Friend's region of the north-west, we spent just under £2 billion supporting around 12,500 jobs, many of which were in Barrow.

Simon Fell: As my hon. Friend will be aware, almost one in five of my constituents works either in the delivery of the national endeavour of the nuclear deterrent or in the supply chain businesses in Barrow; the economic impact is therefore huge. The proposed marina village development in Barrow would help to ensure that money spent there serves our local economy. Will he agree to meet me and back this endeavour, and to meet my local council to support that initiative?

James Heapey: My hon. Friend has certainly hit the ground running. I have been in post for less than two months, and he has been here for the same time, yet this is the second time he has lobbied me on this important development. He will be pleased to know that as a consequence of his formidable advocacy for Barrow, I have already raised this matter directly with the chief executive of BAE Systems. My Department will do all it can to support his campaign, and I know my hon. Friend has also secured towns fund money from my colleagues at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I welcome the new defence procurement Minister to his place. Several of his predecessors promised to factor in wider socioeconomic value when awarding contracts for defence manufacturing. When will the MOD actually start doing that for every contract? Given that the Department can no longer hide behind EU procurement rules, will he now award the contract for the Fleet Solid Support Ships to a UK firm?

James Heapey: On the Fleet Solid Support Ships, the competition has not yet been restarted. May I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the Type 31, where there is a requirement that it should be built in the United Kingdom? That is a model we should be looking to emulate as much as possible.

Support for Veterans

4. **Mark Jenkinson** (Workington) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support veterans and their families. [900538]

8. **James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support veterans and their families. [900543]

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): The strategy for our veterans outlines a 10-year vision. The MOD has launched a new holistic transition policy, broadening the support offered to our people. Resettlement policy and the career transition partnership provide this employment support.

Mark Jenkinson: Will my hon. Friend join me in thanking businesses in my constituency, such as Iggesund, James Walker & Co and TSP Engineering, among others, that have actively recruited veterans? Will he pledge his support for companies like them to help veterans after their valued service?

Johnny Mercer: I certainly pay tribute to my hon. Friend and the company he mentions. Veterans in this country are a significant untapped resource, and one primary objective of the Office for Veterans' Affairs is to re-evaluate what the perception of veterans is in this country. They bring so much to so many companies across the land, including the one he mentions.

James Wild: An area where we can do more to tackle disadvantage that families face is in helping bereaved services children in the education system. Will my hon. Friend therefore look favourably at proposals from

Scotty's Little Soldiers, an excellent charity based in King's Lynn, in my constituency, to track and support 1,000 bereaved services children in our schools?

Johnny Mercer: Absolutely. I pay tribute to those at Scotty's Little Soldiers, who have done a remarkable job over the years, and I am seeing them tomorrow. Data is an area where the Government are determined to do their work to make sure that all of our policies are evidence-based and that they reach the people who need them tracking service families, particularly bereaved families, through schools is an important part of that work.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Since 2013, four men have been lost to their families following their deaths during Army training in the Brecon area. The parents of one of these men, Craig Roberts, are in the Gallery today. At the latest inquest, the coroner criticised the Minister's Department, saying that lessons were not being learnt from these tragedies. She has already granted one extension to respond—when will the Minister respond?

Johnny Mercer: I pay tribute to those who have lost their lives on these exercises. Indeed, on the Select Committee, I worked on a report that was determined to make sure that every question the parents will have about these tragic accidents is investigated. The report is being gone over at the moment, and I want to make sure it is right and that it applies the lessons that have been learned. No child should die in training in our UK armed forces, although we must remain cognisant of the fact that it needs to remain as aggressive and warlike as we can make it. I am more than happy to meet the hon. Lady and her constituents to find out what more we can do to narrow that delta in training.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Too many times in the past five years, I have met veterans in my constituency office who have been unable to access the mental health support they need. The Minister has mentioned a holistic approach to transition. Will he give mental healthcare a top priority in that?

Johnny Mercer: One of my primary duties in this role is to ensure that no veteran does not know where to turn in this country for help, and that is particularly pertinent to mental health. We have some brilliant services across the country. A reconfiguration is going on at the moment, from third sectors into the NHS, but I am looking to launch a veterans' mental health strategy later on this year. I am determined that within six to 12 months there will be no veteran in this country who will not know where to turn to for help.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Veterans who served in Northern Ireland on Operation Banner will, along with many of their families, I am sure, welcome the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive—but not at the price of selling our veterans down the river to appease Sinn Féin. When the Prime Minister stood for the leadership of the Conservative party, he said clearly in writing in *The Sun* that he would legislate to protect veterans, including Northern Ireland veterans, from vexatious prosecution. Will the Minister absolutely reiterate that promise today and assure us all that we will defend those who defended us?

Johnny Mercer: I welcome my right hon. Friend's question. Let me be absolutely clear: no Government in history have done more to talk about or to try to deliver protection for our servicemen and women from vexatious claims and inquests. This Government are committed to resolving the issue, the Prime Minister has promised to do so, and my right hon. Friend has heard from the Secretary of State this afternoon that it will be done within 100 days.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): First, I echo the comments of others in the Chamber about yesterday's tragic events in Streatham.

In North East Fife, there is a fantastic military co-working scheme at Leuchars that helps veterans, spouses of serving personnel and other non-serving members of the armed forces community. It helps people to find work, to access support and to make friends. May I invite the Minister to visit the co-working hub in Leuchars and, as a former career transition partnership employee, ask what plans he has to promote similar schemes throughout the country?

Johnny Mercer: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady and the team at Leuchars, who do a fantastic job. I am currently carrying out a programme of visits to a lot of bases. CTP is a huge part of what we offer for people transitioning from the military into civilian life, and more money is going into it than ever before, but I am determined to learn from best practice, which is what it sounds like the hon. Lady has in Leuchars, so I would be delighted to visit her in due course.

Defence Relationships: South East Asia

6. **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the strength of the UK's defence relationships in south-east Asia. [900541]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): The UK continues to have a strong defence relationship with south-east Asia. We maintain a garrison in Brunei and have kept a persistent naval presence in the region since 2018. We work with many countries in the region to help to improve regional security and build capacity. This is done both bilaterally and multilaterally, including through the five power defence arrangements, the only formal defence agreement in the whole region.

Richard Graham: Given the importance of the South China sea, not only as a major navigation route but as a source of a growing number of intra-nation disputes, does my right hon. Friend agree that the UK has a vital role to play in ensuring freedom of navigation, providing defence and cyber solutions to south-east Asia, and boosting that five-nation power arrangement, as part of our deepening relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations?

Mr Wallace: I agree with my hon. Friend. If any part of the world is a place where the international rules-based system is being threatened, it is in Asia and across the Pacific and the South China sea. That is why we want to strengthen and continue to work with the five power defence arrangements, to work with many of the countries in the region, and to deepen our bilateral relationship with ASEAN member states.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): On the one hand, the Government have rightly been challenging China's aggressive military actions in the seas around south-east Asia, yet on the other hand, despite the Secretary of State himself having reportedly branded China a "friend of no one", the Government have granted Huawei significant access to the superhighways of our cyber and telecoms systems. Will the Secretary of State clarify exactly what his Government's strategy in relation to China is?

Mr Wallace: The Government's strategy towards China is that we treat it in a way that befits its actions but measure our response when China does things that we do not like. For example, we test freedom of navigation in the Pacific but also seek to listen to the experts when it comes to issues such as Huawei. That is why the Government made the choice last week to allow Huawei to have a limited amount of the 5G market. Our policy towards Huawei is to cap it, to ban it in other parts of the network, and to reduce over time our dependency on that company and others like it.

Outsourced Contracts

7. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the quality of service provided under contracts outsourced by his Department. [900542]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heapey): The Ministry of Defence regularly scrutinises the quality of service provided by all contractors. It is good commercial practice to routinely monitor performance against contract targets and we will not hesitate to take appropriate action when quality standards are not met.

Alex Cunningham: I am not sure that that is happening. Latest figures show that the Army is currently more than 10% under strength and that the full-time trade-trained strength is well below the Government's stated target. It beggars belief that Capita still holds the recruitment contract. Despite what the Minister says, have the Government just given up trying to hold them to account, or will they actually sack them?

James Heapey: Since resetting their relationship in 2018, the Army and Capita have worked on improving all aspects of the recruiting pipeline. Halfway through the recruiting year, two thirds of the Army's regular soldier requirement have either started training or are due to do so.

Defence Exports

9. **Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): What recent steps he has taken with the Secretary of State for International Trade to support UK defence manufacturing by promoting defence exports. [900544]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): On behalf of the Prime Minister, I chair the defence, security and exports working group, which is attended by the International Trade Secretary. Ministers from Defence and International Trade support regular overseas trade missions and attend a wide range of international exhibitions, most notably last year's Defence and Security

Equipment International, where we jointly hosted 58 international delegations, demonstrating the best of British defence exports.

Harriett Baldwin: The Secretary of State will know how much of our defence equipment pipeline is coming from the US. He will also know how much our excellent UK defence industry sells into the US. Will he make sure that, as we start the US-UK free trade agreement discussions, the defence sector is one of the sectors that is prioritised?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The US defence market is incredibly important for both the United States and the United Kingdom. Some of my honourable colleagues in this House and I lobbied for the original UK-US defence tech trade treaty in 2006. I can see the right hon. Members for North Durham (Mr Jones) and for Warley (John Spellar) sitting on the back row of the Labour Benches—we went together. We believe that it is so important. The reality is that, yes, we have more work to do. These trade deals will be incredibly important to make sure that we secure British jobs in order to sell aerospace and partner in aerospace across both countries.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State indicate when his Government plan to introduce the excellent recommendations in the report by the right hon. Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne)?

Mr Wallace: A number of those recommendations have already been implemented. I will meet, and regularly do meet, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne) to discuss the matter. It is incredibly important that we make sure not only that we link prosperity to our defence industry through the products that we commission for our services, but that, overseas, we secure prosperity for our jobs.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): The Secretary of State and his team are doing valuable work looking at defence manufacturing for the UK and externally. Will he reassure me that radar is part of that? As I am sure that he remembers, radar was built in the Isle of Wight for the Royal Navy ships.

Mr Wallace: It will not surprise you to know, Mr Speaker, that Britain builds pretty much the best of everything in the world when it comes to aerospace. As a former aerospace worker, and a Member of Parliament who represents a good few thousand aerospace workers, I know at first hand how much the international community needs and wants our products. The trick is to make sure that we sell them, and the best way to sell them is for us to buy British and show that the best armed forces in the world use British kit.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): If the Minister really wants to see the best of what Britain can do in manufacturing, a long-term partner in defence procurement and in making the turbines and gears for the armed services is David Brown Gears in Huddersfield. Will he visit that company? It is a brilliant company. It manufactures for our armed services and it exports. May I invite him to visit to see how excellent it is?

Mr Wallace: I would be absolutely delighted to visit.

Armed Forces: Capabilities

10. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that the capabilities of the armed forces are adequate to meet future threats. [900545]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): As announced in last year's Queen's Speech, the Prime Minister has committed to undertake the deepest review of Britain's foreign policy, defence, security and development since the cold war. It will consider all aspects of our defence and security capabilities, including our approach to procurement and maintaining our technological edge against current and future threats.

Steve Double: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer and for this Government's ongoing commitment to our security. Now that we have left the EU, our ongoing relationship on security with the EU will inevitably change, so what steps is he taking to strengthen our role within NATO for the future?

Mr Wallace: The United Kingdom is a full member of NATO and completely committed to ensuring that that alliance has a long-term future. The announcements that we made at the NATO summit in December set NATO on the right path of expanding into areas of hybrid threat and cyber. I am confident that, with Britain and our partners working to ensure NATO's success, NATO will have a long and fruitful future.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): But military capability also depends on industrial defence capability, which depends on a steady workstream. As a number of Members have said, now that we have come out of the EU, why will the Secretary of State not back our shipbuilding industry, start the new contract and specify that support ships should be built in British yards by British firms? Here is the opportunity—why will he not do it?

Mr Wallace: The right hon. Member will have heard that we stopped the competition for the future solid support vessels. We will look at why that competition could not proceed but, like shipbuilders, I have a lot of faith in the British shipbuilding industry, which is why we have the Type 31 and the Type 26 and excellent aircraft carriers that were delivered on time and on budget, and we will continue to invest in the yards. It is also important to make sure that this SDSR and everything else are budgeted for. No SDSR that I can remember, going back to the early '90s, has been properly funded to back up the ambitions.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): Can I welcome the defence, security and foreign policy review—or the integrated review, as I understand it is to be called? It is a fantastic opportunity to upgrade our defence posture, given the threats that we face. Previous reviews have been hampered by limitations imposed by spending reviews, which, coincidentally, happened at the very same time. So could the Secretary of State spell out the context, the timeframe and the parliamentary engagement for the forthcoming review?

Mr Wallace: I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new role as Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence. Perhaps, given his time in the Department, he will enjoy being able to scrutinise some of his own decisions, and I look forward to his questioning me.

We will publish the details of the review in very quick time as we go forward. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that, if these reviews are to be worth anything, they have to be properly funded. That requires honesty from the Department, wider Government, and the Treasury, and for the ambitions for what we want our country to do and be around the world. If we match our appetites with stomachs, it will have a long-lasting legacy.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): We have had as many defence reviews as you have had hot dinners, Mr Speaker, and I am beginning to think that I have got to the point where I have heard so many Defence Ministers tell us that it is going to be different this time. There have been repeated reviews, and as the Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), said, too often there is a mismatch between the money and the plans. What, realistically, will the Secretary of State do that is different, because every delay in this costs money and every tough decision ducked does no service to our armed services or the security of our country?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Lady makes very genuine and good observations about these defence reviews. I was a soldier serving under defence reviews that never translated into either money or the funding. The first thing that we can do is be honest with the men and women of our armed forces about what we can afford and what we will give them, and at the same time be honest with the public about what our ambitions are globally, and make that honesty not hunkered in sentimentality but based on financial reality, making sure that the whole Government buy into that, and that we explain that fully across the House and to all Members, including the hon. Lady's Committee.

Defence Manufacturing

11. **Mr Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to maintain the capabilities of UK defence manufacturing. [900546]

17. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to maintain the capabilities of UK defence manufacturing. [R] [900552]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heappey): The MOD is committed to supporting the UK defence manufacturing industry. Since 2015, we have published a national shipbuilding strategy, launched the combat air strategy and refreshed our defence industrial policy. Through the defence prosperity programme, we are working to sustain and develop an internationally competitive and productive UK defence sector.

Mr Fysh: The help that the Government give to our indigenous exporting firms is of huge value. I thank the Minister for the Department's help with exports of the Leonardo AW159 Wildcat helicopter, and I note that the Republic of Korea has an opportunity to increase its world-leading Wildcat capability, built in Yeovil, to

give its people maximum protection and forge an increasingly significant and dynamic relationship with the United Kingdom.

James Heapey: The Wildcat, designed and built in my hon. Friend's constituency, and with the sweat of my own constituents, has been tried and tested on operations with the Royal Navy. The Government will continue to do all that we can to support the export of Wildcat to South Korea, including making a Royal Navy Wildcat available for it to test and evaluate in the coming months.

Robert Courts: I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The combat air strategy has led to Team Tempest, a world-leading programme providing not only fast jet capability to replace the Typhoon for the Royal Air Force, but real STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—inspiration by employing 1,000 people directly. Can the Minister assure me that its position will be secure in the upcoming defence review?

James Heapey: The Government will undertake the deepest review of Britain's security, defence and foreign policy since the cold war. The terms of reference will be announced in due course, but the UK combat air strategy that was published in July 2018 will be used to inform the review.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): It is mostly French and Swedish steel that has been used to build our ships recently. Does the Minister agree that it is time to factor in the economic value of awarding defence contracts to UK steel suppliers when making procurement decisions in the future?

James Heapey: I have already had the opportunity to visit Barrow, which is a shipyard full of British boats. I understand that the order books on the Clyde and at Rosyth are similarly full.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Talking about the order book for the Clyde, will the Minister give us an assurance that there will be a continuous drumbeat and no delays for future Type 26 frigates that are ordered?

James Heapey: The commitment to building Type 26 frigates is absolute. In fact, defence spending in Scotland secures 10,200 jobs; that is the Royal Navy supporting 10,200 jobs in Scotland.

Safety of Personnel Overseas

12. **Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to maintain the security of UK armed forces personnel overseas. [900547]

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): The Ministry of Defence constantly reviews the security of its personnel, sites and capabilities to ensure that they remain safe and secure, and that the measures in place remain proportionate, including in response to any changes in threat or risk.

Dr Spencer: I think we would all agree on the importance of protecting our servicemen and women from threats abroad. However, harmful drinking is more common than post-traumatic stress disorder in the armed forces, and double that of the general population. What is the Minister doing to support the health and wellbeing of our armed forces, to whom we all owe so much?

Johnny Mercer: My hon. Friend will know that there are specific areas where the armed forces have challenges when it comes to drinking, including alcohol abuse and so on. There are a number of programmes running throughout the military. We have a good record on this matter, but there is more to do. I am aware that this issue is baked into some of the culture of previous years. We are doing much better now, but there is work to do on that front.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): Last week, three rockets struck the US embassy compound in Baghdad, leaving one person injured. In the light of increased tensions following the US action against Qasem Soleimani, will the Minister tell us what measures are being taken to reduce the risk to our troops in the region, and will he update us on progress in relation to our counter-Daesh programme?

Johnny Mercer: I am clearly not going to go into operational security from the Dispatch Box, but the hon. Member can rest assured that all the correct measures have been taken to ensure that our service personnel are protected abroad, whether it be in Baghdad or the other places where our troops are deployed. The Secretary of State will be providing a formal update on our counter-Daesh programme in due course.

Defence Procurement

14. **Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con):** What recent estimate his Department has made of the number of jobs that defence procurement supports in the UK. [900549]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heapey): MOD expenditure with UK industry and commerce supported 119,000 jobs in the UK in the financial year 2018-19, including more than 10,000 jobs in the midlands engine.

Nigel Mills: Many businesses across Amber Valley benefit from MOD contracts, but there are many more that could. What more can the Department do to work alongside businesses to help spread out these contracts and jobs around the country?

James Heapey: I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this issue. Since taking on this brief, I have been interested to discover how the MOD might broaden access for small and medium-sized enterprises, and he represents exactly the sort of constituency where such opportunities are greatest. There will be businesses in his area that can contribute directly to the MOD supply chain, but with Rolls-Royce in Derby immediately to the south of his constituency, we can work with our prime contractors to ensure that they can also access those supply chains.

Armed Forces: Social Mobility

15. **Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of social mobility in the armed forces. [900550]

23. **Chris Evans** (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of social mobility in the armed forces. [900558]

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): The armed forces aim to attract talent from the widest possible base across the United Kingdom, regardless of socioeconomic background, educational status or ethnicity. The skills, education and training provided enable recruits to progress and benefit from promotion based on merit.

Emma Hardy: The Minister will be aware that the armed forces recruit heavily in areas such as mine in Hull. However, a recent Sutton Trust report showed that people from private schools are seven times more likely to reach the top of the armed forces. What steps is his Department taking to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all and that our talented people starting on the lowest rungs get the same chance to reach the top?

Johnny Mercer: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. For me, the military remains the single fastest accelerant of life chances in this country for those from slightly more challenging backgrounds. The figure she refers to regarding public school and reaching the top is a challenge that has been there for a while, but our figures for Sandhurst are now very different from what they were 10 years ago. Certainly, in my experience and the experience of many of my colleagues, socioeconomic background has absolutely nothing to do with someone's ability to prevail in the military.

Chris Evans: With the cost of university going up, many would-be graduates will look at the armed forces as an alternative career path. However, it is still extremely difficult for someone to gain a commission if they do not have a university degree, particularly an Oxbridge degree, with 18% of commissioned officers having an Oxbridge degree. How will the Minister change things to ensure that people who go into the forces without a degree can gain a commission in future?

Johnny Mercer: I and many of my colleagues, including the Secretary of State for Defence, did not have a degree. The military has been more accessible than ever before for people without a degree. This is something we consistently work on. However, I come back to my point: every applicant is judged on what they can bring and add to the organisation of the UK armed forces, irrespective of their background and conscious of the fact that we must always do more to make sure that it is equal.

Mrs Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): A constituent of mine was serving in a UK base in Cyprus and his children have special educational needs. The school is operated by the Ministry of Defence, which was unable to offer them adequate support. They

therefore had to relocate back to the UK. Will my hon. Friend work with his Department to make sure that children of our brave armed forces have the support they need and that those serving have all the instruments needed to progress their careers?

Johnny Mercer: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I have a specific team within the MOD dedicated to SEND children. I am more than happy to look at her case. We are bringing in legislation for the armed forces covenant. The Prime Minister is absolutely clear that no one should suffer any disadvantage as a result of their military service. That will become law during this Parliament and we will see fewer of these cases going forward.

Red Arrows

16. **Mr Shailesh Vara** (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): What progress his Department has made on determining a new location for the Red Arrows. [900551]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heapey): Work on previously announced potential basing options is ongoing. No final decisions have yet been made.

Mr Vara: I am most grateful to the Minister for those comments. We in North West Cambridgeshire firmly believe that RAF Wittering would be the ideal new home for the Red Arrows. With that in mind, will he kindly agree to stay in close contact with me throughout this process in case he or his officials require any further information? Of course, I would be happy to have another ministerial meeting if it would help to press our case further.

James Heapey: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's offer of assistance. I assure him that all three potential basing options are still being considered. I would welcome the opportunity to meet him and other interested colleagues in the very near future.

Defence Manufacturing

18. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What steps he is taking to maintain strategic defence manufacturing capability in the UK. [900553]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heapey): Our approach to procurement recognises the need to assure the UK's operational advantage and freedom of action in relation to certain capabilities.

Sir Desmond Swayne: What about Cobham?

James Heapey: In addition to measures to protect national security, the Government have secured legally binding commitments that there will be significant protection of jobs in the UK, that Cobham's headquarters will remain in the UK, and that there will be guaranteed spend on research and development. Of course, this is not just a one-way street. I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the acquisition by BAE Systems of two very high-tech and interesting companies in America last week.

Armed Forces: Recruitment and Retention

19. **Miss Sarah Dines** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to (a) recruit and (b) retain armed forces personnel. [900554]

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): We remain committed to maintaining the overall size of the armed forces. There is a range of measures under way to improve recruitment and retention, and these are kept under constant review.

Miss Dines: Can the Minister assure me that his Department intends to keep the present number of Marines, not decrease it, bearing in mind that they are such a vital force to protect this country?

Johnny Mercer: I can confirm that we have no plans to reduce the size of the Royal Marines. They are an extremely important part of this country's defence. They contribute 47% of individuals who go off to our UK special forces group. They are evolving and developing; the future commando force concept is very exciting. There are no plans to reduce the number of Royal Marines at this stage.

Strait of Hormuz: UK Shipping

20. **Robert Largan** (High Peak) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure the safe passage of UK shipping in the strait of Hormuz. [900555]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): The UK is part of the International Maritime Security Construct, which is safeguarding freedom of navigation in the Gulf. It is now under the command of a Royal Navy officer. The Ministry of Defence, with the Department for Transport, is monitoring the situation closely and stands ready to counter threats, should the need arise.

Robert Largan: Since the signing of the nuclear deal, Iran has continued to test ballistic missiles, finance terror groups, harass shipping in the strait of Hormuz and generally act as a bad influence in the region. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the strategic threat to both the UK and our allies in the region, including Israel and the Gulf states?

Mr Wallace: Iran's interference in the region is a strategic threat to its near neighbours and, indeed, to UK interests and her allies. The use of proxy forces, terrorists and the constant incursion against our ships in the strait pose a real problem, which was why we joined the International Maritime Security Construct and will continue to be part of it.

Armed Forces Personnel

21. **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of armed forces personnel. [900556]

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister.

Hon. Members: Come on!

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): I am not very well, Mr Speaker. It is not coronavirus; it is worse—it is man flu. It would have seen the Secretary of State in bed for a week.

We remain committed to maintaining the overall size of the armed forces, and a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention is under way. Those measures are kept under constant review. Importantly, the services continue to meet all their current commitments, keeping the country and its interests safe.

Jessica Morden: Independent analysis by the House of Commons Library has found that Army numbers could fall to just 65,000 by the end of this Parliament if the current rate of decline continues. Instead of giving us more warm words, can the Minister tell us what specific steps his Department is taking to avoid that?

Johnny Mercer: On recruitment, we are at just under 100% of our year-long target, which comes round in April. More people are looking to join the Army than we have seen since 2010. There is a massively positive story to tell. There are no plans to reduce the number of armed forces personnel. It is a fantastic time to join up.

Topical Questions

T1. [900575] **Chris Clarkson** (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): The MOD has provided extensive support to the cross-government response to the outbreak of coronavirus to ensure the safety of British nationals abroad. That has included medical support on the repatriation flight from Wuhan, the use of RAF Brize Norton and contingencies for handling evacuees in the UK. The Department continues to support planning across Whitehall.

Chris Clarkson: I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. Does he agree that, after facing implacable foes armed with guns and RPGs, it is entirely wrong that our service personnel come home only to face foes armed with subpoenas and LLBs? Will he reiterate the Government's reassurance that they will not be pursued for historical convictions when no new evidence is found?

Mr Wallace: I assure my hon. Friend of the importance that we attach to this area, given the stress under which it puts members of the armed forces. This is the first time in my living memory that all the Front-Bench team served on operations and were members of the regular armed forces. That is why we feel it personally, as do the Government. We are determined to deal with this vexatious issue for our armed forces, which is why we will introduce measures in the next 100 days.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Our armed forces were due to have access to Galileo's encrypted system when it becomes fully operational in 2026, but now we have left the EU, that will not be the case. Can the Secretary of State tell the House when the UK's own global navigation satellite system will be fully up and running? Given that

the first satellites may only be launched by 2025, and the system will not be operational until 2030, what will fill the gap in capabilities that this presents?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Lady will be aware that all our systems currently run under GPS—the global positioning system—and it is not necessary for us to operate under any other system. This is about resilience and whether we need an alternative system. What happens in our negotiations with Europe between now and the end of the year will obviously be a matter for the negotiators, but I am confident that we will continue to work alongside the United States on GPS or, indeed, that we will provide further details to the House on what we plan to increase resilience.

Nia Griffith: The Government have actually said that the cost of any system could be up to £5 billion. If the plan is to have this UK option, what assurance has the Secretary of State received that the money will not have to come out of the existing defence budget, which is already under strain, leading to more cuts in other areas?

Mr Wallace: As I said in my first answer, we are currently dependent on using GPS with the United States. We will keep any alternatives that we need under review. I will of course make representations to the Treasury, as will the wider parts of Government that also rely on satellite navigation—it is not just Defence—to make sure that, if any funding is required, that is taken from across Government or indeed from the Treasury.

T2. [900576] **Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con): RAF Valley trains fast jet pilots and helicopter crews, and it is the second largest employer in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State join me in praising the vital work that RAF Valley does in training and developing the next generation to keep our country safe, and could I invite him to visit Ynys Môn?

Mr Wallace: Ynys Môn is an incredibly important island and, indeed, RAF Valley is incredibly important for our RAF and our pilot training. I know that at first hand, in that I have spent a large part of my year at the end of a runway at RAF Valley—literally, although not as an air spotter, I have to say. I go on my holidays to Anglesey, and I know how important RAF Valley is to both the economy and the community. The Government continue to invest in RAF Valley. I greatly look forward to working with my hon. Friend to make sure that voices about the needs of that airport are heard. I am delighted that only recently a new runway was completed to make sure that it has a long-term future in providing our fighter pilot training.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State comment on what he makes of the European Commission's vision of structural consultation on defence and security, and will he be advising the Prime Minister to establish a framework to allow us to continue the excellent work we do with our fellow Europeans?

Mr Wallace: On a number of deployments with the European Union, we do excellent work, such as in Kosovo and so on. We will make sure that, where there

is a requirement for us to work together and there is a mutual need for our security, we will of course enter into such working relationships. However, one of the conditions will be that we can unilaterally enter and unilaterally leave—we will not be tied in. Of course, the security of Europe is always important to the United Kingdom, and we will continue to uphold that policy.

T3. [900577] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that Her Majesty's Government will keep in active service both of the aircraft carriers HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales which, as I know he will agree, are vital for Britain's overseas interests?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend raises an important point. These aircraft carriers are bought and paid for: they have been committed to. One is only on sea trials, and I would urge him to give it a chance—we will finish the sea trials. The aircraft carriers are really important to our strategic reach. We will design them so that we always have one available in a carrier strike group around the world, to be delivered should we need to do so. There are absolutely no plans whatsoever to get rid of them.

T4. [900578] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): When a service child moves to a new school, it is up to the old school to flag this on the student's file, otherwise there could be a delay in receiving the service pupil premium. What discussions has the Minister had with the Education Secretary about the guidance provided to schools to ensure that every service child gets the education they deserve?

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): I have had meetings with the Minister for School Standards to make sure that the process is a lot smoother and that people who can access the service pupil premium can do so further in advance of their posting. Again, this issue comes under the armed forces covenant. I am confident that, when this Government do legislate to make sure that no individual is disadvantaged because of their service, such incidents will be no more.

T5. [900579] **Ian Levy** (Blyth Valley) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will recall the recruitment campaign that highlighted how many people—how many young men and women—born in Blyth Valley have made their careers in the armed forces. Can he tell me and the House what steps he has taken to ensure that the young men and women who put themselves forward to serve are retained and valued?

Johnny Mercer: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, and to the men and women of Blyth Valley who have contributed so much to this nation's defence. We are acutely aware that although we are now doing pretty well in recruitment, we have a challenge with retention, and for the first time a Secretary of State has come into role and started talking about how we can better look after our people. I am confident that with wraparound childcare, and all the other things we are doing, we will improve the offer and tackle retention, and that the men and women of Blyth Valley will continue to serve well in our armed forces.

T7. [900581] **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Will the Minister publish the environmental impact assessment of the MOD's operations at Cape Wrath?

Johnny Mercer: I will write to the hon. Member.

T6. [900580] **Theo Clarke** (Stafford) (Con): As my hon. Friend knows, Stafford is the proud home of the 22 Signal Regiment and the RAF Tactical Supply Wing. Will he commit to ensuring that our armed forces, including those in my constituency, continue to receive the funding they need to help to keep us safe?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (James Heappey): My hon. Friend is right to be proud of the Army and RAF units in her constituency. We attach the very highest priority to ensuring that all three services have what they need to protect our country and its interests around the world. Our manifesto was perfectly clear: we are proud of our armed forces and will fund them properly.

T8. [900582] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): My constituent, Tom, who is an ex-serviceman, needed his medical records from the Army Personnel Centre in order to apply for a hearing aid. When he got in touch last July, he was told that it would take six months to get his records, because the Army Personnel Centre could not meet demand and was putting in place measures to deal with the backlog. Will the Minister update the House on whether that waiting time has been reduced so that our veterans can access the support they need?

Johnny Mercer: There should be no waiting time whatsoever for medical records that are going from regular regiments to a local GP. We are looking at ways of improving the system, and incentivising, to ensure that the gap is much smaller. If the hon. Gentleman writes to me about his constituent, I will find out what is going on in that case and ensure it is sorted out.

T9. [900583] **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): The ability of GCHQ to keep our country safe in cyber-space relies on it securing a pipeline of talent. In that spirit, will my right hon. Friend join me in wishing well all the girls who are participating in the CyberFirst Girls Competition at the National Cyber Security Centre—the semi-final is on 8 February—and encouraging them into a career in cyber-security?

Mr Wallace: Absolutely. The first winner of that competition was Lancaster Girls' Grammar School, which was in my former constituency—it is now in the constituency of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith). It is brilliant that so many girls are entering that sphere. Cyber-security is a real future career, as are other cyber measures, such as cyber-espionage—very good—and I want more and more women to do it. I think it is fantastic. The competition has my full support, and I hope it is won again in Lancashire.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Sergeant Michael Rowley served his country for 25 years. As a result of combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder, he started

drinking heavily and gambling—not an uncommon story. The charity Help a Squaddie helped Michael to get his life back together, but many are not so fortunate. What are the Government doing specifically to help victims who are at risk of or struggling with those issues?

Johnny Mercer: The Government are funding the NHS to bring in the veterans mental health transition, intervention and liaison service, and the veterans' mental health complex treatment service. We are bringing in a high-intensity service, and those measures will be brought together to bring forward a coherent veterans strategy for mental health. We are determined that by the end of this year, no veteran will not know where to turn when they need such support.

T10. [900584] **Felicity Buchan** (Kensington) (Con): What progress has been made in aligning the goals of the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence?

Mr Wallace: The Ministry of Defence continues to work closely with colleagues in DFID and across the Government to ensure that activity is co-ordinated and mutually reinforced in support of our national security objectives. The Government have announced that they will undertake the deepest review of Britain's security, defence and foreign policy since the end of the cold war, and that will cover all aspects from defence to diplomacy and development.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Given Capita's lamentable track record—it was referred to earlier—is there any chance that the Minister will guarantee that it will not get its hands on the MOD fire and rescue service?

Johnny Mercer: There is fair competition in that area, as there always will be. What happened with Capita has been roundly acknowledged by the Ministry of Defence and we have gripped those issues. However, there will be an open and fair competition for that contract.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the announcement he made on Armistice Day last year, at the start of the election campaign, about service personnel not being repeatedly reinvestigated without compelling new evidence broadly corresponds to the recommendations of the 17th report of the last Parliament's Select Committee on Defence, and does he have a reply to that report ready to give to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), my successor as Chair of the Defence Committee, as soon as the new Committee is formed?

Mr Wallace: I stand by the statements I made. I apologise for the time taken to respond to the Committee. The reason is that the original draft reply did not reflect the policy commitment and does not reflect the result of the general election. I am determined that all my Department's replies to Committees are correct, accurate and answer the questions put to them. I hope that when my right hon. Friend reads the reply, he will be happy that it responds to some of the very good recommendations in his Committee's report.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The Veterans Minister and I finally get to meet next week, at a meeting originally promised with his predecessor about my constituent Tony Pitt, who was worried about funding life-saving treatment for a rare condition he contracted in the Army and feared he had only six months to live. It will just be me and his widow at the meeting. Does the Minister accept that the armed forces covenant promise to fund advanced medical care is just not working, given that my constituent died while waiting to meet him?

Johnny Mercer: Of course we will look at that issue again. It comes under the armed forces covenant: no individual should suffer disadvantage because of the time they served. I look forward to meeting the hon. Lady next week.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): A key factor in retaining members of our armed forces is the state of their accommodation. As a former Guards officer based at Wellington barracks, I hear rumours that they are not good. Is the Minister happy that accommodation generally throughout the armed forces meets the required standard?

Johnny Mercer: This Government are putting more money than ever before into armed forces accommodation. I am clear that some of the accommodation we ask our personnel to live in is nowhere near good enough. We have a new programme of inspections and we are determined to get a grip on the issue. I am confident that in the next 12 to 24 months, servicemen and women in this country will see a significant uplift in the standard of their accommodation.

Global Britain

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on global Britain, following the Prime Minister's written ministerial statement today.

Last Friday, 31 January, the United Kingdom left the European Union. Before then, for three long years, we had debated the European question. Members on both sides of the Chamber were weary and people out in the country were tired of the wrangling, so I think there is relief on all sides that the question is now settled. I know that the point of departure is difficult for many people—decent people who love their country and who did not want us to leave—so it is incumbent on this Government to show that leaving marks not an ending, but a bold new beginning. We take that responsibility very seriously.

When we ratified the withdrawal agreement, this Government and this Parliament finally delivered on the promise made to the British people over three years ago. We did that as a matter of democratic principle. We did it to keep faith with and to retain the confidence of the British people. In doing so, we sent a strong signal to the EU and to the world about our ambition and our resolve as we chart the course ahead. As one United Kingdom, we are now free to determine our own future as masters of our own destiny. We are free to reinvigorate our ties with old allies. We are free to forge new friendships around the world. As we seek those new relationships with friends and partners, the interests of the British people and the integrity of our Union will be the foundation stone of everything we do.

The Prime Minister's speech this morning and the written statement to the House start us on that journey by setting out the Government's proposed approach to our relations with the EU in 2020. The most important thing about 2020 is that having left the EU at the start of it, at the end of it we will fully and with absolute certainty regain complete economic and political independence. That is when the transition period ends, and it will not be extended.

We will have a new relationship with the EU, as sovereign equals, based on free trade. Between now and the end of the year, we will work with the EU to try to negotiate a free trade agreement, drawing on other recent agreements, such as the one between the EU and Canada. That should be the core of our future relationship. We will look to reach agreements on other priorities, including fisheries, internal security and aviation. These will be backed up by governance and dispute settlement arrangements appropriate to a free trade agreement, with no alignment and no role for the European Court of Justice, respectful of our democratic prerogatives. We hope we can agree. If we cannot, we will of course carry on trading with the EU in the same way as Australia and many other countries around the world—as a free country, collaborating where we can, and setting our own rules that work for us.

Of course, the EU is not our only trading partner, and at the same time we will be seeking to get agreements with other great trading countries around the world. We are delighted—in the words of US Secretary of State

Mike Pompeo, when he was here last week—that the UK is now front of the queue for a free trade deal with the United States. We expect to open negotiations with the US and other countries very soon—in that way we can broaden our horizons to embrace the huge opportunities in the rising economies of the future, where 90% of the world's growth comes from. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade will set out more detail in a written statement later this week, and I will visit Australia, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia over the next two weeks.

At such a crossroads moment, it is fitting and timely that this Government will engage in a thorough and careful review of the United Kingdom's place in the world, including through the integrated security, defence and foreign policy review. This review is an opportunity for us to reassess the ways we engage on the global stage—including in defence, diplomacy and our approach to development—to ensure we have a fully integrated approach, because now is the moment to look ahead with confidence and ambition, to signal to our future partners the outward-facing, trailblazing country that we intend to be.

We have a vision of a truly global Britain. The first pillar of our global Britain strategy will be to continue to prove that we are the best possible allies, partners and friends with our European neighbours. We are working closely with our European partners to find a political solution in Libya. We will continue to stand together to hold Iran to account for its systemic non-compliance with the joint comprehensive plan of action, the nuclear deal. We will work together to tackle shared threats and global challenges, whether it is Russia's aggression, terrorism, rising authoritarianism, climate change or, indeed, health crises such as the coronavirus. It was our honour on Friday to bring home 29 other Europeans on the UK-commissioned charter flight from Wuhan, along with the 97 Britons, because we will always look out for our European friends, with whom we share so many interests. I am grateful to the Spanish Foreign Minister for Spain's help in co-ordinating that effort and to the French Foreign Minister in relation to the flight that came home on Sunday.¹

The next pillar of our global Britain strategy will be the UK's role as an energetic champion of free and open trade—to boost small businesses, cut the cost of living, create the well-paid jobs of the future for the next generation, provide more consumer choice and to raise UK productivity, which is so important for our “levelling up” agenda right across the country. The pursuit of shared prosperity has an essential role to play in our approach to development policy, too. As we maintain our 0.7% commitment on development spending, we need to find better ways of making sure it contributes to long-term and sustainable economic growth. As we demonstrated at the UK-Africa Investment Summit, we believe the UK has a unique and competitive offer to tackle poverty and help poorer nations benefit in a way that benefits us all over the longer term.

Finally, the third pillar of our global Britain will be the UK as an even stronger force for good in the world. Our guiding lights will remain the values of democracy, human rights and the international rule of law, and we will lead on global issues that really matter, such as climate change. That is why this year we will host

1. [Official Report, 5 February 2020, Vol. 671, c. 6MC.]

[Dominic Raab]

the UN climate change summit, COP26, in Glasgow. We will lead by example and rise to the challenge by harnessing all the British talents in tech, innovation and entrepreneurialism to find creative solutions to global problems. We will champion the great causes of our day, as through our campaign to give every girl access to 12 years of quality education. We will defend journalists from attack, stand up for freedom of religion and conscience, and develop our own independent sanctions regime to tackle human rights abusers head on. Together, united, we can show that this country is so much bigger than the sum of its parts.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Did Dominic Cummings write this rubbish?

Dominic Raab: I know the hon. Gentleman does not like that commitment, but it is what the Scottish people voted for.

The 31st of January was a day that will be etched in our history. It has been hard going, and I know that many good people on both sides of the House and all sides of this totemic debate still bear the scars of the last three years, but now is the time to put our differences aside and come together, so together let us embrace a new chapter for our country, let us move forward united and unleash the enormous potential of the British people, and let us show the world that our finest achievements and our greatest contributions lie ahead. I commend this statement to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I expect to run questions for 45 minutes. I call Paul Blomfield.

3.41 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of his statement.

The Foreign Secretary is right that the last three years have been difficult and divisive for our country. He is also right that leaving the EU does not mark an ending. We have left the EU, but Brexit is far from done. As he knows, the next stage is more difficult—agreeing our future relationship in all the areas he set out, and in more besides—and we will continue to be dogged by the central dilemma that was at the heart of much of the wrangling over the last three years: will the new relationship be determined by the economic interests of our country or by the ideological commitment to break with the European social model that drove so many of the Brexit enthusiasts? I am sorry to see that today's statement and the Prime Minister's comments over the weekend suggest that ideology has trumped common sense.

Difficult decisions lie ahead for our country, and if the Government are serious about bringing people together we need reassurance that they will conduct the next stage of negotiations in an open and accountable way—and not by banning journalists from their political briefings, as they apparently did earlier this afternoon. The Government stripped Parliament's role in providing accountability from the withdrawal agreement Act, so will the Foreign Secretary at least commit to publishing all negotiating texts and proposals and reporting to

Parliament on each round of negotiations? [Interruption.] I want to see this Parliament in no less a place than the European Parliament, as the EU negotiators will. Will he also set out exactly how the three devolved nations will be consulted at every stage of the process?

The country is faced with two options—two opposite destinations: we can either form a new and close relationship with our biggest trading partners, or open the door and lower our standards by pursuing the damaging trade deal with Donald Trump that the Foreign Secretary welcomed in his comments. [Interruption.] I see the faces of some Government Members. They may change when the farmers whom many of them represent respond to Trump's ambitions for that trade deal, which would damage not only farming but manufacturing, lower standards and expose our public services to real risks. As Government Members might have noticed, this weekend the UK's former ambassador to the US, Sir Kim Darroch, made it clear that Trump would aim to force the NHS to pay higher prices for pharmaceuticals. The NHS itself has expressed concern about that.

The reckless pursuit of a Trump trade deal is limiting the Government's aims in their negotiations with the EU. We started with a commitment to the "exact same benefits" as we currently enjoy with the EU. That was scaled back to "frictionless trade". Now it is either a damaging Canada-style deal or leaving without a deal—rebranded as an Australia-style deal. Do the Government still recognise their own analysis from 2018—the Foreign Secretary will note that the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), is sitting behind him—which shows that a Canada-style deal would lead to a 6.7% reduction in our GDP, while a WTO-style deal would lead to a 9.3% hit, hurting every region and nation of our country?

Business will be alarmed by the casual way in which the Foreign Secretary talks about leaving without an agreement, and other sectors—such as universities, which are critical to our future—will be concerned about the fact that they were not mentioned at all in his statement, or in the written statement from the Prime Minister. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the Government will press for association with Horizon Europe and continued participation in Erasmus?

Labour will continue to press for a relationship with our European partners based on common regulation and a level playing field, for a new place in the world based on internationalist values, and for a future with equality and social justice at its heart.

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks about the importance of moving beyond the divisions of the referendum. However, I think I am right in saying that not one member of the shadow Cabinet is here to address these issues. [Interruption.] I apologise. There is one. However, the shadow Foreign Secretary and the shadow Brexit Secretary are busy debating the Labour leadership, although this is an important moment for Members in all parts of the House to look at the future direction of this country.

The hon. Gentleman talked about parliamentary scrutiny. We have made it absolutely clear—the Prime Minister made this point on Second Reading of the Bill that became the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020—that Parliament will be kept fully informed about the progress of the negotiations. Both Houses

will have access to all their usual arrangements for scrutinising the actions of the Executive, and the Government are confident that Parliament will take full advantage of those opportunities. We will also ensure that there is full engagement with the devolved Administrations.

The hon. Gentleman made a number of other points, and I have been listening to his more recent remarks, including those made since the election. He has said that the Labour party should have organised an out-and-out campaign for Remain during the election campaign. That suggests to me that the hon. Gentleman, and indeed the Labour party, have still not quite “got it” that there is a referendum result, a democratic will, that must be respected. We will not move on from this debate, let alone grasp the opportunities of Brexit, if the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party stay stuck in that rut.

It was not clear to me whether his attack on our proposals and ambition for free trade agreements was just the tired, old anti-Americanism that is harboured in the Labour party, or whether he is actually against free trade in itself, but he does not seem to believe in democracy and he does not seem to believe in free trade, and at points during his remarks he did not seem to believe in the potential of this country.

Let me now turn to the hon. Gentleman’s specific points about a free trade agreement with the United States. Let us be absolutely clear, as we have already been: the national health service is not on the table during those negotiations. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is pointing and asking about pharmaceutical companies. The pricing of UK medicine is not up for negotiation. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says that that is not what the ambassador says. It is what this Government and this Prime Minister say.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the free trade agreement with the United States, but he made no mention of the prospects for an ambitious FTA with Japan, Australia or New Zealand, or of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Is he against those as well? It seems to me that he is pitting himself against a huge opportunity for this country to grow its trade, boost its small businesses and ease the cost of living for consumers, and that is a step back, not forward, for the United Kingdom. He also mentioned forecasts. I think that there is a degree of healthy scepticism about some of those forecasts.

The United Kingdom and the Government are not passive observers. It is incumbent on us—through our approach to the economy, through an ambitious approach to free trade and through getting the right immigration policy—to ensure that we grasp the opportunities, and we on this side of the House are absolutely committed to grasping those opportunities and making a full success of Britain in every quarter of the Union.

The hon. Gentleman referred to business sentiment. We have seen purchasing managers index data on manufacturing today, which was positive at 50 points. The EY ITEM Club has identified an increase in business confidence, and the International Monetary Fund has increased its forecast for the UK. We are confident that we can make a success of Brexit. I am only sorry that the Labour party is still looking over its shoulder.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): My right hon. Friend’s statement made only a passing reference to the agreement on internal security for the future. Unlike the Labour party, I do not expect the Government to publish their full negotiating mandate, but will they publicly make much clearer their intentions for that treaty in regard to key instruments that keep us safe, such as PNR—passenger name records—the Prüm convention and Schengen information system II? What is the final date on which that treaty can be agreed, such that it will become operational on 1 January 2021?

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for the work that she has done in this area. For more detail, I can point her in the direction of the Prime Minister’s written ministerial statement. She will know from her own experience of negotiating with the EU that there are difficulties because it claims that access to some of the instruments will be conditional on accepting free movement. I know that she will agree that we must bring an end to free movement. However, I accept that data sharing, extradition and our relationship with Europol and Eurojust are important elements of our law enforcement co-operation, and we will be looking forward to securing appropriate relations with the EU.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me early sight of his statement. He said that the UK would “look ahead with confidence” and “signal to future partners” that we were “outward-facing”. May I disagree? I think that all these plans risk making the UK a smaller, more insular and more isolated place. He also spoke about a “truly global Britain” and about being the “best possible allies” with the EU, but I fear that that was rather contradicted when the Prime Minister said in his written statement today that there would not be “any regulatory alignment” at all, even on the efficacy of medicines.

The Prime Minister also said that there would be no “supranational control in any area”

of UK policy. The World Trade Organisation has an appellate body—a dispute resolution body—the European Free Trade Association has a court to deal with disputes, and even the much-vaunted CPTPP has an investor-state dispute resolution mechanism. Unless the English language has changed, every single one of those bodies and mechanisms has supernatural effect—*[Laughter.]* It may well be supernatural as well! Every one of those bodies has supranational effect. Does the Secretary of State not understand that if our putative trading partners insist on formal dispute resolution mechanisms or institutions, our saying no might risk the UK being seen as abandoning the international rules-based system? Does he not understand that rejecting formal dispute resolution mechanisms or institutions when our partners insist on them will make it harder, not easier, to strike deals? Does he not understand that if the UK reverts to WTO rules—the UK’s favoured option outside any real agreements—the WTO has an appellate body, a dispute resolution body, that is supranational in its effect, thus rendering the red lines laid out by the Prime Minister this morning utterly useless before the ink is even dry on them?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman referred at the outset of his question to an approach that was smaller, insular and isolated, but I am afraid that that sounds

[*Dominic Raab*]

like the Scottish National party's recipe for the people of Scotland. The Conservatives want one United Kingdom proceeding forward and ready to grasp any opportunities, including for the Scottish people, and including ensuring that we have full control over our fisheries as an independent coastal state—one thing that he would clearly be willing to sacrifice at the drop of a hat. Although it is understandable that the SNP, given the views of its leadership, calls for more and more powers to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, it is astonishing that it wants to give up power to unelected bureaucrats in Brussels through what he calls dynamic legislative alignment. There is a total contradiction in his position.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the dispute resolution mechanism. The UK Government will approach the negotiations in the same way we did for the withdrawal agreement—although this will be tailored to free trade and areas of security co-operation—and will ensure that there is a track for negotiated diplomacy to resolve problems through political resolution. As for arbitration, where it is necessary, the common practice is that both sides appoint arbitrators and appoint a chair. What we will never do—the EU calls for this and the SNP seems to endorse it—is allow one side's judicial institutions to have control over the dispute resolution mechanism for both sides. That would be entirely lopsided and a fundamental abdication of responsibility by any responsible Government, and we will not go down that path.

I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman will continue to make in his own way the blinkered arguments for a second referendum in Scotland. In the meantime, we will continue to work in the full interests of the whole United Kingdom and take this country forward together and united.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): My right hon. Friend will have welcomed how our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister handled the recent Iran emergency and will agree that his work in bringing together two other European powers into the E3 was extremely impressive. Does my right hon. Friend have any views on a few more of the institutional tie-ups that Lord Hague recommended to the Foreign Affairs Committee in the previous Parliament? Although global Britain works beautifully in reaching out, perhaps we could look at and grow some of our more immediate bilateral partnerships.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend makes some good points. Of course, the E3 co-operation lies outside the formal structures of the EU, but it worked effectively in the recent Berlin conference on Libya, and we also worked closely on triggering the DRM under the joint comprehensive plan of action. By working in co-operation with our French and Spanish partners on the coronavirus evacuations and chartered flights, we have shown that bilateral relations provide ample opportunity to prove that we will be even stronger neighbours, partners and allies in the years ahead.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): In the Prime Minister's other written ministerial statement this morning on the closure of the Department for Exiting the European Union, he said:

“Those of its functions which are still required have been transferred to relevant government departments.”

Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House to which Department and which Minister responsibility for the negotiations on our future relationship with the EU has been transferred? The Exiting the European Union Committee will be keen to hear from him or her as soon as they are identified.

Dominic Raab: Of course, people from a range of Departments were siphoned into DExEU when it was created. We have taken back a significant number of DExEU officials into the Foreign Office, and the Minister for Europe and the Americas, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), talked to them earlier today. They will be integrated into the wider functions of Government in the usual way.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and the Prime Minister on his.

Looking at the service sector, given that the EU has made next to no effort in most of the trade deal arrangements that they have negotiated to put any special pressure for a regulatory position for the UK in financial services, does my right hon. Friend now think that the EU will reference enhanced equivalence, as in the paper written by the lawyer Barnabas Reynolds, which the Treasury accepted? Will my right hon. Friend be proposing that to the EU as the way forward when it comes to regulation?

Dominic Raab: Our ambition is to include comprehensive obligations on market access and fair competition in relation to—

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Who is going to be leading it?

Dominic Raab: The Prime Minister's adviser, David Frost, is leading the negotiations. If the hon. Gentleman was paying attention, he would know that already. As for financial services, we are willing to look at regulatory and supervisory co-operation arrangements as long as they can be done on the basis of equivalence. I am aware of the paper to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) refers, but the matter is already in the political declaration. Obviously, as we proceed with the second phase of the negotiations on the future relationship, we will want to ensure that the EU lives up to its side of the bargain in that area.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): As the Foreign Secretary embarks on his review of the world, will he remember individual cases affected by our foreign policy—including that of my constituent Luke Symons, who, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, is being held captive by the Houthis in Sana'a? The family have been in touch with the Foreign Office about concerns for his welfare and mental health. Can the Foreign Secretary assure me that maximum efforts are being made to secure Luke's release?

Dominic Raab: I can, and I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his tireless efforts on behalf of his constituent. It is a difficult case, but we will continue to do as much as we can to support the family and to secure release. The consular teams in the Foreign Office,

as well as the missions and the geographic departments, work very hard on this. A lot of the consular work takes place beneath the surface, privately; the exercise of diplomacy has to be done out of the public limelight, almost by definition. But I assure the hon. Gentleman that we work tirelessly to secure release in cases such as this.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary give a cast-iron guarantee that under no circumstances will the territorial sovereignty of Gibraltar be part of any type of negotiation as part of the trade agreement? Will he also confirm that any free trade agreement with the EU—and, indeed, the rest of the world—in future will include benefits for all our overseas territories and the Crown dependencies?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend, who has been a tireless champion of not just Gibraltar but all the overseas territories. We are absolutely clear: the UK will not exclude Gibraltar from our negotiations with the EU. We will negotiate on behalf of the whole United Kingdom family, and that includes Gibraltar.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If the concept of a global Britain is to have any meaning and value, surely it must have respect for human rights and an international rules-based order at its heart. With that in mind, will the Foreign Secretary reconsider the unqualified support he gave to President Trump last week in respect of the so-called peace plan for Palestine? Will the right hon. Gentleman repudiate the proposed annexation of the west bank and at long last support the recognition of a Palestinian state?

Dominic Raab: I gently say to the right hon. Gentleman that I do not think he has read the detail of this. Whatever else he may disagree with, the one thing that the plan put forward by the US included was a recognition of and commitment to a two-state solution. We have been absolutely clear that that is the only way in which the conflict can be resolved.

We support a plan and a mechanism to get the parties out of the destabilising vacuum and void that there has been of late, and around the table. The plan is only the point of departure. I share some of the concerns expressed around settlements; I think there is also a question around the status of Jerusalem. But above all, rather than just rejecting the plan, it is important that we try to bring the parties together around the negotiating table. That is the only path to peace and to a two-state solution.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): The Prime Minister's speech was really clear in giving examples of how far above the level playing field the UK already is. In seeking a Canada-style free trade agreement, along the lines of what I think is chapter 15 on financial services equivalence, will the Foreign Secretary tell us a little more about what is mentioned in the written ministerial statement—the structured withdrawal of equivalence for financial services and who would arbitrate on that?

Dominic Raab: We have said not only in the written statement but in the political declaration that we want financial services to proceed on the basis of the kind of

co-operation that involves recognition of the equivalence of regulation. We think that is the best approach for the UK but also for the relationship with the EU.

The dispute resolution mechanism will be tailored to the different fields and sectors covered by the FTA and the broader areas of co-operation. However, in the case of binding resolution, we have been clear that that would involve arbitration with both parties contributing. Typically, a chair is selected by the arbitrators who have been nominated, and that does not involve the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): If the 15-year damage to our economy is not to be the 6.7% or 9.3% respectively for the so-called Canada deal or no deal, which the Government are now trying to rebadge as an “Australian deal”, what is it? And why have the Government changed their mind?

Dominic Raab: We are absolutely confident that the approach we are taking allows us to grasp the opportunities, including in relation to free trade and in making sure we have full control over our own laws and are fully economically and politically independent.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): Around the world protectionism is growing, and the UK has a duty to be a vocal advocate for free trade across the globe. So what reassurance can my right hon. Friend give businesses and manufacturers in my constituency that we will do just that and that free trade will become the backbone of British foreign policy?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend will have heard the Prime Minister's speech this morning, and I am sure it will repay reading. He is clear that at a time when there is protectionism around the world, there is a real case and place—and this would be a real unique selling point for us—for the United Kingdom being a champion of liberal, global free trade. That will have advantages not only for the businesses in my hon. Friend's constituency but for the low-income and middle-income families who appreciate and feel the cost of living pressures, because of the way this increases choice and reduces prices at home.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Hosting the global climate conference COP26 is a huge opportunity for Britain to tackle the climate emergency and play an international leadership role. So why is this mired in chaos and confusion? The Prime Minister has failed to chair a single meeting of the climate Cabinet Committee and now he has sacked the conference president. Why is that? What are the Government going to do to play that leadership role that we all need to see?

Dominic Raab: The leadership role is seen, first, in the actions we are taking in decarbonising the UK economy; secondly, in being the first major economy to commit to net zero by 2030; and thirdly, in showing the international leadership. We do not just want the country together; we want to bring other countries together, and that is why we are hosting COP26. I pay tribute to the work Claire Perry did. As we move forward to this more intense lead-up to COP26, it is right that there is full ministerial responsibility over the negotiations and over the leadership of the COP.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Trade is important, but so are our values. Will the Foreign Secretary commit to ensuring that our values of freedom of speech, a free press, an independent judiciary, and paying great attention to tackling modern slavery and other such international crimes, are front and centre in all that this country does in the coming months and years?

Dominic Raab: I can reassure my hon. Friend, and not just with the campaign for media freedom, which we are leading along with our Canadian friends; we have that emphasis on protecting journalists and whistleblowers, who shine a light on the worst injustices in the bleakest corners of the world. I do not know whether he is in the Chamber, but I pay tribute to the Prime Minister's special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), and we will be taking that work forward. We are also introducing a separate new autonomous sanctions regime to make sure that the worst human rights abusers in the world can be held to account, through visa bans and asset freezes.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Tackling the climate emergency must be core to trade policy, yet the lack of specific Government proposals looks miserably weak compared with the European Commission work on carbon border tariffs and the European Parliament ruling out trade deals with countries not signed up to the Paris agreement. The Foreign Secretary keeps going on about how Britain is going to be leading the world in tackling climate change, so let us prove it: can he say whether or not the Government will commit to going at least as far as those two EU proposals? No more waffle, no more rhetoric—will he or will he not?

Dominic Raab: We have set out our proposals, and we are committed to that ambition: reducing to net zero by 2050; continuing to reduce carbon dioxide emissions; and bringing together innovation, technology and entrepreneurs to provide British answers to the climate change challenge. Of course, with our Italian co-hosts, we are also leading the COP26 conference in November.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, as an independent coastal state, our UK fishermen will be given priority over catching any fish stocks in our 200-mile to median line limit?

Dominic Raab: We automatically take back control of our waters and others' right to fish in them at the end of 2020. We will be leaving the common fisheries policy, so we will be an independent coastal state. In line with the practice of other such states, the agreement we do with the EU will provide a framework for annual negotiations on access and quotas. I hope that gives my hon. Friend and her constituents the reassurance they need.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): In aerospace, aviation, engineering, food, farming and ceramics, the organisations that represent those who employ millions of workers have expressed serious concern over what happens if the Government get it wrong. Will the Secretary of State undertake that the Government will, in the next stages, fully engage those industrial

organisations and the unions that represent the workers concerned, not least because if the Government get it wrong—there is a real risk of that—tens of thousands of workers will pay the price with their jobs?

Dominic Raab: I do not share the hon Gentleman's pessimistic outlook, but it is important that all areas of civil society, including the unions, are engaged and can feed in their views on all the different sectoral aspects he mentioned. The hon. Gentleman talked in particular about aviation; we believe that there is mutual benefit in an air-transport agreement that covers market access to air services, aviation safety and security. That is just one of the wider areas of co-operation that we will look to take forward with our EU partners.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Government confirm that the European Union has misjudged the mettle of this Government and country in thinking that we are going to give away our fish again and accept all the EU's laws in return for a free trade agreement that it needs more than us? I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, and say no more concessions.

Dominic Raab: I think I agree with all my right hon. Friend's points. We were asked by the EU to make a choice and we have chosen a Canada-style agreement. It seems to many of us that the EU would like to cherry-pick by giving us the level of access of a Canada-style agreement while wanting the level of alignment of a Norwegian-style agreement. That is not on the table.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): If we diverge from EU standards to secure a US trade deal, that will have huge consequences for Northern Ireland. Many in the US Congress, both Democrats and Republicans, have said that they will never ratify any infringements of the Good Friday agreement, and they have said so publicly. Will the Secretary of State explain how the situation will be resolved?

Dominic Raab: It has already been materially resolved. When I was out in Washington, I met many members on the hill from all sides of Congress, including Richie Neal, who chairs the Friends of Ireland caucus. We were able to show that, with the changes we have made to the withdrawal agreement and the protections and safeguards for the Good Friday agreement, we are protecting the situation in Northern Ireland. We have strong support on both sides of the aisle in the US for the approach we have taken and, indeed, for US-UK free trade agreement. I hope that the hon. Lady will now get behind it.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary assure the House in clear, explicit terms that under no circumstances will there be any role for the European Court of Justice, that there will be no acceptance of EU rules, and that there will be no weakening in our resolve to impose tariffs if the EU will not conduct a fair and free negotiation? In the words of our former Prime Minister, "No. No. No."—and this time we will back the Prime Minister.

Dominic Raab: We of course enter the negotiations with a spirit of optimism, ambition and good will, but we also want to be clear. I think a question was asked

earlier about the EU side not understanding what is and is not up for negotiation. We are not going to allow the European Court of Justice to adjudicate disputes that affect the United Kingdom. That is not global practice and it would be totally lopsided. Equally, in relation to a level playing field or other areas of high alignment, we have been absolutely clear—the Prime Minister was this morning—that we will have full economic and political independence and full control over our laws.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary says that he wants a Canada-style free trade agreement and claims that FTAs never include level-playing-field obligations, but article 23.4 of the EU-Canada FTA clearly states that

“it is inappropriate to encourage trade or investment by weakening or reducing...labour law and standards.”

Will the Foreign Secretary be honest with the British people and state clearly that free trade agreements always include level-playing-field obligations?

Dominic Raab: I know that the hon. Gentleman follows these things carefully. Of course, the article in the EU-Canada agreement to which he refers is a hortatory recognition of the importance of strong labour laws; it is not legislative high alignment. That is precisely the kind of approach that the UK would take.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): What I hope we can still call the Prime Minister's tour de force this morning laid out clearly that he did not believe we needed any further treaties or institutions to cover security, foreign and defence issues, but to avoid any misunderstanding will the Foreign Secretary confirm that agreement on data protection is going to be vital, not only for security issues but for wider service export interests? We currently have a considerable service surplus in our trade with the EU.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is right that data is important. We are, of course, looking at the data adequacy process. Given the high level and high standards of UK regulation and laws in this regard, we are confident that, whatever approach we agree on in relation to the deal, we will be able to secure it in order to safeguard data-sharing both among businesses and individuals, but also, as he says quite rightly, in relation to law enforcement and wider areas of security.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Foreign Secretary knows that the WTO and its dispute resolution system are operationally dysfunctional, because the US will not appoint appellant judges. Does he accept that, if we drift away from the protection of the laws, the rules and the courts of the EU, our jobs will be put at risk and our financial services, in particular, will disperse? We are already seeing the currency down 1%. Will he focus on keeping us aligned, rather than moving to a system that does not work?

Dominic Raab: I certainly agree that there is a case for WTO reform and for making sure that it can be an effective mechanism for resolving disputes. We want the WTO to work effectively. We want to be a champion of reform and liberalisation within the WTO. The answer though is not then to abdicate our responsibility through legislative high alignment with the EU.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): Every one of the Nobel prizes in the sciences awarded this year was awarded not to an individual, but to a group of people from different countries and different institutions. It is clear that creative genius is international. Will my right hon. Friend tell us how British scientists can continue to operate in international, global and European networks?

Dominic Raab: The issue of 5G and high-risk vendors has raised the importance of making sure that the UK has the right fiscal regulatory approach to encouraging tech investment in this country so that, for both the present and the future, it is an area of competitive advantage. When we co-operate and collaborate with our North American friends, our Five Eyes friends and our European friends, it is important to ensure that we have the collaborative approach and the mobility arrangements through the tax and the research and development incentives to boost tech nationally. It is important that we work with our like-minded friends and partners.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the Secretary of State agree that sensible deals such as lowering the bourbon tariff from the US to facilitate lowering the whisky tariff for all the United Kingdom, including for my own Echlinville Distillery in Kircubbin in Strangford, is the way to make the most of what we can achieve on the global market?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. That is just one area where a free trade agreement with the US and, indeed, with other countries around the world—particularly with the markets of the future and the growth opportunities of the future, in the Asia Pacific area—can create benefits for all quarters and for all nations of the United Kingdom.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): After three years of Brexit distraction, it is wonderful to hear a Foreign Secretary who is determined to see Britain play a more influential role on the international stage. To that end, does he agree that the forthcoming security review will prove to be an inflection point in determining the impact of the growing threats that we face, the aspirational role that the UK aspires to play, and the subsequent hard and soft power upgrade that we will require to fulfil that ambition?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question and congratulate him on his recent election to the Select Committee. I agree with all the aspects that he raised. We want to make sure that we look at foreign policy and all its elements in the round, from security to development. We want to make sure that, as we move forward—leaving the European Union is a point of departure, not the point of arrival—we are global champions of free trade, good strong allies and neighbours not just with our American allies and friends, but with our European friends, and, above all, an even stronger force for good in the world.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): When did the European Union reach a trade agreement with Australia?

Dominic Raab: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the economic framework partnership agreement 2008.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Given that 10p in every pound that this Government spend comes from the financial services sector, will my right hon. Friend ensure that that sector is a key priority in trade negotiations ahead?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—financial services are a critical part of the UK economy. In the political declaration, clear arrangements are envisaged to make sure that we can strengthen financial services, both in the UK and into the European Union, and in particular I hope that the arrangements that we will pursue around equivalence will give effect to that.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): Those of us on the SNP Benches are told continually that we are privileged to be part of the world's most successful union of nations, yet I could detect no reference whatsoever to the devolved Administrations in the Secretary of State's speech. What will his negotiating strategy be with the devolved Administrations as he seeks to take forward his vision of global Britain?

Dominic Raab: I am glad to say that, beneath all the political froth, in my time as Brexit Secretary and from what I have observed since, the devolved Administrations have played a vital role in feeding in their priorities, making sure that the Government can update them on the process, the trade-offs and the competing interests that inevitably inform an international negotiation. I know that that will continue as we move forward.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there seem to have been hints from the Government that they will put more effort into the United Nations in future as part of global Britain, and in particular that we should put more effort into peacekeeping and that sort of activity in the United Nations? That will increase our soft power within a great organisation.

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, not for his role in the House, but for his experience and role in peacekeeping operations. I particularly remember him giving evidence to the Yugoslavia tribunal, in my time in The Hague, as an expert witness. He is absolutely right, and as we leave the European Union, while we want to maintain strong relations with our European friends and partners, we also want to make sure that NATO is fit for the future, and is strengthened and reinforced, given the changing threats that it faces. As he so rightly says, there is also an increasing role for an even more ambitious approach in the United Nations on human rights, but also on peacekeeping.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Successive Prime Ministers have come back from the European Council and boasted, quite rightly in many cases, how well they have done persuading the whole of the EU to adopt sanctions in relation to Russia. How are we going to do that when we are no longer sitting in the room?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. We will have the freedom to have a more autonomous approach to sanctions. [*Interruption.*] It is not quite true, if he looks at the competence of the EU. In relation to human rights abuses, we will set out our proposals shortly, but we have an interesting opportunity, working with our Canadian and wider Five Eyes partners, as well as with our bilateral partners who are closest to us on human rights issues, to provide, cement and reinforce an even broader coalition of like-minded countries that will hold dictators and despots to account for the worst abuses.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: For those whose questions have not been taken, we will certainly try to get you in in a future statement. I call the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the right hon. Nick Hancock.

Wuhan Coronavirus

4.22 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Nick? It is not “Room 101”, Mr Speaker.

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the ongoing situation with the Wuhan coronavirus. On Friday, the chief medical officer announced that two patients in England who are members of the same family tested positive for coronavirus. They were transferred to a specialist unit in Newcastle, where they are being cared for by expert staff. Public Health England is now contacting people who had close contact with these two confirmed cases. Close contacts will be given health advice about symptoms and emergency contact details to use, should they become unwell in the next 14 days. These tried and tested methods of infection control will ensure that we minimise the risk to the public.

On Friday, a Foreign Office-chartered aircraft carrying 83 British nationals left Wuhan for the UK, and I want to thank all those involved in that operation, including staff at my own Department, the Foreign Office, Border Force, the Ministry of Defence and military medics, as well as all the NHS staff, officials at Public Health England and many more who have worked 24/7 on our response so far.

Yesterday, we brought back a further 11 people via France, and returned UK nationals have been transferred to off-site NHS accommodation at Arrowe Park Hospital on the Wirral, where they will spend 14 days in supported quarantine as a precautionary measure. I thank all the staff there who have done so much to make that possible. There, they will have access to a specialist medical team who will regularly assess their symptoms. In addition, one British national has been taken to a separate NHS facility for testing.

We will take a belt-and-braces approach that makes public protection the absolute top priority, from a virus that is increasingly spreading across the world. As of today, there are more than 17,000 diagnosed cases in mainland China, with a further 185 in other countries, including France, Germany and the United States. There have been 362 fatalities so far. The World Health Organisation has now declared the situation a public health emergency of international concern, and the UK chief medical officers have raised the risk level to the UK from low to moderate. We are working closely with the WHO and international partners to ensure that we are ready for all eventualities.

Health Ministers from G7 countries spoke this afternoon, and agreed to co-ordinate our evidence and response wherever possible. The number of cases is currently doubling around every five days, and it is clear that the virus will be with us for at least some months to come; this is a marathon, not a sprint. On existing evidence, most cases are mild and most people recover. Nevertheless, anyone who has travelled from Wuhan or Hubei province in the last 14 days should immediately contact NHS 111 to inform the health service of their recent travel, and should stay indoors and avoid contact with other people just as they would with the flu—even if there are no symptoms. Anyone who has travelled to the UK from mainland China in the past 14 days and is experiencing a cough, fever or shortness of breath should self-isolate and call NHS 111, even if symptoms are mild.

We will do all we can to tackle this virus. We are one of the first countries in the world to develop a new test for it. Testing worldwide is being done on equipment designed in Oxford, and today I am making £20 million available to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations to speed up the development of a vaccine. I can announce that Public Health England has sequenced the viral genome from the first two positive cases in the UK, and is today making that sequence available to the scientific community. Its findings suggest that the virus has not evolved in the last month. We have also launched a public information campaign, setting out how every member of the public, including Members of this House, can help by taking simple steps to minimise the risk to themselves and their families: washing hands and using tissues when they sneeze, just as they would with flu. That goes for all of us.

We remain vigilant and determined to tackle this virus with well-developed plans in place. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I expect questions on the statement to run for up to 45 minutes.

4.28 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement, for the way in which he has kept the House updated, and for making arrangements for the chief medical officer, NHS England officials and Public Health England officials to keep me updated.

Our thoughts are naturally with those who have lost their lives and those who have contracted the virus, including the two cases mentioned by the Secretary of State. I thank our NHS staff, who once again show themselves to be exceptional and dedicated. I pay tribute to our world-leading expertise at Public Health England and NHS England. I also join the Secretary of State in putting on record our thanks to all those involved in returning British nationals from Wuhan. Will he tell the House whether it is the Government’s intention to return all remaining British nationals in China, and whether there will be more Foreign and Commonwealth Office-chartered flights in the coming days?

I agree with the Secretary of State that we must remain vigilant and alert, and not succumb to alarmism or scaremongering. As things stand, the virus has a mortality rate of around 2%. That is certainly significant but, as he says, most people will recover. However, the virus is highly infectious. The pathogen appears to be easily transmitted. Cases have now been reported in over 20 countries. The epidemic has grown at a pace quite unprecedented in recent history, with the official case count more than tripling in the past week.

I welcome the Secretary of State’s remarks about the G7. He will be aware, of course, that we have seen cases in countries such as Cambodia, Nepal and the Philippines that have weaker health systems than ours. What work is he carrying out with the Secretary of State for International Development to support countries around the world that will need extra help at this time?

I welcome the Secretary of State’s £20 million for vaccine research, but we have to recognise that, even if a vaccine is produced, it is probably some months away.

[Jonathan Ashworth]

Therefore, slowing down the virus spread while that vaccine is developed is absolutely crucial. So how many people has Public Health England now contacted who have been in touch with the two people who were infected? Is he able to share those figures with the House?

I understand, and indeed endorse, the precaution of NHS England in quarantining evacuees from Wuhan at Arrowe Park Hospital on the Wirral. I must mention my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), who is the local MP and who has been in touch regularly with Ministers, her constituents and the hospital since the news broke last Thursday. I have been contacted by a patient in quarantine who has told me that evacuees are tested for the virus only if they display symptoms because risk of virus transmission is considered low. It would help to reassure the House if the Secretary of State could clarify why, if risk of transmission among non-symptomatic evacuees is low, there is no option for evacuees to self-quarantine at home. I understand that Japan and the Netherlands are allowing such quarantine. As I say, I endorse the precautions that Ministers are taking, but it would be helpful if he could offer greater clarity and those reassurances. Indeed, what would be the response of the Government and the NHS if evacuees wanted to leave Arrowe Park and self-quarantine at home? Could he update the House on that?

I welcome the public information campaign. Will the Secretary of State update us on what discussions he has had with local authority public health officials and local authorities' social care providers and social care staff, who are obviously caring for people who are especially vulnerable to the respiratory problems associated with coronavirus?

This is a time of considerable strain on the NHS. I know the Secretary of State and I disagree on why that is, but he will accept that it is a time of huge pressure. How many specialist beds are available across the system to deal with more cases of coronavirus should we need them, and what is the capacity of trusts to flex up extra specialist beds if needed? If we do succumb to the epidemic in the UK, that will start to affect the wider NHS workforce as well. What plans are in place to ensure that NHS staff are protected over the coming months—because, as he rightly says, this is a marathon, not a sprint?

I am sure the Secretary of State would agree that we should have no truck with the racism and insensitivity shown towards Chinese and east Asian people that we have sadly seen in some quarters, with wrongly attributed videos showing wild animals being eaten and crass cartoons in the *Evening Standard*. Indeed, the French media are digging up old racist tropes as well. None of these attempts to dehumanise an entire ethnicity should be allowed to prevail.

I welcome the Secretary of State's statement today and hope he will continue to keep the House updated in the coming days and weeks.

Matt Hancock: I will try to answer all the shadow Secretary of State's questions, not least because I want to pay tribute to him for his balanced and reasonable approach in tackling what is ultimately a very significant public health challenge.

I entirely share with the shadow Secretary of State, and perhaps should have put in my initial statement, the rejection, which the whole House demonstrates, of any racism and insensitivity towards the Chinese community here or visitors here of Chinese origin. That will not help us to tackle this disease. We will do everything we can to tackle the disease, but racism will not help anybody, so I share his comments entirely.

We have no plans to evacuate all remaining UK nationals in China. There are an estimated 30,000 UK nationals in China, and the proportion of the population who have the virus outside Wuhan is much lower than in Wuhan. Of course, there are continued flights—not by British Airways and Virgin, which have suspended flights, but by Chinese airlines. We have appropriate measures in place at the airports, as advised by Public Health England, to ensure that those coming from the rest of China also get the appropriate advice, which includes to self-isolate if they have symptoms. We are clear that this evidence-led approach is the right way to take things forward. Of course, if the evidence and the clinical advice change, we will update policy, and I will come to the House at the first available opportunity to explain that. We are trying to take a science-led approach at all times.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the challenge of the virus getting out to other countries, and especially developing countries. I am working closely with the Department for International Development and have spoken to the Secretary of State on a number of occasions about this. Of course, the WHO represents the whole world. The Global Health Security Initiative is chaired by the UK and had a call this weekend. We are leading efforts around the world to ensure that we can help all countries, no matter the calibre of their health systems, to get a grip. I have authorised a team of British experts to go to the Philippines to support their work.

The hon. Gentleman is right that the goal is to slow down the spread of the virus, and we will take all actions that are proportionate and scientifically appropriate to do that. In the case that the epidemic here gets much more serious, we have 50 highly specialist beds, and a further 500 beds are available in order to isolate people, but of course, we are working on further plans should there need to be more.

Public Health England's contact tracing is ongoing. We will explain how far it has gone when we are ready to, and when we have managed to get in contact with all the people we need to get in contact with. I join the hon. Gentleman in thanking his colleagues from the Wirral, several of whom I have spoken to, for their support of the rational and sensible approach that we have been trying to take.

The hon. Gentleman asked about self-quarantine at home. The truth is that it is belt and braces to have full-blown quarantine. All those who are in quarantine have signed a contract agreeing to go into quarantine in return for getting on the flight. That is a good deal, because the flight was provided by the UK Government so that they could come back from an area that we deemed did not support their health. In return for coming back, they agreed to quarantine.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): As chairman of the all-party parliamentary China group, I extend on behalf of all Members our sympathies to the people of

China in their hour of need. I thank the crisis team in the Foreign Office, all those in the Department of Health and Social Care and everyone who has been doing their best to help our nationals in China at this difficult time and treat those who have come back with the virus.

I think we all strongly approve of the Secretary of State's decision to deploy extra money to develop vaccine capabilities through the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations—a group that some of us did not know about before the coronavirus came to be. Is China involved in that coalition, and to what extent are we working closely with it on that? I welcome the work being done across Departments. Will he do all he can to publicise the right number at the Foreign Office crisis team for those whose relations in Hubei or neighbouring provinces have so far been unable to get out?

Matt Hancock: I join my hon. Friend in thanking all those who are doing important work. We are of course working with the Chinese Government and we offer all support that they need. This is best done at a global level; hence it is going through the coalition, the World Health Organisation and the GHSI. With G7 partners, we are happy to respond to any demands or requests from countries around the world, not just from China, should that be needed. That includes countries whose health systems may not be as advanced as those of others, but which need support to make sure that they can tackle the virus.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families affected in what is truly a global health emergency. I have three quick questions for him. First, can he tell us what discussions he has had with the devolved Administrations, and will he commit to ensuring that they are updated in real time on any developments in order for them to react immediately in advance of any new announcements? Secondly, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has issued an urgent request for medical masks, protective suits and safety goggles. Is this something the Government will be looking to provide? Finally, what assessment has he made of the conflicting advice on closing borders—some voices are saying that this could inadvertently lead to an increase in the number of affected persons—and how has that impacted on any advice that he and his departmental officials have chosen to give?

Matt Hancock: The engagement with the devolved Administrations has been incredibly important in this so far, and will continue to be. Each of the devolved nations has a chief medical officer, and the team of the four CMOs is an incredibly important forum for making sure that the advice going to all four nations is clinically justified and correct. That has been working very well. Personally, I have spoken to the Ministers involved as well. We have a principle that we share information and publications before they go public, and thus far that has worked well. The hon. Member is right about the requests for equipment. We have sent out equipment to China, and we of course stand ready to respond to any further requests it has.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that learning about the decision on quarantine from BBC News, rather than being told

about it by his Department, which is what happened to me and most of my colleagues on the Wirral, was an error? That meant we were inundated with emails and phone calls from very worried constituents, and we had been given no briefings from which we could get any reassurance. Will he undertake to this House that such a thing will not happen again? When health emergencies like this happen, we are all in the same boat. We have to be able to reassure our constituents, and we cannot do that if we have not been briefed ourselves. Will he thank his junior Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), and the chief medical officer for the briefings that we have received subsequently, but will he please learn that lesson?

Matt Hancock: I called the hon. Member whose constituency includes Arrows Park. This was a very fast-moving situation, so being in contact with the local MP was incredibly important. Subsequently, as we were able to, we were also in contact with all Wirral MPs. However, I absolutely take the point: the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) would have preferred a briefing in advance; her colleague in whose constituency the hospital is got such a briefing. I apologise that that did not manage to get done in what was, as she will understand, a fast-moving circumstance, when our first priority was the protection of the public and of course those being evacuated.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I very much welcome the Health Secretary confirming that he has granted £20 million to seek a vaccine to combat the coronavirus, which I think is commensurate with Britain being a global health power. May I have assurances—I am sure he will give me these—that the UK will continue to play the most international role in combating both this virus and other global health threats that exist?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is right, and I am sure we can do yet more. Today, we put an extra £20 million into the global effort, and the UK is playing a huge international role. As I said in my statement, the main testing equipment was developed in Oxford and is now used around the world, and Public Health England's work at Porton Down is globally leading. Developments in the science around the vaccine are a global effort in which Britain is taking the lead.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Merseyside is home to the oldest Chinese community in Europe, so I certainly associate myself with the remarks of the shadow Secretary of State. While some in the Wirral were surprised by the news, many of my constituents have been in touch to say that their first thoughts are with those currently experiencing quarantine, in what must be a distressing situation for them. Given that we will have many lessons learnt, will the Secretary of State commit to visiting the Wirral, so that he can thank Merseyside police and NHS staff, and all those who have helped, and understand the experience so that we can improve as necessary? No doubt at some point this will happen again.

Matt Hancock: Yes, I would be happy to make that commitment. As the hon. Member may know, I was born and brought up in Chester; the Wirral is but a

[*Matt Hancock*]

stone's throw away. I wish to add Wirral Council to her list. It has done a great job in difficult circumstances, and worked closely with us to ensure the best support for those evacuees currently at Arrowe Park and for everybody on the Wirral, so that they get the support they need.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend point people to a resource where they could look up the symptoms they might have, what symptoms are indicative of the coronavirus and what they might do if they think they are infected?

Matt Hancock: The first thing people can do is ring 111, or look on the Public Health England website and the NHS website, which includes links. Critically, people should not go to A& E or to their GP without first calling 111 because they may inadvertently contribute to the spread of the virus, rather than contain it.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I agree with the Secretary of State that a co-ordinated global response is extremely important, because we know that delaying responses could hasten the spread of the disease. Does he share my concern about reports in *The New York Times* yesterday, which referred to countries where China holds sway? For example, Cambodia is a magnet for Chinese tourists and workers. Its Prime Minister, Hun Sen, told a news conference that anybody wearing a mask would be kicked out of that conference because it would create a climate of fear. Does the Secretary of State share my concern that that does not bode well for trying to slow down the spread of this disease?

Matt Hancock: I have not seen that report, but I will look into it.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I commend the response by the Secretary of State and his Department, but without wishing to appear a conspiracy theorist, serious questions are going round about the role of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which incorporates the National Bio-safety Laboratory in China, and about whether there has been under-reporting of the level of fatalities and the number of people affected by this issue. Is the Secretary of State absolutely happy that the Chinese authorities have been completely transparent with the details of this virus and its impact?

Matt Hancock: When a virus such as this strikes, it causes a series of difficulties, especially in the epicentre, and it is clear that the health system in Wuhan is struggling to cope. Collecting the information is therefore necessarily difficult, even with the best of intentions. I understand that there is a lot of noise about this issue on the internet. The most important thing is to try to get the best information we can, analyse it, respond and follow the science wherever possible.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I particularly thank Public Health England for the advice it has provided throughout the weekend, but levels of concern remain high in York. Not only is that impacting on the local economy, but people are concerned. That

concern could be alleviated by better communication and if the statutory bodies—including the local authority, the university, the police and other authorities—are kept better informed about what is happening. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss what has happened in York and learn from that so that it can be repeated in a better way elsewhere?

Matt Hancock: I agree with the hon. Lady that through experiencing a challenge such as this, when things are moving fast and information flows very quickly, we can always improve the way in which those flows occur. The Minister leading on this will be happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss these matters because, as she rightly identifies, we must constantly seek improvement. I pay tribute to the approach she has taken, given that the two cases identified in England so far involve residents of her constituency.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I thank the Health Secretary for updating the House today. As one who has worked on the frontline in primary care, I know that the people working there often bear the brunt of these events, dealing with both the people who are scared when they come in to talk and those who actually suffer from the virus. My colleagues back in practice will be pleased that my right hon. Friend has directed people towards the 111 service, but what has he done to tell colleagues in GP practices or health centres where they should signpost people who turn up in those locations? If the situation worsens and becomes more sinister and widespread, will any funding be made available?

Matt Hancock: We have clearly communicated advice to all GPs and published it. I will not repeat it here, because what matters is that people follow the precise clinical guidelines set out by the medical leaders of the NHS and the chief medical officer.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his update to the House. It was reported in the *Liverpool Echo* that if anyone in quarantine at Arrowe Park falls ill—we hope that no one does—they will be treated at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital. I am sure that that is right and correct, but as a consequence many constituents have asked what that means and put safety questions to me. I have had no communication from Public Health England, Ministers or anyone else, so it is hard for me to reassure my constituents. Will he make sure that MPs from a broader range of places near the Wirral can get information from Public Health England and Ministers, so we can be in the frontline of reassuring our constituents?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely. We are to hold a briefing with the lead Minister and the chief medical officer that is open to all MPs from across the House, so they can put questions directly to the chief medical officer and get the clinical evidence behind the decisions we are taking.

Specifically on the hon. Lady's question, the Royal Liverpool is one of the best hospitals in the world for dealing with these sorts of disease. It is one of the hospitals that we identified in advance as a place where people with coronavirus would be taken. One of the advantages of using the facilities at Arrowe Park was its proximity. Transit from A to B will of course be in

secure conditions, so that no one is affected on the way. People can rest assured that if a case emerges in the isolation area at Arrowe Park, we have plans in place to get those affected to Liverpool and into the hospital in a way that does not affect nearby residents. To be frank, local residents should be very proud of their hospital.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Apparently, there have been 361 deaths from coronavirus in China, with many more infected. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that in the worst-case scenario—if it does get into this country and people develop symptoms—their chances of dying are not that great?

Matt Hancock: One part of that is true and another is sadly not, in that it is no longer “if” it comes to this country—it is here. However, the thrust of what my hon. Friend says is absolutely right: the current rate of mortality—those who die having contracted the disease—is around 2%, which is significantly lower than other recent diseases of this type, such as SARS, and a lot lower than Ebola. However, as the shadow Secretary of State said, the rate of transmission appears to be higher, and the number of cases appears to be doubling around every five days. We have the challenge of a disease that is transmitting relatively quickly, but the vast majority of people who have it survive.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): In answer to my written question from 27 January, the Government said that funding is in place to deal with this public health challenge. Will the Secretary of State outline exactly how much contingency funding has been allocated, further to the £20 million in his statement, and is that just to the Department of Health and Social Care or across Government?

Matt Hancock: Currently, there is no further need for the draw-down of funding. However, conversations with the Treasury have taken place to ensure that all the funding that is necessary will be available, if it is needed outside existing departmental budgets.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for keeping us updated on the situation in York. I appreciate that Public Health England says that it is making good progress in identifying everyone in York who has had close contact with the two patients, but it would be reassuring for my constituents and residents in York to have a precise timeline of how long the process will take and when it expects that to be concluded. Can the Secretary of State give us that information?

Matt Hancock: The process of contacting those who have been in contact with the two people who have so far tested positive for the virus is rapid and ongoing—it is a matter of days to complete and get in contact with all those people. This is an ongoing operation and it will be concluded soon. I will let him, the House and the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) know as soon as we can make that information public.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I put on record my thanks to all the officials who supported my 81-year-old constituent Veronica Theobald to make the journey from Wuhan to the Wirral. What lessons have

been learned about the repatriation of older citizens or citizens with additional needs, who might be more vulnerable?

Matt Hancock: We have worked hard to try to make sure that the repatriation takes into account other health problems that some people had, and to make sure, frankly, that the accommodation takes that into account—we have tried our level best to make the accommodation as comfortable as possible. I have read some of the stories in the newspapers about the lengths that NHS staff have gone to. The Minister responsible went to Arrowe Park to make sure that we are doing everything we can to make the facilities not only safe—of course, both to the public and those who are quarantined there—but comfortable for the two weeks.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): With any infectious disease control, it is very important that members of the public play a role by saying, “Yes, I think I may have been affected,” and being subjected to quarantine. Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute not only to them but to the members of staff? I understand that they drove across two counties to pick up one new patient’s wife’s birthday present, which they then drove all the way back to Arrowe Park, because playing by the rules and doing right by the country is the right thing to do.

Matt Hancock: That is absolutely right. We have tried to go above and beyond to help those who are currently in Arrowe Park. I did not know about the example that my hon. Friend gave, but there have been several others, including some of the biscuits that were given to people who were quarantined at Arrowe Park, which had apparently gone down very well.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): The Secretary of State will recall that during his last statement to the House on the Wuhan coronavirus I raised the importance of vaccination. At the time, he said that

“it is unlikely that a vaccine is going to be available—there is not one now—so that is not the route we should be looking at”—[*Official Report*, 23 January 2020; Vol. 670, c. 436.]

He has since announced that the Government are investing £20 million in speeding up development of a vaccine. Of course this is welcome, but what has happened in the last 10 days to change his mind and his assessment, and what is the realistic timeframe in which the public can expect to see a vaccine developed?

Matt Hancock: That is a very good question. We need to be cautious on the timings for the development of a vaccine, but I am pushing it as hard as possible. It is true that the science has developed in the last 10 days—scientists working around the world to understand the virus have made some progress—and I was convinced enough to put £20 million into that global effort; and we may well put more in. I was impressed by the science, as reported to me by the chief medical officer, so my assessment is now slightly more promising than when the hon. Lady last asked me this question.

Robert Lorgan (High Peak) (Con): One of my constituents is currently in quarantine, having been evacuated from Wuhan. Having spent most of last week talking to the Foreign Office, I want to put on the

[Robert Largan]

record my thanks to the Foreign Office staff, both here and in China, and to staff in the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS for their brilliant work. Can my right hon. Friend give more information on the social media campaign the Government are running to get information and advice out to people as quickly as possible?

Matt Hancock: We have put £500,000 towards an immediate communications campaign—not just on social media, although there is a lot there, but in newspapers and on radio—to make sure people get the message that there is something everybody can do: vigilantly wash your hands and if you have a cough or a sneeze, use a tissue and throw it away. These sound like simple things, but they matter, and they also protect you from the flu.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Do face masks work?

Matt Hancock: There are circumstances in which they work, but we are not recommending that people wear them generally—but of course it's a free country.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend, as well as his team and all his staff, for their work on what is a moving feast. Given that things could deteriorate in this country, what steps can local government, directors of public health and health and wellbeing boards take, particularly around prevention?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this important point. Local authorities and local resilience forums have a critical role to play in resolving this, as Wirral Council has demonstrated with its efforts thus far to support people at Arrowe Park, and I pay tribute to the work that local authorities have done so far. Local authorities across the country should be familiarising themselves with their plans in case the coronavirus comes to them.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Constituents of mine who returned from mainland China were told to self-isolate, even though they showed no symptoms, and that if they developed symptoms they should go to accident and emergency or their GP. This is the opposite of the advice the Secretary of State set out in his statement and in answer to another hon. Member. It cannot be right, in terms of both public health and reassuring the public, to have contradictory advice. Will he make sure that the correct advice is given from now on, as far and as widely as possible?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We have published clear advice. All the advice from central Government, the NHS and public health organisations is exactly the same, and has been scientifically derived and communicated outwards as much as possible, but if he has details of where different advice has been given, I would love to know, because it is a constant effort to get the correct advice out there. We are working with social media companies to ensure that if people go on Twitter, for instance, and search for “coronavirus” they get proper advice, rather than non-valid advice. But there is a lot to do.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On Friday, when I was driving around my constituency, I heard on BBC Radio Humberside that the two people from York had been brought to one of the hospitals in Hull. They had then gone on to Newcastle. A press release was issued by the chief executive of the Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust. I wonder whether some thought should be given to how we communicate with the public, and whether more needs to be said about the role of local hospitals that are being used to deal with issues like this.

Matt Hancock: A lot of thought is being put into how we communicate with the public. We need to win both the battle against this disease and the battle for public confidence. This is a bit like my answer to the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), and, indeed, my answer to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who asked about masks. Washing one's hands is much better than wearing a mask. That is the correct advice, and we are trying to get the correct, straight communications out whenever we possibly can.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): And the prize for perseverance and patience goes to Geraint Davies.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Figures issued yesterday—I appreciate that the Secretary of State has updated them today—showed that, out of 14,500 people diagnosed, 304 had died and 342 had recovered. What is of concern is the similarity of the number of people dying to the number of people recovering.

The Secretary of State has already mentioned that the transmission rate is doubling every five days. He will also know that, as well as introducing flight blocks, China has introduced road blocks, and has prevented people from going to work for 14 days in districts where there is no transmission at all. What does the Secretary of State plan to do if a number of cases emerge in cities up and down Britain? Has he any plans to reduce people's movements, for instance, to contain the virus?

Matt Hancock: Let me make it absolutely clear that I do not recognise, and the Government do not recognise, the figure that the hon. Gentleman has given for the number of people who have recovered. The mortality rate is estimated to be about 2%. Of course we will revise that figure as more information comes to light, but the figure that he gave for the number who have recovered from the disease appears to be very low in comparison with the information that we have.

Of course we have plans in case the disease becomes widespread globally and widespread here, and we are constantly working on those plans to ensure that we are as ready as possible. We have plans in place, and we had them before the virus arrived here. We are working through those plans, and I will endeavour to update the House whenever I possibly can.

I began by paying tribute to the shadow Secretary of State. Normally when I am nice about the shadow Secretary of State, he thinks that I am doing it to damage his political career. There may be some truth in

that, but in this case he is acting in the most responsible and high-minded way, and I think that the whole House should pay tribute to him.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We now come to the statement on the Government's response to the Streatham incident. I will just allow Members who need to leave to do so swiftly and quietly so that I can call the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Mr Robert Buckland.

Streatham Incident

5.8 pm

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement about the senseless and horrific terror attack in Streatham yesterday afternoon.

Two members of the public were brutally stabbed as they went about their business on the busy high street. Another was injured as our brave police stepped in before even more harm could be done. I am sure that Members will join me in sending our thoughts and prayers to the victims, their families, and all those affected by this appalling attack. I would also like to pay tribute to our outstanding emergency services, who once again ran towards untold danger to protect the public: the police who shot the offender to save others, and the ambulance staff who fearlessly tended the wounded, despite the risk to their own lives.

Protecting the public has to be the No. 1 priority for this Government. The Streatham incident is subject to an ongoing police investigation, and I am therefore limited in what I can say at this time, but I would like to share what details I am able to with the House. A known terrorist senselessly stabbed a man and a woman on Streatham High Road at about 2 pm yesterday. The attacker has yet to be formally identified but the police are confident that it was 20-year-old Sudesh Amman. In December 2018, he was imprisoned for three years and four months for 16 counts of distributing extremist material and for the possession of material likely to be useful for the purposes of preparing a terrorist act. The sentence he received was a standard determinate sentence, and that meant that one week ago he was automatically released halfway through that term. The Parole Board had no involvement in the matter. The law required automatic unconditional release at the halfway point.

Amman was being followed by armed police officers when he made his attack, and they immediately shot him dead before he could harm any others. They stepped in despite the fact that he appeared to be wearing an explosive device, which has now been confirmed as fake. A female member of the public in her 20s was hurt by broken glass as shots were fired to end the threat. She remains in hospital, as does the male victim, who is in his 40s. I am pleased to say that he is now recovering after initially fighting for his life. The other female victim, who is in her 50s, has since been discharged. Our thoughts are with them all. As this is an ongoing investigation, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on the case while the full facts are being established, but I would like to reassure hon. Members that our outstanding security services and the police have the full support of the Government as they investigate this atrocity.

I also want to talk about our security services, police, and prison and probation officers, and about their joint response. All these operational agencies are truly first-class. They are the epitome of public duty. The swift response to yesterday's attack, monitoring the threat and responding quickly when it escalated, can give us confidence that the police and security services are doing all they can to keep the public safe. Our Prison Service and probation service have robust measures in place to deal with terrorist offenders, and we are at the forefront of international efforts to counter this threat.

[Robert Buckland]

All terrorist prisoners and individuals who are considered to be an extremist risk are managed through a specialist case management process. Most can be dealt with as part of the mainstream prison population, but where necessary, a small number of the highest-risk offenders are now managed in separation centres. The time an offender spends in prison is an opportunity for us to do our best to rehabilitate them, while recognising that this is no simple challenge. Psychological, theological and mental health interventions are all used, and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service psychologists supply two formal counter-radicalisation programmes, used both in custody and in the community. In addition, the desistance and disengagement programme was rolled out in prisons in 2018. It provides a range of intensive tailored interventions designed to address the root causes of terrorism. I want to pay tribute to the work of our prison and probation staff. They are dedicated to keeping the public safe, and they work tirelessly to try to turn lives around, even in the face of such a deep-seated ideology.

The tragic events at Fishmongers' Hall in November last year showed that we need to look carefully at the way we deal with terrorist offenders, and I have long been clear, as has my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, that automatic halfway release is simply not right in all cases. After the London Bridge attack, the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and I immediately promised a major shake-up of our response to terrorism and, two weeks ago, the Home Secretary and I announced clear measures, a tough new approach, and a new commitment to crack down on offenders and to keep people safe.

First, we will introduce longer and tougher sentences for serious terrorist offenders, ending release before the end of their custodial term, and opening up longer licence periods while keeping the worst offenders locked up for a mandatory minimum 14-year term. Secondly, we will overhaul prisons and probation, with tougher monitoring conditions, including lie detector tests to assess risk. Thirdly, we will double the number of counter-terrorism probation officers and invest in counter-terrorism police, providing an increase in funding of £90 million from this April. Finally, we will put victims first by reviewing the support available to them, including an immediate £500,000 boost for the victims of terrorism unit.

We have also announced an independent review of our multi-agency public protection arrangements, to be led by Jonathan Hall, QC. The review will look at pre-release planning and the management of offenders upon release into the community. Many of the measures will be included in a new counter-terrorism, sentencing and release Bill, to be introduced in the first 100 days of this re-elected Government.

Yesterday's appalling incident plainly makes the case for immediate action. We cannot have a situation, as we saw tragically yesterday, in which an offender—a known risk to innocent members of the public—is released early by automatic process of law without any oversight by the Parole Board. We will be doing everything we can to protect the public. That is our primary duty. We will therefore introduce emergency legislation to ensure an end to terrorist offenders getting released automatically

with no check or review having served half their sentence. The underlying principle must be that offenders will no longer be released early automatically and that anyone released before the end of their sentence will be dependent on a risk assessment by the Parole Board.

We face an unprecedented situation of severe gravity and, as such, it demands that the Government respond immediately, and this legislation will therefore also apply to serving prisoners. The earliest point at which these offenders will now be considered for release will be once they have served two thirds of their sentence. Crucially, we will introduce a requirement that no terrorist offender will be released before the end of their full custodial term unless the Parole Board agrees. We will ensure that the functions of the Parole Board are strengthened to deal even more effectively with the specific risk that terrorists pose to public safety. For example, we will ensure that the appropriate specialisms are in place. That work is in train, and we will take steps to implement it as soon as possible.

When terrorist offenders are released, we will always ensure that they are subject to the most robust safeguards, and we will consider whether new legislation is required to provide additional assurance. We will also review whether the current maximum penalties and sentencing framework for terrorist offences are sufficient or comprehensive, on the underlying principle that terrorist offenders should no longer be released until the Parole Board is satisfied that they are no longer a risk to the public.

Keeping our streets and our people safe is our first duty. We face a threat from an ideology that takes no heed of others, and we must use every tool we have to make sure that that threat is neutralised. The British public have a proud history of coming together in times of adversity against those who seek to divide us, and it is together that we can make sure that the terrorists who seek to threaten our way of life will never win. The Government will do everything in our power to defeat them and to ensure that the public are protected. I commend this statement to the House.

5.19 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I had sight of the Secretary of State's statement only 20 minutes before he started speaking. That left me in the unacceptable position of having to prepare my statement about such a serious matter on the basis of press briefings.

I begin by saying that my thoughts are with the people attacked yesterday, their families and the people of Streatham, who witnessed this absolutely horrific attack. I also pay tribute to our police and emergency services for the professionalism and courage that they demonstrated in their swift response to the attack.

The first responsibility of a Government is to keep their citizens safe. Tragically, cuts over the past decade across our justice system—to the police, prisons, probation and the Crown Prosecution Service—have left our communities less safe. That is why our justice system is in crisis.

It will take time, of course, for the full facts about yesterday's terrible attack to come out. We owe it to those affected to carefully assess what happened and take the action necessary to reduce the risk of similar attacks happening again. Experts have raised serious

concerns about the impact of austerity on the Government's programmes for dealing with terrorism offenders. A former CPS chief prosecutor for north-west England described those programmes today as "largely underfunded" and "poorly executed". Does the Secretary of State agree with that assessment? What is being done to address the situation?

I turn to prisons. This is the second such attack carried out by a recently released prisoner in recent months. How many of the recommendations from the 2016 review into extremism in prisons have been implemented? Huge cuts to prison budgets have not only left our prisons with more than 2,000 fewer officers than in 2010; they have also led to an exodus of experienced staff, involving the loss of tens of thousands of years of experience. That experience is vital in maintaining safety and order in prisons and, crucially, in identifying and dealing with radicalisation.

Figures that I obtained last year show that the picture in high-security prisons is even worse, with over 400 fewer prison officers in such prisons compared with the figure for 2010. Does the Secretary of State believe that those cuts to staffing levels have made it more difficult to monitor people convicted of terror offences in prisons? The same figures revealed that Belmarsh, where the Streatham attacker was held until his release last week, has a staggering 100 fewer prison officers than it did back in 2010. By what date will the Government return all high-security prison staffing numbers to 2010 levels?

Sadly, the problems in our criminal justice system are not limited to prisons. Probation manages hundreds of thousands of offenders released from prison. All but a handful of the most dangerous prisoners will at some point leave prison. Probation has a vital role to play in keeping our communities safe. The Government's decision to break up our probation system, alongside the decision to outsource the monitoring of some of the most dangerous offenders in bail hostels, has left the public at higher risk. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the consequences of the failed probation reforms for the monitoring of those convicted of terror offences?

Finally, I turn to sentencing. Judges can ensure that the most dangerous offenders are not released halfway through their sentence and that instead they serve a minimum of two thirds, and are released then only if the Parole Board determines that it is safe for that to happen. We will look at the proposals referred to in the Secretary of State's statement, because our priority must be to keep the public safe. But to be clear, the Government cannot use sentencing as a way of distracting from their record of bringing the criminal justice system to breaking point.

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making his points, and I will do my very best to answer them all. On his last point, about sentencing, he is right to make reference to the extended determinate sentence system—but that, of course, depends on the learned judge making a finding of dangerousness. In this particular case, that option was open to the court, but the court decided not to take it, which is why the term was a standard determinate one. More needs to be done on the framework, to make sure that it does not depend on the need to make such a finding and that we can end automaticity when it comes to early release. I

very much hope that the hon. Gentleman and his party would support that approach when it comes to the necessary legislation.

The hon. Gentleman makes observations more generally about the justice system. I remind him that the responsibility for the supervision of serious offenders has always lain with the National Probation Service, which remained within the hands of the state. I reassure him that the reforms to probation that I am driving forward mean we will bring together all the arms of the probation service in a way that will lead to greater co-ordination, a better spread of casework for probation officers and improved purchase on the regime, which needs to be applied. We are actively recruiting more probation officers.

Ian Acheson made his report in 2016, and eight of the 11 consolidated recommendations were adopted, with disagreement on three of them. I commend the work that he and others did. Things have moved on considerably since that point, and it is right for me to emphasise the joint working the Home Office, my Department and the security services do to make sure we are all working together to monitor not just offenders of this nature in the community, but terrorist offenders in prison. Other countries are learning from that experience.

The hon. Gentleman made the general remarks about the justice system that we hear from him regularly, so I simply remind him of the choices we had to make at the beginning of the last decade, the difficulty we were placed in and the fact that we are increasing counter-terrorism funding and bearing down on the risk we face. There has never been any question, at any time during the Conservative Government's period in power, that we have prioritised resources over the need to protect the public. We will continue to put public protection at the centre of our deliberations, irrespective of the cost.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. It will be obvious that a great many people wish to take part in this statement. For the benefit of new Members and others, let me say that a statement is not an occasion for making a speech. I must insist on brief questions. Each Member has the chance to ask one question, not to give a preamble and then ask an "Oh, and also" question. We must have just one question, otherwise we will not get through everyone and those who are not called could be angry with those who have been called and taken too long.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome the Lord Chancellor's approach to this, because most of us recognise that the exceptional nature of this threat may require exceptional measures. However, can he help us as to precisely which rehabilitation measures the perpetrator of this attack was subject to while in prison? Will he consider again the remaining aspects of the Acheson review regarding much more assertive management of these particularly complex and dangerous prisoners within the system, from the start of their sentence?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, the Chair of the Select Committee on Justice. It would perhaps be wrong of me to go into specific detail as to the regimen that applied in prison to this offender. I

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would make the general observation that the terrorist cohort is complex and difficult to assess, and if there is not engagement by individuals with the programmes on offer, the assessment of risk becomes a much more complicated exercise. I simply say that, bearing in mind the exceptional nature of the terrorist cohort, exceptional approaches are needed.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): May I start by extending my sympathies and those of the Scottish National party to those injured and terrorised by yesterday's events, and by praising the security and emergency services? I am pleased that the UK Government are following the Scottish Government's lead in ending automatic early release for the most serious offenders. The Lord Chancellor has said that he intends to introduce emergency legislation, making retrospective provision in relation to those sentenced before the law was changed. Will he assure me that the usual legal difficulties with retrospective legislation have been addressed to his satisfaction?

Sentencing is only a small part of the answer to terrorism, and what happens during the sentence is what matters. To date, deradicalisation and disengagement programmes have been largely "unfunded and poorly executed". Those are not my views, but the views of Nazir Afzal, the former chief Crown prosecutor for the north-west of England, an experienced lawyer and a prosecutor worth listening to. He says that that has happened as a direct consequence of the decision by successive Tory Governments to cut funding to probation and other rehabilitation programmes. Of course, the costs of the sort of post-release police surveillance that we saw yesterday far outweigh the costs of adequate funding for preventive measures and deradicalisation. Does the Lord Chancellor agree with me and Nazir Afzal on that? Will he assure the House that in future sufficient funds and resources will be made available to deal with preventive and deradicalisation programmes in prison?

Finally, it was reported earlier today that an anonymous No. 10 source told Sky News that the system for dealing with terrorism has significant problems because of "the shocking influence of lawyers on policy".

I imagine that the Lord Chancellor does not share that view—[*Laughter.*] This is important. Will he join me in condemning those sorts of anonymous briefings? Does he agree that there is plenty of room to introduce robust anti-terrorism policies that are rule-of-law compliant?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for her remarks about the solidarity that we have across these islands with regard to terrorism.

Let me deal with her last point first. It is important to remember that we in this country stand for the rule of law and due process. That is what marks us out as different from those who rely on the bullet and the bomb—those who use indiscriminate and arbitrary means and methods to impose their will on us. If we stand for nothing else, we have to stand for the rule of law. That makes us better than them, it makes us different and it means that we have something worth defending. I hope that answers the hon. and learned Lady's latter question.

On the first issue that the hon. and learned Lady raised, as I said, this is an exceptional situation. The issue of retrospective effect is of course a key factor. The important point is that we are talking about the administration of a sentence—the way it is dealt with, as opposed to its length or type. For that reason, it is entirely appropriate to look at the administration of a sentence and I would regard that as a reasonable approach.

The hon. and learned Lady asked about resources. I am happy to tell her that in the past several years, counter-terrorism funding has increased year on year. I repeat the point that I made to the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon): resources will never get in the way of our dealing properly and robustly with those who pose a threat to us. The way in which we deal with terrorism continues to evolve, and programmes change and adapt according to the knowledge that we accrue. I will not pretend that we are in a state of grace when it comes to these things, because we are still learning, but make no mistake about it: this country is a world leader and many other states look to us as a beacon because of the way we deal with counter-terrorism and the particular threat that it poses.

James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend is right to underline the fact that the thoughts of the House remain with those affected by this shocking incident, and to commend the work of our police and security services. He has underlined the decisive action that he intends to take in respect of the halfway-point issue, and I commend him for that. Will he look at the issue firmly post the release of offenders and the potential availability of measures such as terrorism prevention and investigation measures to provide the level of safeguard and control necessary to assure the public that if there is risk, it can be managed effectively?

Robert Buckland: My right hon. Friend served with distinction as the Security Minister. Indeed, I remember sitting with him in the Bill Committee on the TPIMs legislation some years ago. He and I understand that a distinction is to be drawn between the sentencing process and that particular mechanism, but there is no doubt that there is merit in what he says about the way in which we need to make sure that those who pose a continuing risk are adequately monitored. I will consider his remarks very carefully indeed.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I join the Lord Chancellor in his tribute to the Security Service and the police, who work so hard on this issue. He is right to address the concerns relating to sentencing and parole, to ensure that dangerous terrorists and extremists who continue to pose a risk to the public are not released early, but he will know that the problem is not solved if it is just deferred to the end of the sentence. He will know that there have been considerable warnings about these risks, and that Ian Acheson has expressed considerable concern that the recommendations in his review have not been fully implemented. What is the Lord Chancellor's assessment of the 69 recommendations that Ian Acheson made, and how many of them have been implemented?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, for her question. The Acheson recommendations were, with

his agreement, consolidated into 11 particular measures, of which eight were accepted by the Government, and three were disagreed with. Having paid tribute to Ian Acheson and to the work that he did, and indeed to his continuing input into this important area, I think it is right to say that, since 2016, a lot has developed with regard to how we manage offenders. Indeed, the particular separation units that were recommended have been set up. The criteria for the use of those units obviously have to be carefully monitored so that we are not using them in an arbitrary way. At the same time, I am proud of the facilities at Belmarsh and Whitemoor, which I saw when I visited them myself. I know about the particular criteria that are applied in separation units and the intensive work that goes on. She and I know that this is a very difficult cohort: there are some who superficially comply and yet harbour their hatreds even beyond release; and there are others who are capable of rehabilitation. What we are talking about is more than just punishment. The watchword has to be public protection. Are we doing everything that we can to keep our streets safe? If we are not, then we need to do more. Hence today's statement.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): My constituent, Liam Taylor, was 19 years old. He and two others were stabbed on Friday night. It was not a terrorist attack, but it was a terrible attack and Liam died at the scene. My thoughts are with his family, and my thanks go to Essex police. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, when it comes to tackling knife crime, whether committed by a terrorist or otherwise, our police, our prisons, and our justice system must have all the resources they need?

Robert Buckland: May I join my hon. Friend in her tribute to everybody who did their utmost to try to save a life in what was a terrible tragic incident in her constituency? Sadly, it is an incident that is repeated far too often, and the scourge of knife crime is something that I think all of us in this House will have been touched by. The causes of it are complex. Some of the reasons are ones that we well understand—county lines, exploitation, and the use of knives as an enforcement weapon—but there are other reasons as well that we also need to understand. That is why I pay tribute to organisations such as the Ben Kinsella Trust and all those charities and groups that work so hard to educate young people about the dangers of knife crime. If I hear again the phrase, “I carry a knife for my own protection”, I think that I will scream. In so many cases that I have dealt with, that has been the cause of so much misery, injury and death.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): The people of Streatham, as resilient and as united as they are, remain shaken by what happened yesterday. We are very grateful to the emergency services for their swift response and for the fact that they saved many lives. The Minister says that we are at the forefront of tackling terrorism and that we have robust measures in place, but those measures did not prevent what happened in my constituency yesterday. Although I note what he says about automatic release, the people of Streatham cannot fathom a situation in which somebody so dangerous who has to be under surveillance immediately after leaving prison is allowed to leave. Will the Minister assure me, and assure the

people of Streatham, that there is no circumstance—no measure that could have been taken—that would have stopped this individual from being released from prison?

Robert Buckland: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. She is representing her constituents fearlessly and well. I join her in the tribute to the people of Streatham who experienced not just the immediate horror, but the long aftermath of this terrible incident. I can assure her that the law had to apply in this case. This is the law that had been changed in the Criminal Justice Act 2003, which allowed automatic early release, and which meant that the Parole Board was not involved. There was no risk assessment as a prerequisite of release and therefore the automatic element of it meant that the particular situation that she described so well applied. It is something that I do not accept, which is why I have announced today that I will act and will deal with it in the form of emergency legislation, because I want to protect the public, the people of Streatham and the people of all our communities in our country. I thank the hon. Lady for her comments.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I strongly welcome the remarks and actions of my right hon. and learned Friend. The root of this often lies in radicalisation at schools, colleges and universities. We have the Prevent programme, but what assessment has he made of that programme, and are there any plans to strengthen it in our education system?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, the Chair of the Select Committee on Education. He will be reassured that the Prevent programme is under constant examination and review. The nature of the threat continues to change, and in this case and at Fishmongers Hall we see individuals arming themselves with knives in a very random way. That is a new aspect of behaviour that we need to understand fully. The short answer is yes, we will continue to redouble our efforts to make sure that we reach all those young people who are particularly vulnerable to this type of exploitation, and of being sucked into extremism and worse.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. We have to have much shorter questions and answers. I appreciate that the Lord Chancellor is explaining complicated and important matters, but he has explained a lot of them, so we need short questions and short answers, otherwise most people will not have a chance at all. I call Dame Diana Johnson.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): With No. 10 briefing on some of the terrible decisions that have been made in the past 15 years on counter-terrorism policy, does the Lord Chancellor believe that the introduction of the regime of terrorism prevention and investigation measures, which weakened the control order regime that had been in place, was one of those terrible decisions?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady will remember the legal morass that we got into with control orders—it was not a happy experience—which faced constant

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challenge in the courts. Their effectiveness was undermined, I am afraid, and it was essential that we took measures to make sure that we had a regime that was invulnerable to such challenge and which would be sustainable. That is why the changes were made. The hon. Lady is somewhat misrepresenting the position, if I may say so.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): When might we see the emergency legislation of which my right hon. and learned Friend speaks?

Robert Buckland: I am not going to begin prejudging what the business managers might have in mind or, indeed, the allocation of time in the House, but as soon as possible.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy), the Minister said that he would look at further legislation, but she hit the nail on the head. This man was released from prison, and immediately followed by armed police. The Minister seems to have ruled out control orders, so what will be in the emergency legislation that means that that risk cannot happen again? If this man was so dangerous why was he let out?

Robert Buckland: I do not know whether the hon. Lady, the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, heard what I said. The purpose of the emergency legislation is to end automatic early release at the halfway point. That will apply to serving prisoners, which is why I want to introduce emergency legislation, which will be introduced as soon as possible. That ends the automaticity element, which was the reason why this individual, who posed a risk, was released. There was nothing more that we could do, because the law, as passed by the previous Labour Government, was what we had to apply. That is what we are going to do, and I am more than happy to explain it further to the hon. Lady later.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): How seriously should we take the recent report that one of Lee Rigby's killers claims to be a reformed character?

Robert Buckland: I have not seen that report. It is a matter for those responsible for the assessment of risk within the custodial estate to look at the evidence, to professionally assess it and to understand the particularly unique risks posed by the terrorist cohort. I think the thrust of my right hon. Friend's question was precisely on that point, and it is well understood.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I welcome the Lord Chancellor's plans for temporary emergency legislation, but surely he was aware of this problem as early as last October. Why did he not incorporate measures in the draft Release of Prisoners (Alteration of Relevant Proportion of Sentence) Order 2019, which we debated only six days ago?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Gentleman would obviously advocate a counsel of perfection. I am dealing with serious violent and sexual offenders—[*Interruption.*] No, I am sorry but I will not accept that; a lot of the

offenders who commit terrorist-related offences are covered by the statutory instrument that was passed last week. We are now dealing with all terrorists and terrorist-related offenders. After every serious incident, it is our duty to assess the level of risk and to look at the situation before us.

Steve McCabe *indicated dissent.*

Robert Buckland: The hon. Gentleman can shake his head as much as he likes, but I am totally clear that we need to act quickly. That is why we are going to introduce emergency legislation, and I am sure he will support us in the Lobby.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): During my time at the Home Office, I introduced the Prevent duty so I am well aware of the importance of managing these matters before people are convicted, during incarceration and on release. However, sentencing matters. The Lord Chancellor has mentioned ending early release and increasing mandatory sentences. Will he also urgently consider imposing tougher minimum sentences?

Robert Buckland: My right hon. Friend, as a former Security Minister, is indeed very familiar with these issues, and he and I worked together on them during the passage of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016. I reassure him that a mandatory minimum sentence of 14 years for serious terrorist offences will be part of our proposals in the counter-terrorism Bill, and I am sure that he will vigorously support that legislation when it comes to be debated in the House.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): The fact is that this attacker should not have been released from prison automatically. The law requiring automatic release is wrong, and it is right that we are now going to fix it, but that in itself is not enough. Whether people are locked up for two years, five years, 10 years or more, there is a very grave risk that people will come out of prison more dangerous than when they went in because our prisons are in crisis. What actions will the Minister take to ensure that all criminals, but especially high-risk terrorists, do not come out of prison more dangerous than when they went in?

Robert Buckland: I welcome the hon. Lady's support for the measures that we are going to introduce. She is absolutely right about the need to end automatic early release. I assure her that we use a range of engagement programmes to deal with this violent and dangerous cohort of people. These engagement programmes are of various natures, and are designed to meet the particular demands that such individuals can pose. However, the programmes do require engagement. Where there is engagement, we can achieve results, but we also need to be mindful of the dangers of superficial compliance. That is why this particular cohort is difficult, challenging and tough, and requires an unprecedented response.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will the Minister give me an assurance that the legislation will be fully retrospective, notwithstanding article 7 of the European convention on human rights—he knows what I am saying—and, furthermore, that it will be good law, and

that if Parliament clearly and expressly makes it clear that it intends such legislation to be retrospective, the courts, despite their reluctance, will give effect to it?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to remind us of the powers of Parliament in that respect, and, indeed, of the role of the Law Officers in giving consent to legislation that has retrospective effect. I remind the House that this is all about the administration of sentences, rather than their actual length or type. That is why I judge it appropriate in these unprecedented circumstances to introduce this legislation. I will discuss the details of the matters he raises with him when the legislation is introduced.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I have no problem in supporting stopping early release, but the Secretary of State is aware that there are individuals who, no matter how much rehabilitation we do, will come out still dangerous. When, in the last Parliament, the Intelligence and Security Committee took evidence on the Westminster Bridge attack, the security services raised with the Committee concern about 38, I think, individuals who would be released in the next two years and considered as dangerous. Was this individual one of them? I suspect that he was if he was being followed by an MI5 team. What are we going to do in terms of protecting the public from these individuals, because they will come out anyway after a certain period, early release or not? If the Government did know about this individual beforehand, why did they not intercede beforehand, because I know that the Security Service has real, serious concerns about these people on quite short sentences?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to the work of the right hon. Gentleman on that Committee. He will know that it would be invidious of me to descend into the particular circumstances of this individual case, as the investigation is ongoing, but he raises a valid point about the monitoring of offenders post sentence and post licence. That is why I am looking very carefully to see what can be done in the provisions of the new counter-terrorism Bill to extend the purchase of the licence system to elongate licences so that we have that formal system as part of the sentence. The right hon. Gentleman also echoes the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire) on whether more can be done with regard to a particular regime that could be applied. These are difficult questions, but I am sure that he and I will engage upon them in the weeks ahead.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I cannot make the clock go slower. I tried to make people speak faster, but that does not seem to work. We have five minutes left and not everyone is going to get a chance. Let us go a little bit faster and see who we can get in.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Is there a case for greater isolation of extremists from the general prison population while in prison, or does the Secretary of State think we have the balance right?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend asks a pertinent question. I think that the individual offender needs to be assessed. There will be times when isolation is absolutely the right thing to do, but there is always a danger that by isolating prisoners of this nature together we could create further colleges of extremism. We therefore need to get the balance right. I think we are, but we constantly keep it under review.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I want to return to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson). Does the Secretary of State not accept that it was a mistake to weaken the control order regime and replace it with a weaker system of supervision—a decision taken not through judicial necessity but through a political deal between the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats? Will he now review that decision in the light of the recent incidents?

Robert Buckland: I am very glad that the right hon. Gentleman asked me that question because it allows me to develop part two of the point. He will have noticed in the years since the debate on TPIMs a welcome increase in the number of prosecutions for offences of terrorism. I have always believed, as I think he does, that the best way to deal with this type of offender is prosecution. The number of returning foreign fighters who have been prosecuted—I personally granted consent to a large number of prosecutions when I was Solicitor General—means that we have had an increasing number of that cohort in our prisons. It is as a result of conviction that they are on sentences, rather than part of that control order regime. I am afraid that he is choosing to ignore this point: it was a system that we had to change and I do not think it was the wrong thing to do.

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con): When I was Treasury counsel, I acted for the Government in various parole cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 was often a feature. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that strained interpretations of the Human Rights Act have served to undermine the delicate balance of rights versus responsibility, and that we now need an approach that means that national security and public safety will never be jeopardised?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend speaks with considerable experience. Human rights are there to protect us all. They should never be a means of enhancing the rights of those who would wish us ill. Therefore, while it is important that we have that underpinning framework, we must make sure that the balance is always struck in the interests of the protection of the public when it comes to serious violent and terrorist offenders.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): The Lord Chancellor mentioned that he wants to protect the public and protect the people of Streatham. Is he aware that, on the back of some terrorist-related incidents, we see a spike in hate crime? On 1 January 2020, the North Brixton Islamic Cultural Centre in my constituency had an anti-Islamic hate slogan graffitied on the wall, and a number of our Muslim communities are now feeling quite scared about reprisals. Does he agree that all our communities have the right to go about their daily lives

[*Florence Eshalomi*]

without any fear of physical or verbal abuse? Will he ensure that any consideration of new legislation will provide that additional reassurance for all our constituents?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady raises a pertinent point, because it allows me to remind the House that we are dealing not just with so-called Islamic terrorism but with far-right terrorism. About a sixth of the cohort in our prisons are far-right extremists. That is a problem that we readily acknowledge. We must face up to it and be honest about it. I absolutely condemn attacks on mosques or places of worship to do with that great religion, because hate crime has no place in our society. I will continue in my current role, as I did as a Law Officer, to do all I can to promote the need to stamp out hate crime in all its insidious forms.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Radicalisation does not end at the end of a prison sentence, so will the Lord Chancellor commit to working for better co-operation between MAPPAs and Prevent co-ordinators, because that will help to minimise the risk of convicted terrorists to all our communities?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend will be glad to know that, as part of our measures announced several weeks ago, a review of the MAPPAs provisions has been announced. It will be led by Jonathan Hall, Queen's Counsel, and one of the issues that will be looked at will be the very matter that she raises. I am grateful to her.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I can see that there are senior Members on the Opposition Benches who have not been called—I apologise—and likewise large numbers of people on the Government Benches. However, Mr Speaker has said, making it very clear, that statements will take 45 minutes, and I point out that if we are going to give everyone a chance, questions and answers have to be short, but nobody pays any attention and this, I am afraid, is what happens. Questions have to be short or not everyone gets in. But I assure people that if you have not got in this time, you will be at the top of the list next time, as were the people who were not called on the last statement but were called on this one.

Points of Order

5.57 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spennings) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am seeking your advice on an urgent and important matter. This afternoon, accredited lobby journalists based here in the House of Commons were denied access to an important briefing with David Frost, the Prime Minister's Europe adviser on post-Brexit trade plans. David Frost is a civil servant and therefore his briefing on the most prominent issue of the day is supposed to be neutral and not political. The issue of post-Brexit trade plans is one of great public concern, and access to a high-level briefing should not be hand-picked by Government and political advisers. The exclusion of some publications led to every major national broadcaster and newspaper walking out.

I know that all Members of this House will agree that lobby journalists' access to Government is vital for a functioning and healthy democracy, and this latest deterioration in relations between the Government and the lobby is deeply concerning. Members are also aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, of your commitment to improving the culture in this place, and pass-holding lobby journalists are part of our community. Therefore, what advice can you offer me as to how Members might be able to formally raise this issue with the Government and ensure that this does not become commonplace?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order and for giving me notice that she wished to raise it. Of course I agree with her, as everyone will, that accredited lobby journalists are indeed part of our parliamentary community and so of course must be, should be and normally are treated with respect—and, indeed, within the behaviour code that we all apply, or should apply, to each other. The responsibilities of the Chair do not extend to the specific matter that she raises, so I can give no further answer, but I am quite sure that she will find a way of bringing her concerns to the attention of the Government in some other way. If she has any difficulty in doing so, she should please ask for further advice and I will be happy to help.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You may be aware that, earlier this afternoon, the Foreign Secretary was not able to answer a question I put to him about which Minister will be leading the negotiations with the European Union on our future relationship. In those circumstances, to whom are Members of this House meant to direct written or oral questions about the state of those negotiations when we do not currently know who is in charge?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's concern. Of course, if he submits questions to the Table Office, they will be passed on to a Minister who can answer them. I appreciate that he would like to know who it is. I am quite sure that that information will become obvious in due course, but if he finds that a question he has submitted has been ignored in any way, I am sure he will let the Speaker's Office know, because that would not be appropriate.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You may have read this weekend that notices were placed in a tower block in my constituency referring to “Brexit day” and suggesting that non-English speakers are no longer welcome here and have

“infected this once great island.”

How can we as a House make it clear that that appalling, racist sentiment does not reflect the views of this country, whatever our arrangements after Brexit? How can I, as the Member for Norwich South, make it clear that my constituents and I abhor and reject that racist statement? Finally, how can we ensure that the laws against hate speech are enforced not just in letter but in spirit?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The situation he describes is truly appalling, and I am certain that every Member of this House will agree with him that such behaviour is totally unacceptable. It is against the law, and it is against the rules of common decency and neighbourly behaviour. There is not much that I can do about it from the Chair, except to say that the House will show that it is in total agreement with what he says, so that the message goes out from here that such behaviour is unacceptable.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Agriculture Bill

[Relevant document: Tenth Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee of Session 2017-19, Scrutiny of the Agriculture Bill, HC 1591]

Second Reading

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I must inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

6.2 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Theresa Villiers): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This Bill will introduce the first major reform of agriculture policy in this country for half a century. Now that we have left the European Union, we are determined to do things differently and to pursue the priorities of the people of this great nation. That means strengthening the Union of our United Kingdom by levelling up opportunity, to unlock our country’s potential. As we commence consideration of this landmark Bill, I want to highlight the huge contribution that farmers make to our society by putting food on our plates and conserving the natural landscapes that we all value so much. This Bill will provide our farmers and land managers with a chance to play a fundamental role in tackling the greatest environmental challenges of our time: protecting nature and tackling catastrophic climate change.

Brexit means that we can finally leave the common agricultural policy, to build a brighter, better, greener future for British farming. With its exasperating rigidities, complexities and perversities, the CAP is a bad deal for farmers, a bad deal for landscapes and wildlife, and a poor return on public investment for the taxpayer. We can do so much better.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I hope very much that we will be able to do better. The Secretary of State talks about looking after our farmers and higher standards, but will she guarantee that those higher standards will not be undercut by cheaper imports that do not meet those standards? If they are, we will not be doing our farmers any favours at all and will simply be outsourcing lower standards. Can she guarantee a legal commitment that no imports will undermine those standards that we will have in our country?

Theresa Villiers: I can reassure the hon. Lady that our manifesto is very clear on this. We will maintain our high standards of animal welfare, food safety and environmental protection. It is there in our manifesto, and we will defend that line in our trade negotiations.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): This weekend, I was approached by a young farmer who wants to succeed his grandfather as a tenant farmer. His landlord is the Church Commissioners—not so much a Christian organisation as a violently commercial one, which I suppose may be its right. Can my right hon. Friend assure all our good, solid tenant farmers, who are the bedrock of our support in the countryside, that we stand four-square behind them against rapacious landlords?

Theresa Villiers: I can. My right hon. Friend will know that the Bill contains provisions to introduce greater fairness for agricultural tenants, which we believe is very important. That is one way in which the Bill has been strengthened since the version considered in the last Parliament.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Speaking of rapacious predators, farmers and growers in my constituency and elsewhere have been victims of the habits and customs associated with monolithic retailers. We welcome in the Bill the powers that the Government will introduce to give a fair deal to farmers and growers. Will the Secretary of State speak a little more about how and when she intends to use those powers?

Theresa Villiers: I will come to those later in my remarks, but as my right hon. Friend acknowledged, an important part of the Bill is introducing greater transparency in the supply chain, so that farmers get a fairer deal for the produce that they create.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the theory of productionism, which lies at the heart of the common agricultural policy, encourages farmers to put as much land as possible into agricultural use, thereby disincentivising room for biodiversity? Can she confirm that the Bill will reverse that trend?

Theresa Villiers: The Bill enables us to provide financial assistance for environmentally friendly farming practices. Providing more space for biodiversity, trees and nature will, I hope, be at the centre of many of the environmental land management schemes that we will be able to take forward under the Bill.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Is the Secretary of State aware that providing modest support for small-scale farmers could be extremely valuable? That is part of my campaign for an Island deal similar to the one enjoyed by the Scottish islands. It could include support for small-scale abattoirs or humane slaughter on farms, which is the most humane way of slaughtering animals for human consumption, as well as milk storage, grain storage and vegetable box erectors on the Island. Those would work for not only my patch but many other parts of the United Kingdom. How will this excellent Bill help? Will she come to the Isle of Wight to talk to my farmers and see that for herself?

Theresa Villiers: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss those important suggestions, and I would be more than happy to visit his constituency.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way; she is being incredibly generous with her time. I want to take her back to the fact that the Bill lacks any legal guarantees to protect our food standards from being undermined. The Conservative party's manifesto may have referenced that, but the Bill does not, so will she give us a cast-iron guarantee that the Bill will protect those standards?

Theresa Villiers: Our manifesto is clear. We will stick to the commitments in our manifesto. The Prime Minister reiterated that only today.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The Secretary of State knows Northern Ireland well, so she will know that the big issue facing agriculture is farm incomes, which have fallen by 23% in the last two years. What assurance can she give to farmers listening in Northern Ireland tonight that the Bill will encourage an increase in both farm productivity and farm incomes?

Theresa Villiers: My hon. Friend will appreciate that agriculture is a devolved matter, but the Government's manifesto does commit us to maintain the same overall levels of support for our farmers in each year of the current Parliament. We do clearly recognise the importance of ensuring and securing prosperity in the farming community in Northern Ireland, and we will work closely with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on these matters in the weeks and months ahead.

We are going to put the broken system of the CAP firmly behind us. We are replacing it with an approach based on the principle of public money for public goods. We have committed in our manifesto to support that new approach with an overall level of funding to match 2019 levels for every year of the current Parliament. The Chancellor has already announced that the Government will provide £2.852 billion of direct payment support for the 2020 scheme year.

The objective of the Bill is a productive, profitable, resilient farming sector, empowered to produce more of the high-quality food that is prized around the world and appreciated so much here at home, all the while meeting the highest standards of food safety and traceability, animal health and welfare, and stewardship of the natural environment. Now more than ever before we need to recognise the vital importance of the work that farmers do, because our climate is changing, because our ecosystems are under increasing pressure and because by the end of this decade 9 billion of us will share this planet.

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): I say to my right hon. Friend that we must not get too misty-eyed about farmers. There is far too much cattle slurry, from dairy farms in particular, going into our rivers and destroying those rivers, and we really do need to make sure that farmers are held accountable for what they do with the slurry their cattle produce.

Theresa Villiers: Through a combination of regulation and farm support payments, we are certainly doing everything we can to ensure that farmers play their part in addressing and reducing pollution, and contribute to cleaner water and cleaner air.

Finding a way sustainably to feed a rapidly growing global population is essential if we are to have any chance of tackling the climate and nature crisis that we face. Getting Brexit done means that we are able to forge ahead with the reforms that the United Kingdom has sought for so long from the European Union, but never managed to secure. For 40 years successive UK Governments of all political complexions have vowed to secure reform of the CAP, and for 40 years Ministers returned from Brussels and stood at this Dispatch Box with very little to show for their efforts. This Bill will therefore deliver one of the most important environmental reforms for decades. It shows that we can deliver a green

Brexit, where we have a stronger and more effective focus on environmental outcomes than was possible while we were a member of the European Union.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend is being characteristically generous in giving way. I agree with her entirely about the need to green and be environmentally friendly in farming. Against that backdrop, is she able to indicate her thinking about the support this Bill could provide to those farmers who are really keen to invest in agri-tech as a way of reducing the need for both insecticide and pesticides?

Theresa Villiers: The new scheme of farm support will include support for agri-tech to support productivity enhancement in a sustainable way. My hon. Friend raises an important point, which I will refer to later in my remarks.

If we get right the reform we are contemplating today, we can be a beacon for others to follow. Over \$700 billion is spent around the world on agriculture subsidies. If we successfully deliver a new approach to farm support here and that encourages even a fraction of those billions of dollars of farm subsidies to be diverted into environmental improvement schemes, we will have created a massive boost to efforts to address the climate crisis. As Secretary of State, I want to emphasise that I fully recognise the urgency of that crisis. I have been driving forward this Bill as just one part of the biggest package of legislative reform in Whitehall, but I am determined to go further. In the coming weeks, I will be publishing documents outlining more detail on our proposals for the future of farming.

The Government have always been clear that we will seize the opportunity Brexit presents to deliver reforms that work for our farmers across our Union and that help to secure crucial environmental goals, but I am afraid that that cannot be said of the official Opposition. In all the years Labour Members had to change things, they did nothing. They wanted us stuck in the EU, locked forever into the CAP and anchored to a status quo that has been holding us back for decades. I am shocked that, in tabling a reasoned amendment, they have signified their intention to vote against this Bill.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): I speak here as a patriot, and I have quite a farming community in Weaver Vale, and I and Opposition Members certainly want to maintain good British standards. Why does the Secretary of State not be true to the Government's words in the manifesto and put this into legislation, as the National Farmers Union has called for?

Theresa Villiers: The hon. Member has heard my response on that. It is in the manifesto, and we will deliver on our manifesto commitments.

The first chapter of the Bill provides the framework for funding schemes to support farmers, foresters and land managers. Clauses 1 to 3, which contain the meat of the Bill, will empower the Government to devote public money towards securing the public goods that people value so much, but which the market does not fully recognise or reward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Theresa Villiers: No, I will not give way.

That includes improving standards of animal health and welfare, managing land in a way that enhances cultural and natural heritage, and improving public access to the countryside. Of course, protecting the environment will be right at the heart of our new approach. The Bill will enable the Government to support farmers to deliver improved water and air quality, increased biodiversity—for example, through enhanced protection for our hedgerows—and measures to address climate change. We all here know that farmers and land managers are already doing a huge amount to meet these environmental goals, but, as in so many parts of our economy and our society, we need to do so much more if we are to have a chance of reaching net zero and preventing disastrous climate change. These changes in farm support will help us to meet our hugely ambitious target for planting trees and safeguarding peatland.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for the gracious and generous way in which she has given way. I point out to her that, as she will probably know, livestock farming contributes some 27% of methane production—methane is 85 times worse than CO₂ for global warming—and, what is more, slurry contributes about 40% of the secondary PM2.5 in UK cities. Why does the Bill not contain anything about air pollution, despite her saying it is all about climate change and helping the environment?

Theresa Villiers: I am sorry to hear that Labour wants to talk down British farming. The reality is that well-managed livestock production can provide important environmental benefits, including for biodiversity. I think we need a debate on livestock farming that reflects the facts, which include the fact that our livestock farmers are some of the most carbon-friendly in the world in the way they produce their products.

We know how vital it is to protect soil health. Soil is clearly one of our most precious national assets, and we have added it to the list of purposes underlying the schemes that we can pay for under the Bill. This is a direct response to the views expressed in this House about the previous version of the Bill. A further addition is to include in clause 1 the conservation of native breeds and plants, so that the species that sustained our ancestors are kept safe for future generations. Work is already well under way to prepare and implement these crucial reforms. Our environmental land management scheme is the cornerstone of our new agriculture policy. Extensive tests and trials are under way in different parts of the country. We will launch the ELM national pilot in England in late 2021, and the scheme will launch fully in 2024.

ELM will provide a powerful driver towards meeting the goal set out in our 25-year environment plan, which is to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. Getting ELM right is crucial for meeting our commitment to net-zero carbon emissions, and to meet the tough targets set out in our forthcoming Environment Bill. I emphasise that our goal is to design ELM schemes that work for farmers and land managers, and in which a very wide range of farmers and land managers can take part.

Ian Paisley: I welcome the points that the Secretary of State makes about protecting our environment, because without a good environment we cannot produce the good,

[*Ian Paisley*]

tasty, and traceable food for which Britain and the United Kingdom are famous. Does she recognise that the UK currently imports 16% of its milk? Why can we not buy more British milk from British farmers and close that deficit?

Theresa Villiers: I would encourage everyone to do that. We produce some of the finest food and drink in the world, and I encourage everyone to reflect that in their shopping habits.

We fully recognise the particular challenges faced by upland farmers—indeed, I discussed that issue just a few days ago with a group of farmers in Northumberland National Park. We are determined that ELM will also work for upland farmers, and the incredible work they do to safeguard our beautiful natural landscapes will put them in a strong position to take part in our environmental schemes.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Theresa Villiers: No.

Reformed funding support for farmers and land managers will be an important part of our programme to level up the rural economy, and we will provide grants and funding to improve productivity and help farm businesses become more resilient and successful. We believe that farming efficiently and improving the environment can, and indeed must, go hand in hand. We will therefore support investment in green agri-tech, as referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), and invest in research and development to help raise sustainable productivity levels.

Clause 4 includes a duty on the Secretary of State to set out a multi-annual plan for financial assistance, while clauses 5 and 6 include provisions that will require the Government to make annual reports on the amount of financial assistance provided in England. Those three clauses are designed to provide greater certainty and stability about assistance in the future, and are in direct response to concerns expressed by right hon. and hon. Members about the earlier version of the Bill. Clauses 7 to 13 provide that during a seven-year transition period basic farm payments will gradually be phased out.

I strongly believe that the changes in the Bill will be positive for farmers and the environment, but change of this magnitude will also have far-reaching impacts, and adjustment to the new approach will not always be easy. As I emphasised in the debate on the Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) Act 2020, a managed seven-year transition period up to 2027 will give farmers time to adapt to the new system, and provide time for the new schemes to be fully tested before they are delivered across the country.

Tim Farron: I am extremely grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. She will appreciate that in that seven-year transition period farmers will be expected to cope with the loss of the basic payment scheme—according to her Department's figures, 85% of funding for livestock farming comes from that scheme—and for all the likely and theoretical benefits of ELM it will not be functional for everybody until 2028. Does she agree that a wiser

and more compassionate way of dealing with this issue would be to not phase out BPS until 2028, rather than starting before that?

Theresa Villiers: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. In part, we want our grants for productivity and investment to help plug that gap. But we have to get on with this; we must make progress in transforming the way we support land management in this country. I am afraid the climate crisis is urgent.

Clause 11 contains provisions to introduce delinked payments during the transition, and where we can, and subject to constraints in the withdrawal agreement, we will introduce simplifications to the existing BPS scheme. Our transition to the new schemes opens the door to a fresh approach to the rules that we expect farmers to meet, as provided for in clause 9. We are determined to have a far more rational and proportionate approach to compliance than the inflexible CAP regime that we are leaving. For too long farmers the length and breadth of this country have had to put up with systems of inspection, compliance, and penalties that often seemed to defy logic or common sense. Outside the EU, we can do better.

Clauses 18 to 20 provide that in exceptional circumstances the Government can act to support farmers through significant market disturbances in England. Our farmers want to be competitive, collaborative, and innovative, and to negotiate effectively at the farm gate to get a fairer return. We are using the Bill as an opportunity to take further action, and to improve fairness in the agriculture supply chain.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State accept the offer from the National Farmers Union to work with the Government on legislative provisions, in order to safeguard standards while allowing sufficient flexibility to conduct meaningful trade negotiations?

Theresa Villiers: I am in regular touch with the National Farmers Union—indeed, I spoke to its representatives only today. Throughout the process of negotiating our new relationship with the European Union, and our trade agreements with the rest of the world, there will be strong engagement from the Departments for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for International Trade, and from the Government as a whole, with farmers and other stakeholders on those crucial matters.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Theresa Villiers: I have to make progress because I know there is a long list of speakers.

Clauses 21 to 26 on data will increase transparency and help to manage risk and market volatility more effectively, and clause 27 will help protect UK producers from unfair trading practices. The Bill enables us to make progress on our new multi-species livestock information programme. That addition to the Bill that was debated in the previous Parliament will support a game-changing initiative to strengthen biosecurity through traceability, and help to strengthen consumer confidence in the quality and safety of the food that reaches the supermarket shelf. Parts 4 and 5 include new UK-wide

provisions on fertiliser and organic products, and on reform of agriculture tenancies in England and Wales. Many of those provisions will benefit farmers in every corner of our United Kingdom, delivering a fairer and more modern agriculture system.

The Bill includes new powers for the devolved Administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland, which they requested to enable them to bring forward new agriculture policy. We fully respect the fact that agriculture is a devolved matter, and we have worked closely with the devolved Administrations on this Bill. I thank them for the collaborative approach that they adopted. Where clauses cover devolved matters, we will of course seek the appropriate legislative consent motions.

Crucially, this Bill fully recognises the importance of food production and food security. In response to concerns expressed in this House, and beyond, about the previous version of the Bill, clause 17 places a duty on Ministers to report regularly on food security to Parliament. The Government are committed to boosting the best of British, and to championing our iconic produce on the global stage. Our manifesto commits us to maintaining and defending our high standards of food safety, animal welfare, and environmental protection as we embark on our trade negotiations with countries around the world.

We will give our farmers unfailing support as their businesses adapt to the bold and radical programme of change that this Bill ushers in, so that they can maintain and enhance the high standards that are the backbone of their success, play their part in tackling climate change and giving nature the space to recover, and continue their vital work of feeding the nation. I urge the House to back this historic change to agriculture policy in this country. Together we can seize this opportunity to deliver a better future for British farming, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the spokesman for the Opposition, I ought to give notice that there will be an immediate time limit, initially of seven minutes. A great many Members wish to make their maiden speech this evening and we want to ensure that those making a maiden speech do not have to do it in less than seven minutes, but that means that many people who have indicated that they would like to speak this evening will not have an opportunity to do so, because there simply will not be time. I call Luke Pollard.

6.30 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House, whilst recognising that on leaving the EU the UK needs to shift agricultural support from land-based payments to the delivery of environmental and other public benefits, declines to give a Second Reading to the Agriculture Bill because it fails to provide controls on imported agricultural goods, such as chlorinated chicken or hormone treated beef, and does not guarantee the environmental, animal welfare and food safety standards which will apply.

The amendment, which stands in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and others, would deny the Bill a Second Reading because it fails comprehensively to guarantee environmental protections and animal welfare

standards in any post-Brexit trade deals. The United Kingdom's history and identity are connected and integral to our countryside, to our farming and to our connection to the natural world. We are rightly proud of our high farm animal standards and our high standards of animal welfare and food hygiene. Today, I will ask some difficult questions about where the Bill takes us, voice serious concerns about the Bill and set out Labour's genuine, heartfelt and reasonable concerns about a Bill that is silent on food imports produced to lower standards that risk undercutting the great British farmer.

What kind of country do we want to be? In which direction will Britain face in the future? Will our nation rise to the challenge of the climate emergency? Will we crash out of the transition period without a deal? Will we sell our values short for trade deals, especially with the United States? I have looked in ministerial statements for certainty and found plenty of words, but no answers—at least none that I genuinely believe. The Bill sets out a path to a wholly new system of agricultural support, and Labour backs many of its provisions, but as I will explain, legal protections to guarantee animal welfare, food hygiene rules, agricultural workers' rights and environmental protections on the food we import are deliberately omitted from the Bill.

Simon Hoare: The hon. Gentleman knows I have a lot of sympathy with what he wants to end up with on those issues, but does he not agree that denying this important Bill a Second Reading, when farmers want to know the direction of travel and have some certainty, would be absolutely the wrong step? Those issues are quite properly addressed in Committee and on Report, and we should get moving forward quickly.

Luke Pollard: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about giving certainty to our farmers, and I will come to that matter later in my speech, but Labour Members cannot accept a Bill that opens the door to chlorinated chicken being sold in Britain. We simply will not do it.

On the day when people are looking for certainty about where we are going as a country, this Bill does not provide that certainty—the key challenge that the hon. Gentleman mentioned and that I just spoke about. The United Kingdom has exceptionally high environmental and food standards, and an internationally recognised approach to animal welfare, which is a good thing.

Geraint Davies: Is my hon. Friend aware of the research in the United States about hormone-impregnated meat—beef in particular—giving rise to premature pubescence in children; premature breast growth and so on? Does he know that there was an attempt to pursue that, but the officials in charge were sacked by Donald Trump when he became the President?

Luke Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. There are valid questions about some of the farming methods used by some of our key trading partners and the reasons why they are used.

I do not want the legacy of high standards to be ripped apart by the introduction of cheap, low-quality foods following our exit from the European Union. Britain has a brilliant diversity of growers, farmers and producers. Our rural communities define what it is to be British. Our rural landscapes are beautiful, but they are

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not frozen; they are working environments. Our rural areas are an inheritance that we pass to our children, and that is why the rules that govern our stewardship of farms, fields, rivers and hills and valleys are so important.

Before I embark on my main argument, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I again declare an interest? My little sister is a sheep farmer in Cornwall, and I have been asked by my old man to add that he keeps a few chickens. I overlook the Pollard chicken coop at my peril.

There is much in the Bill that Labour supports. Public money for public goods is a philosophy that Labour backs. I am no fan of the common agricultural policy—it is probably one of the few areas where the Secretary of State and I agree. Incentivising farmers to protect wildlife, enhance biodiversity and restore habitats is a good thing, which my party supports. At what pace and by what mix of payments is still to be determined in detail. How this move will help smaller farmers as well as large producers is still uncertain, but the direction of travel is one that I welcome. Farmers have been looking after the land for generations, and it is not if they should do so but how that matters, especially as we scrutinise the Bill further.

As my hon. Friends the Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) and for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) have said, the Bill is silent regarding the big promises the Prime Minister has made on standards. Indeed, this very morning, in his speech in Greenwich, the Prime Minister promised the British people that

“we will not accept any diminution in food hygiene or animal welfare standards”,

but the Bill contains no legal guarantee to put those words into law. So many of the Prime Minister’s promises have been broken, words twisted and responsibilities shrugged off. For any of those promises to be believed, they must be enshrined in law. For the British public, for our farmers and for anyone we do trade deals with in the future to see clearly, there must be no regression on standards—no undercutting of British farmers with food grown to poorer standards, poorer animal welfare, more damaging environmental impacts or poorer protections for workers.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): My hon. Friend is, as always, making a well-informed speech. The concerns he is voicing are not just those of the official Opposition or of other parties in this House. They are shared by organisations such as the NFU and other farmers associations—organisations that naturally support attempts to change agriculture in this country. It is not just us asking these questions. The Government need to listen to the NFU and the Farmers’ Union of Wales, which have genuine concerns and fears about the Government renegeing on the commitments they made in their December 2019 manifesto.

Luke Pollard: I agree entirely. Sometimes there is a temptation to believe that, just because a dodgy socialist at a Dispatch Box said it, it must be untrue, but apparently there are an awful lot of dodgy socialists out there now.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I do not for one second suggest that the hon. Gentleman is in any way dodgy, but does he not realise that while the points

the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) made are valid to him and would be perfectly reasonable to make the subject of amendments, by choosing to oppose Second Reading of the Bill, he would make amendments impossible? Will he withdraw his opposition to the Bill so that he can make the amendments that he purports to want?

Luke Pollard: Perhaps the Government’s whipping arrangements are somewhat flawed tonight, but with a majority of 80 the Bill will proceed, unless the hon. Gentleman would like to join me in the Lobby. If he is so worried about the future of the Bill, he is welcome to join me in expressing the serious and heartfelt concerns not just of Opposition Members, but of organisations that work day in, day out with our agricultural communities, which are worried that while they are improving standards in the UK, we will leave the door open to their being undermined. That is not something I can accept.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but does he accept that the farmers of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have a commitment to deliver high-quality products that they can sell all over the world, and they have no intention of changing the regulations that ensure that those products continue to be delivered? Does he accept the Secretary of State’s assurance on the need for the devolved Administrations to be part of that? They accept that being part of the regulations is the way forward.

Luke Pollard: The hon. Gentleman is right. British farmers do not want lower standards; they are proud of the standards they uphold and we are proud of what they grow and how they grow it. What worries us is the risk that, despite those high standards, the door could be opened to lower-cost, poorly produced food imports. That concern is shared by farmers. That is why the importance of putting legal protections in the Bill is so clear. Why is the Secretary of State not proposing legal protections so that chlorinated chicken and hormone-treated beef will not be on sale in our shops, restaurants and takeaways? Why is she not insisting that our farmers’ best practice is not undercut by US mega-agriculture? Why does she not make upholding Britain’s example on animal welfare her red line that she refuses to cross?

Speaking frankly, few in this House believe that the Secretary of State will last long in her job with the reshuffle coming up, so she had nothing to lose in making the case to support our British farmers to stop them being undercut. If she had done so, she would have been the farmers’ hero—a protector of the environment, an upholder of promises to the electorate, someone we could all be very proud of—but her silence on the issue of leaving out legal guarantees from the Bill points to one inevitable conclusion: the promises made by the Prime Minister to uphold the standards are disposable. They are liable to be rejected and replaced at will to secure a bargain-basement trade deal with Donald Trump and usher in a potential for chlorinated chicken, hormone-treated beef and more besides to be sold. If the Government say that that is not happening, why is it not in the Bill? Why will that point not be put into law?

Sir John Hayes: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about food imports: I want to see less food imports and more of the food that we consume grown here to assure

traceability and guarantee food security. To get him off the hook, it would be much better for the Opposition's credibility if they backed the Bill and made these arguments later. Not to back the Bill is to fail our farmers by not giving them the support that they need as we leave the European Union—surely he must know that.

Luke Pollard: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman: it is important to back British. Indeed, if he had been present, as many of us were, during debates on the Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) Act 2020, he would have heard my call for us to buy British, buy local, and especially buy food from the south-west, a region that I and the Farming Minister—the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice)—can be very proud of. Look for the red tractor, because it supports our local businesses and our country.

This issue is fundamental for the future. This is not just a minor amendment that can be put in place; it is fundamental to the direction that we are going in as a country and whether we leave the door open to cheap imported food that undermines our standards. That is why we have tabled this reasoned amendment. That is why it matters and why I am making this case today.

Another fellow west country MP—the recently re-elected Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish)—put it very succinctly:

“Imports produced to lower standards than ours pose a very real threat to UK agriculture. Without sufficient safeguards we could see British farmers significantly undermined while turning a blind eye to environmental degradation and poor animal welfare standards abroad.”

He proposed a very good amendment in the previous Parliament that won cross-party support, although sadly, not the support of his Front Benchers. He said:

“Our suggested amendment calls for agricultural goods to be imported into the UK only if the standards to which those goods were produced are as high as, or higher than, current UK standards.”

We could all get behind that.

Ian Paisley: I want to try to get my head around this: is the Opposition's opposition to chlorinated chicken about chlorinating all foodstuffs? Every single lettuce grown in the United Kingdom is dipped in chlorine, so do they have a principled objection to using chlorine in foodstuffs, or is it just about Trump-bashing? [*Interruption.*]

Luke Pollard: A Member on the ministerial Bench says, “Tell us about the vegetables.” The important thing is to tell us about the standards and the produce. The hon. Gentleman raises a good point: some people in the House might not be familiar with all the agricultural practices that go into producing our food each day. The issue with chlorine-washed chicken is not the chlorine that washes the chicken—he is right that we chlorine-wash some of our vegetables in the UK that are on sale in supermarkets—but the reason why it needs to be chlorine-washed in the first place. That is because it frequently compensates for poor hygiene standards, such as dirty or crowded abattoirs, cages packed with birds, which would be unlawful in the UK, diseases and infections. The reason why the chicken is chlorine-washed, rather than the chlorine, is what is most concerning.

We cannot wash away poor animal welfare standards with swimming pool water. The realities of how the chicken was reared remain. Refusing to set out legal protections against that in the Bill leaves the door open to allowing such food into our food chains in future trade deals. Here is my challenge to the Secretary of State. She has heard, effectively, from both sides of the House—

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Luke Pollard: I am only a shadow Minister just yet, but I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman favours my ambition.

Mr Paterson: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's arguments. The Americans use peroxyacetic acid, not chlorine. Will he comment on the fact that Americans eat about twice the volume of chicken as Europeans but have significantly fewer cases of campylobacter and salmonella? He makes the correct case that they have different animal husbandry standards from ours, but what metric would he use? If he goes on the outcomes of the food, based on the medical evidence, American food is safer or as safe as ours. What will the Labour party do in considering food that is produced under a different regime? How will it be judged, what data will be used, and how will he stop this, or propose that it is stopped?

Luke Pollard: The right hon. Gentleman is right that acetic acid is used in many cases instead of chlorine. Whether the infection is killed by acetic acid, chlorine, or any other process, the concern is that there is an infection there in the first place through poor animal husbandry. I invite him to look at that and at the work produced by the EFRA Committee under his colleague, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton. It goes into detail to make sure that the standards of any imported food are as least as high as those we have in the UK.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): This goes to the heart of why Labour is supporting the reasoned amendment and does not want to allow Second Reading to go through. In the last Parliament, we supported the Second Reading of the Agriculture Bill. I sat on the Bill Committee. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton tabled new clause 4 and I tabled new clause 1 to the Bill. The Government were terrified that they were going to lose, because we had such cross-party consensus on this—from the NFU to environmental groups, to farmers and to greener people—so they suddenly shelved the Bill. We have not seen anything of it since December 2018. We cannot trust the Government this time and allow Second Reading to go through without trying to raise this point now.

Luke Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend for that very good point. Farmers will be watching this discussion tonight who are unfamiliar with parliamentary process. For them, the idea of letting the Bill pass Second Reading without making a case for this might seem appealing, but unless the Government and the Secretary of State, in particular, will accept an amendment or propose one that sets the promises in law, it is important

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that we make the case now. I say to all the farmers who do not want their standards undercut, who are genuinely worried about this, that they have an opportunity to ask their Member of Parliament, whichever side of the House they sit on, to make that case, because that challenge about putting this into law is important. Every day that passes when it is not proposed, including in the Bill, we have to ask why.

We do not need to look too far back to find a precedent that would help the Secretary of State. Last week, the Government whipped their MPs to vote for the NHS Funding Bill to set into law their commitment to spend more on the NHS. Why do the Government need a law to implement promises on the NHS but not a law to implement promises on animal welfare and environmental concerns? Let us look at what the Health Secretary said about that Bill:

“The crucial thing in this Bill is the certainty: the Bill provides everyone in the NHS with the certainty to work better together to make long-term decisions, get the best possible value for money”—*[Official Report, 27 January 2020; Vol. 670, c. 566.]*

Indeed, certainty is a good thing. The certainty that British farmers will not be undercut by cheap imported US produce grown at a lower cost with lower standards would help them as well. Why is legal certainty good for one election promise but not for another? We know the reason: one they intend to deliver, and one they do not. That fact has been pointed to by leaks from DEFRA officials that were unearthed by Unearthed. A report published in October said:

“Weakening our SPS regime to accommodate one trade partner could irreparably damage our ability to maintain UK animal, plant and public health, and reduce trust in our exports”.

That is why this matters.

I am proud of British farmers—not just the ones who are in my family, but all of them. Because the Bill fails to uphold animal welfare and environmental standards in law, Labour cannot support it. We need a legal commitment not to allow imports of food produced to lower standards or lower animal welfare standards. We need advice and support to help smaller farms transition to more nature-friendly farming methods that tackle the climate crisis, and we need the Government to set out a clear direction of travel for future agricultural regulation. Food grown to lower standards, some with abusive practices, must never be imported to undercut British farmers.

I have no doubt that Tory MPs will dutifully vote for the Bill tonight, but each and every one of them must know that my argument has merit. They might be wise to ask themselves why the NFU, the RSPCA and Greenpeace are saying the same thing as that Labour chap at the Dispatch Box. Why did the re-elected Chair of the EFRA Committee present a similar argument in the last Parliament? Could it be that collectively we are on to something? If we are—spoiler alert: we are—I encourage Members to make a beeline to the Secretary of State to encourage her to propose an amendment to the Bill as swiftly as possible to set in train the promises made at the general election, not only by the Prime Minister but, I believe, by nearly every Tory MP here.

I and my colleagues on the Opposition Benches will be voting for the reasoned amendment to deny the Bill a Second Reading because it omits the legal protections

to prevent our British farmers from being undercut. I hope that the Bill can be improved—and swiftly—because in proposing a greener and better future it will also allow for that future to be undermined by imported food grown more cheaply and to lower standards. Who will eat that food? It will be the poorest in society. Who will be able to afford food grown to higher standards? The better-off. It will lead to deregulatory pressure to ensure that Britain’s farmers can compete with US industrial agriculture, which is the opposite of the spirit of the Bill and of what the Secretary of State said at the Dispatch Box, and it is the reason we need legal protection to ensure that no food is imported that has been produced to lower standards than we have today. The Secretary of State has the opportunity to do that. Every day that she lets that opportunity slip by is an indication that they intend to renege on their promise.

6.51 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I will try to be quick as there are maiden speeches to be made.

I welcome the Bill, and I urge the Opposition to vote for Second Reading and then to try to amend it in Committee and on Report, because the amendments I tabled in the last Parliament, which the shadow Secretary of State mentioned, I might well reintroduce at a later stage. Now is the time to let the Bill through, which I welcome as an historic moment.

We want long-term certainty, as we move forward, so I am pleased that the Bill now includes a reference to multi-annual financial assistance plans, but while the Government lay out clearly how they are to phase out direct payments, which is wonderful, they are not so clear about how the ELMS and other payments will kick in. I look forward to some proper pilots. I know that some have been done, but they were started and then stopped and delayed by the problems in the last Parliament. We must have practical schemes in place as we replace the basic farm payment, and if we have trouble rolling out the ELMS quickly enough, we should reconsider the level of basic farm payment paid in the interim, because we must make sure that the money gets to farmers and the agriculture community.

The EFRA Committee looked at the role of the Rural Payments Agency in overseeing and enforcing fair deal obligations for businesses and purchasers of agricultural produce. I am keen to see how the RPA will work with the Groceries Code Adjudicator and hold processors to account—for instance, in the beef or lamb sector, if a processor is not paying the right price for the carcass, will we be able to hold them to account? Will the RPA be able to fine them? If we are to make them change their practices, we have to get in there and make it work. As I have said, I am keen to hear how the RPA and the Groceries Code Adjudicator will work together.

On food standards, the point has been made across the House that we produce some of the best—if not the best—food in the world, to high environmental and animal welfare standards. We cannot allow in food that does not meet those high standards, so I look forward to things coming forward in Committee and on Report. As we design our new policy for enhancing our environment—planting trees, stopping flooding, and so on—we must also seek to enhance the way we grow our

food. Agritech will be important in helping to reduce our use of sprays and fertilizers while also producing a great deal of food.

There are more than 7 billion people in the world today and there will probably be some 8.6 billion by 2030. Seeking to enhance our environment and manage our land differently is very moral from an environmental point of view, but feeding the population of the world is also a moral issue, so as we import food let us be careful that we are not importing the water to grow it and taking food from those who can least afford it. Also, if, as we enhance our environment and plant more trees, we reduce our food production, where will much of that food come from? It will come from Brazil. I have been to Brazil, as have many others, and seen them ploughing up the savannah and driving their cattle towards the rain forest. They are destroying much of their environment in order to produce food. I am sure that hon. Members can see my point. Let us be careful to keep that production in this country.

Furthermore, we rightly make much of holding carbon in the soil and planting more trees, but we sometimes lose sight of the importance of the carbon that is locked in our permanent pasture, in the grassland and in the hills. We must maintain the level of production in this country, especially from grazing livestock, in part because it is produced to high welfare and environmental standards.

Sir John Hayes: We should be proud of the efficiency and productivity of our farmers. In this debate about the environment, much of which I respect and agree with, we must not lose sight of the effectiveness and efficiency that has made our farmers leaders across the world.

Neil Parish: My right hon. Friend is right, and I am looking forward to seeing that in the Bill. As we leave the CAP and develop our own agriculture policy, we will have an opportunity not only to enhance the environment, increase biodiversity, plant more trees, and so on, but to look at the efficiency of our production and livestock breeding—for example, by introducing native breeds and cross breeding in order to deliver that very high quality. On crop production, let us use genome technology and everything that is there so that we can produce lots of food.

It is also important, as we look to managing our landscape in the future, that we seek to enhance our hedgerows and field margins, but we must ensure good production where we have very good fertile land. One thing that worries me about our policies going forward is that it is very much at the high end of food production, and that is great, but much of the population also like to enjoy good-quality chicken meat that is produced intensively but is also very reasonably priced. We produce intensively reared chicken in this country according to very high standards, and I do not want us to phase out production in this country and then import that type of meat from other countries where it is produced much more intensively. Likewise with cereals: we must make sure that the types of crop protection used to produce cereals that we import are also available to our farmers. If we do not, all we will do is export our livestock and our poultry and pig production.

This is an important Bill, and it contains much that is to be recommended. However, we must be careful to ensure that as we enhance the environment and our

biodiversity we also increase production. We have an opportunity now to produce more food in this country and to be more self-sufficient.

6.59 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I am sure I have seen this Bill somewhere before but, as it seems that we are destined to repeat this whole thing, and we will no doubt be going over the same ground, let me say upfront that the Bill does not respect the devolved settlement and that that cannot be a basis on which to proceed.

Let me deal first with the issue of farming support payments. We discussed it during the passage of the Bill that became the Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) Act 2020. That Bill was, of course, needed as a result of the Government's failure to plan, which, I suppose, is why we find ourselves repeating a failed Agriculture Bill.

Questions that were asked during the passage of the direct payments legislation were not answered at the time. I wonder whether Ministers have had an opportunity to consider them yet, and whether they find themselves in a position to answer them now. In order to be as helpful as possible, let me refresh their memories. Like the debate itself, this may seem rather like an episode of *déjà vu*, given that I asked those questions twice, and other Members asked them as well. None of us received an answer, but I am eternally hopeful. It must be my Aussie optimism.

First, let me ask about currency fluctuations. Will any drop in the value of sterling see a corresponding uplift in farm payments to take account of the increased costs of the imported products that farmers will need in the event of legislation requiring the Scottish Government to make payments on the basis of existing EU rules? We know that the currency recently took another beating as a result of Brexit; do the Government propose to help farmers a little with that, and with future fluctuations?

Will there be a multi-annual framework for farm support, or will there just be ad hoc, "make it up as you go along" nonsense? We were told that the details had not been worked out. Has any thought been given to that framework since then? Even the merest idea of how the basic framework of the scheme will look would be a start. When will that be available?

When will we hear details of the shared prosperity fund—details of how much money it contains, and what conditions might be attached? When will we see the global funding figure, and the proportions for Scotland and Wales? Will we have any guarantees that they will be at least maintained in real terms and on international comparators? Will support for our farmers at least keep pace with the support that farmers in the remaining states of the EU will receive? Farmers need some idea of the long-term support that they will receive, or not receive, so they can plan their businesses. The Minister is a farmer himself, and he must be aware of that. Brexit is enough of a disaster for farmers without their not being made aware of the funds that they are likely to receive.

Perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us whether it will be open to owners of grouse moors, shooting estates, private forestry and other such land to apply for the new English scheme for public goods. Will public

[Deidre Brock]

money, having been directed away from food production, be finding its way to them? I personally think—and I believe that many other people think so too—that the proposed new English system will store up long-term problems in England’s food supply, which will, of course, affect Scotland’s production chain. I hope that we shall hear some answers from the Minister tonight, even if there is a timetable for substantive answers.

We have some other concerns. The viability of many of our farms relies on getting produce to European markets, but the only word that we seem to have had on the future relationship is the Prime Minister’s lukewarm hope for a trade deal. We do know that there are a couple of deadlines on the horizon in June, with the questions of financial services and fishing to be decided. We are fairly sure that fishing will be sold out in favour of the City of London’s access to the European markets. However, that wrangling and betrayal dance will mean less concentration on agriculture and the movement of goods—food produced here, to be sure, but also the fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides and other crop products that our farmers use, as well as the animal feed on whose import they rely.

That, of course, feeds into the subject matter of part 2: food security and the supply chain. There will be little point in the Bill if farmers cannot farm in any case. What conversations are Ministers having about ensuring the free flow of goods into and out of the EU? Just this morning we read that the Prime Minister would rather accept tariffs than EU laws, and would not follow EU regulations. Imagine the feelings of farmers and crofters hearing that from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom! What guarantees can be offered on the future of their trade? Without some guarantees, the structures and rules being set up by the Bill are meaningless phrases and empty promises.

The other deadline in June is, of course, the decision on applying for an extension of the transition period beyond the end of this year. I do not think that anyone will be surprised if there is a great deal of hubristic chest thumping and a great many refusals to extend, but the truth is that farmers will need that extension while the deals to ensure their survival are being hammered out.

In the midst of all of that chaos, the Bill contains measures that cut into devolution, trampling on devolved competences such as livestock identification and organics. That is not acceptable, and it must be reversed if the Government want to respect the voices of the Scottish people.

One final issue worth addressing, given the promises made by the Government time after time, is the failure to include protections for food quality and protected geographical indications, of which we have heard much today. We have no guarantees, our food protections are being stripped away, our food quality and welfare protections are going, and support for farmers is under threat, as is their ability to farm. This is not legislation; it is a Brexit fire sale.

In an area of “government by clever wheeze”—or what the Government think are clever wheezes, anyway—good management and sensible government have gone, and we are left with assertion, bluff and bluster. Far from the ideal of evidence-based policy making, the Bill

is a hope-and-prayer pitch at filling a giant hole with a tiny pebble. In Brexit England, evidence seems to be treated with the same suspicion as experts, and we are left with this nonsense instead.

This Bill does not respect the devolved Administrations, and the SNP will be withholding our consent for its progress.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Virginia Crosbie to make her maiden speech.

7.7 pm

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Second Reading of the Agriculture Bill is particularly important to my constituency. It will enable this Government to reward farmers for the work that they do to protect and improve our environment. I shall be working closely with the Welsh Government to ensure regulatory alignment, so that farmers in England and Wales can continue to work in partnership.

I am proud to say that the island of Ynys Môn is without doubt the best constituency in the UK. The island’s motto is Môn Mam Cymru: Anglesey the Mother of Wales. It was voted as one of the happiest places in which to live in Wales. Why? It is beautiful. The Anglesey coastal path consists of 125 miles of coastline, with beaches from Cemaes to Amlwch, Benllech, Beaumaris, Newborough Forest, Rhosneigr, Rhoscolyn and Trearddur. We have heritage, from the 13th-century Beaumaris mediaeval castle to Copper Kingdom Parys Mountain and Oriel Ynys Môn in Llangefni. Our lighthouse, South Stack, is surrounded by cliffs where puffins, guillemots and razorbills breed. The port town of Holyhead is the second busiest ferry port in the UK, and provides a key link to our Irish friends thanks to Stena Line and Irish Ferries. We are playing our part to keep the UK safe: RAF Valley trains fast jet pilots and helicopter crews, and Group Captain Chris Moon has promised me a tour.

We are home to Morgan Evans Auctioneers in Gaerwen and the legendary Anglesey agricultural show in Mona, which is held every year, and to which I extend a personal invitation to the Secretary of State. We have our own sea salt, Halen Môn, which, like the pork pies in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), has protected status, and which is the key ingredient in Barack Obama’s favourite caramels.

Orthios Eco Park is creating jobs and safeguarding our planet for future generations. My first job was with dolphins, so I am pleased to say that we even have our own zoo aquarium, Sea Zoo, and our own Butterfly Palace in Llanfairpwllgwyngyll. For those who like racing, we have Trac Môn and Cartio Môn. We even have our own science park, M-SParc.

How do you get there? You do not have to swim. You do not have to sail. We have two bridges, the Menai suspension bridge and the Britannia bridge, and if you fancy flying, we even have our own airport, Anglesey airport. But most importantly of all, Ynys Môn has its people, and these are people who have put their trust in me. It is an honour to have been elected to represent

Ynys Môn, and I want to use my background, my experience and my determination for all my constituents, however they voted.

My grandfather was a miner in Wales for 47 years, and my mother worked in a jam factory. I am the first person in my family to have stayed on at school beyond the age of 16. I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Albert Owen. He leaves big shoes to fill. He was known for sticking up for his constituents and working cross-party. I hope to follow in his shoes, and I look forward to hosting Anglesey day here in Parliament. My focus will be on delivering the jobs, skilled employment and investment that Ynys Môn needs, and I am hoping that the Wylfa Newydd nuclear power station will transform the island. It will deliver jobs and help the Government to deliver their 2050 net zero carbon target.

Wales is a nation with a language that has been spoken for thousands of years, and I give my personal commitment to support this beautiful language by creating a robust economy. I took my parliamentary oath in Welsh, and I am learning Welsh. I know my pronunciation needs work, and I thank you for your patience. I am not a linguist; I am a scientist. My degree is in microbiology. I worked in pharmaceuticals and more recently I taught maths. It is a privilege to be an MP, and with privilege comes responsibility. I want to be a voice in this place for those who have no voice. This is not the hardest speech that I have ever done. The hardest speech I have done was at my brother's funeral. That is why I understand how important our mental health services are. I also understand how fantastic our NHS is. I nearly died in a car crash when I was just 19, and this is an opportunity to publicly thank Mr Brian Sommerlad—who has changed so many children's lives at Great Ormond Street—and his brilliant team for their surgical skills. He gave me the courage to face university.

I am proud that I am one of the 220 women MPs in this place. I am only the 551st woman MP to be elected. Before the 2019 general election, there had never been a Conservative woman MP in Wales. We now have three. I am looking forward to working with my hon. Friends the Members for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton) and for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones), and with the whole Welsh team. I would not be here without the Conservative Women's Organisation, 50:50 Parliament, Women2Win and, in particular, Baroness Anne Jenkin. I am most grateful for their support and I promise to continue the campaign to get more women elected. I would also like to thank the police at Llangefni and the friends who have supported me on social media. You angels know who you are.

I would like to end by saying that I am a mother, a wife and a friend. I want to dedicate my life to public service, to work hard and to use my enthusiasm and ideas to make tomorrow a better day for my constituency, Ynys Môn—Anglesey, the Mother of Wales. I have an active dialogue with the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales, and I know that they and the farming community are working hard to help us to tackle climate change and wildlife decline. I am looking forward to voting on the Agriculture Bill and the Environment Bill to ensure that they are rewarded. Môn Mam Cymru. Diolch am wrando.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): There are a lot of maiden speeches tonight, and I know that a lot of colleagues have come into the Chamber to

hear those maiden speeches, but there is also a debate going on, so I would ask people to listen to the other speeches as well, without too much chattering.

7.14 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) on her maiden speech. Her Welsh pronunciation sounded absolutely fine to me, but what would I know? Perhaps my colleague here, my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones), is in a better position to judge.

I do not want to repeat everything that I said on Second Reading or in Committee last time round. I hope to be on the Committee again. I will start on a positive note by saying that an addition to the Bill will now give financial assistance to farmers to share information about agroecology. Those of us in the all-party parliamentary group on agroecology have been involved in this for a long time and we would like to see a little bit more clarity in writing from the Minister about how that will work in practice. We are rather disappointed that there is not more of a commitment to financially rewarding the transition to and practice of whole-farm agroecological systems. There is a concern that we are still looking at small tweaks to a system in which environmental stewardship will be located very much on the margins, rather than being done at farm scale. That is one of the weaknesses of the Bill.

We have talked in the past about county farms, and I know that there was a commitment to support county farms, but it is not in the Bill. I would like to hear more about that if the Minister has time when he winds up.

There is no commitment to net zero by 2040 in the Bill. The NFU supports that, and I would have thought that the Government felt able to commit to putting it in the legislation. That ties in with the whole debate that we need to have about land use, which ranges from the impact of the deforestation of the Amazon and the importation not just of meat but of livestock feed, which has a direct connection with our farming here, to the burning of peatlands—the natural carbon sinks that ought to be protected and preserved, not burned to a cinder because of grouse shooting.

It is widely acknowledged that the common agricultural policy was a failure. It was a blunt instrument that led to the inefficient and unsustainable use of farmland. Landowners and farmers were often rewarded for how much land they had, rather than what they did with it, so I very much support the public money for public goods approach, but there is concern that the future environmental land management scheme could end up failing in the same way if it does not adopt that whole-farm approach to landscape-scale delivery. We also need to build in natural climate solutions to that, and to have far more debate about rewilding, peatlands, the planting of trees, agriforestry and so on. I hope that we will do that in Committee.

The Bill is also silent on the baseline of environmental standards that all farmers should adhere to, whether they are in receipt of financial assistance or not. We discussed that in Committee before, and it is really important that we establish that baseline in law and make it clear not only that farmers will be rewarded for going above those standards, but that they will be punished if they go below them. This morning's report

[*Kerry McCarthy*]

by the Institute for European Environmental Policy highlighted the fact that hedgehogs, birds and mammals could all be at greater risk because of the gaps in domestic regulation as a result of our leaving the EU.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): As a member of the Children's Future Food Inquiry, which I co-chaired, my hon. Friend will be aware that we made recommendations to the Government to establish an independent children's food watchdog to implement policies that could improve families' access to affordable and healthy food. Does she agree that the small nod to food security in the Bill by way of a report to Parliament every five years is just not good enough in this regard? Does she also agree that the Government should look into implementing a food watchdog?

Kerry McCarthy: Yes, I think that that is very much the case. As I am fond of saying, the F in DEFRA stands for food, not just farming. Food is quite cheap and there are question marks about who is paying the price. We only have to look at the breaches of human rights and the modern slavery that is prevalent in our food chain, as well as the difficulties involved in trying to find people to work here. Despite food being cheap, many people still cannot afford to feed their family in a healthy, nutritious way and are forced either to go to food banks or to buy food that is barely worthy of the name. It might have calories in it, but it has very little nutritional value. I want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the brilliant work she has done with the Food Foundation and on school food. She has done so much to make the case that food is intrinsically connected with our health. That is such an important thing, and I hope that we can carry on talking about it.

On trade, I tried to introduce new clause 1 on Report in the previous Parliament, but the Bill mysteriously disappeared as we were gearing up for victory. It is so important to have a black-and-white commitment, because I do not believe that many Back Benchers are prepared to accept the Government's word. Without such a commitment, we will offshore our nature and climate commitments, exacerbating the crisis we face, we will undercut UK producers, creating a race to the bottom here at home to compete on price, and we will leave consumers unprotected against low-quality imports produced to standards that would be illegal on British soil.

Whenever we question the Secretary of State, junior Ministers, the International Trade Secretary or even the Prime Minister, we must listen carefully, because they tend to say, "No lowering of UK standards," but that is not good enough. This is about the standard of goods that we allow into this country, so it is completely irrelevant to make promises about UK standards. A leaked DEFRA briefing stated that the Department would come under "significant pressure" from the Department for International Trade to weaken our food and environmental standards to secure trade deals, particularly with the US and Australia. I happened to be in Washington at the same time as the previous International Trade Secretary, who was on television saying that he did not think there was a problem with chlorinated chicken.

Now, with the publication of the leaked US-UK trade talk papers, we can see just how determined the US is to weaken our standards. Taken with the evidence American farming lobbyists provided to the US Trade Policy Committee last year, the US wish list now includes: abandoning the precautionary principle for food and farming; accepting hormone-treated beef, chlorine-washed chicken and meat raised with high levels of antibiotics, when we know that there is a crisis in the routine use of antibiotics in farming and its impact on human health; lifting the ban on ractopamine in pork and stopping parasitic tests on pigs; allowing genetically modified foods to be sold with minimal regulation; scrapping mandatory labelling on GMOs and for E number additives and food colourings—if anyone is lost, this is what the US has said its priorities are—ditching rules that protect traditional food and regional specialities, such as pork pies and the salt from Anglesey; removing our safety-first approach to chemicals; and legalising hundreds of pesticides currently banned in the UK under EU law. The latter is a particular cause for concern if we are serious about transitioning to a sustainable food and farming system, because the US currently allows around 1,430 pesticides compared with just 486 in the EU.

That is why those of us who have been engaged in these issues for a while have always been clear that while chlorinated chicken has become totemic, it is just the tip of the iceberg. While the Secretary of State's commitment on "Countryfile" that we would not import hormone-treated beef or chlorinated chicken was welcome, it does not cover the million and one other issues that we ought to be equally worried about. There are questions, for example, about how easy it would be to unpick the statutory instruments that underpin that position and, frankly, all SIs that contain transferred EU food safety legislation.

I look forward to serving on the Agriculture Bill Committee, Whips permitting, to bringing back my new clause 1 on Report if the Government do not make any concessions—and to winning this time.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. It is a pleasure to call Ruth Edwards to make her maiden speech.

7.23 pm

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Like every new Member rising to give their maiden speech, I feel daunted at the prospect of speaking in this Chamber for the first time, but that feeling is dwarfed by my fear of failing to do justice to the achievements of my predecessor, the right hon. Ken Clarke. Ken served the people of Rushcliffe for 49 years and served our country in many of its great offices of state. He was a friend, sparring partner and mentor to many on both sides of the political debate. A real personality, Ken is known for his love of jazz, football, bird watching and Hush Puppies—although I have since been informed that he actually wears Crockett & Jones and by perpetuating the Hush Puppies rumour I am spreading fake shoes—[*Laughter.*] My oratorical skills may improve, but I am afraid that the jokes probably will not. Ken was the last Chancellor to drink brandy at the Dispatch Box. How I wish at this moment that the custom would be revived and extended to Back Benchers making their maiden speech.

By any measure, Ken's record is more suited to a full debate than a single speech. He is one of the greatest political reformers of the 20th century. His reforms to the NHS, the police and the justice system provided many of the foundations for the institutions we have today. His skilful management of the economy resulted in the economic boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Following such a great politician is an immense privilege, and I am incredibly grateful for his advice, encouragement and endorsement as his successor in Rushcliffe. Ken's experience, wisdom and commitment to one nation Conservative values are needed at this pivotal time for our country. I sincerely hope he will soon be joining our colleagues on the red Benches of the other place.

I am hugely grateful to the people of Rushcliffe for putting their trust in me. Rushcliffe is a very special place. It is consistently ranked one of the best places to live in the UK. We have world-famous sports grounds, such as Trent Bridge, Nottingham Forest, who will be promoted this season, and a thriving grassroots sports scene. The vibrant town of West Bridgford in the north of the constituency gives way to rolling countryside and the tranquil waters of the Grantham canal. It is dotted with villages, large and small, and we are home to many historic traditions, such as the annual wrestling match in the village of Bunny, for example, for which the prize was a gold lace cap. Sadly, I will not get the opportunity to compete, because the competition was discontinued in 1810—before even the tenure of my predecessor began. I will, however, be taking part in the Hickling scarecrow weekend this September—an ambition that far outstrips my artistic talents.

In Rushcliffe, we make tractors, wine, gypsum products and electricity. We are the home of the British Geological Survey. We are proud to host the Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre and the brave veterans it works with. We care passionately about protecting our environment and supporting local producers. Cropwell Bishop and Colston Bassett are two of the handful of dairies that produce the pungent, blue-marbled goodness that is Stilton cheese. Packed local markets in Ruddington, West Bridgford and Sutton Bonington showcase our vibrant scene of local food and drink producers.

That brings me on to the Bill, and I should declare an interest as my husband has received direct payments for his smallholding. I welcome the stronger focus on food production and food security alongside environmental protections, because food production and protecting our environment are inextricably linked. Where our food comes from and how it is produced are key factors that will determine how fast we are able to reduce adverse impacts on the environment. I am delighted that the Government are encouraging the environmentally sustainable production of food, and I hope the high welfare and environmental standards adhered to by British farmers will be imposed on food imported into our market, so that our farmers have a level playing field. I also welcome the inclusion of measures to protect and improve soil quality as a public good for which financial assistance can be given.

Finally, I welcome the provisions in clause 27, which strengthen protections for producers across the entire agriculture supply chain from unfair trading practices imposed on them by some supermarkets and middlemen. For too long we have taken the food on our plate for granted. We have not questioned too closely where it

comes from, its impact on our planet, or whether the people we rely on to produce it are treated fairly by those who sell it to us. That must change, and I welcome the significant contribution that the Bill will make in bringing about that change.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Steven Bonnar to make his maiden speech.

7.28 pm

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards). I congratulate her on a fantastic speech and tell her to listen out for a reference to Nottingham Forest later in my own speech.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech during this important debate. I encourage the House to join me in welcoming the SNP's reasoned amendment as a significant step towards environmental sustainability, food security and the necessary protections of animal welfare in what are uncertain times for the hard-working farmers of these countries—a progressive step, I might add, already taken in November by our Scottish Government, which is world-leading on climate change.

It is an immense honour to be sent here to represent the good people of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill. I wish to take this opportunity to thank my election team, who have been with me from my first leaflet drop as a “yes” activist and have remained by my side until this day. Those activists took a very wet-behind-the-ears retail worker with a simple desire for self-determination for his country and made me into an elected Member of Parliament in a few short years. I am not quite sure how they have actually managed that.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank all those who put their cross in the box of myself and the SNP. I will do my best, every day, to repay that trust. I also wish to take this opportunity to assure those who did not vote for me: I will work tirelessly to represent your interests, wherever they may lie, for as long as I am in this place. I will do so with the same vigour and determination that I always have since my first day as an elected representative. I have no doubt that, in taking forward our needs and desires together, my constituents and I will face some of the same disdain, derision and apathy that people in my constituency are well used to facing when it comes to the ruling hand of London upon our shoulders.

Friends, at this point I wish to take a moment to pay tribute to the former Member I have replaced here—Hugh Gaffney. I am sure that everyone will agree that he was a formidable voice in this place for postal workers. Hugh would certainly have been expecting longer down here than the brief time he got, but I would like to wish him and his constituency staff the very best of luck in their future endeavours.

The burgh constituency of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill is made up of a few large towns and many small villages. The large towns lend the constituency its name, but the villages and other new communities, such as Stepps, Muirhead, Moodiesburn, Bargeddie, Glenboig, Birkenshaw and my own home village—my beloved Viewpark—have strong individual identities of their own. Unlike many hon. Members before me, I cannot

[Steven Bonnar]

stand here and make the claim of having the most picturesque constituency; we are, by and large, a collection of housing schemes built to house the many who worked the pits and steelworks of industrial Lanarkshire and beyond. But my constituency is not without its breathtaking scenery, like the vista of the snow-topped Campsie hills, observed as we take in the view from the historic and much-loved Douglas Glen. But at our core, we are an industrial set of towns and an industrious people—hard-working, straight-talking and as honest as the day is long. That is who we are. We wouldnae do ye a wrang turn, but you wouldnae want to step on our toes either.

We are proud of our achievements, and those of our sons and daughters—many contributions to the worlds of politics, law, sports and the arts. Poet Laureate Walter Watson lived and died in Chryston. The great boxing champion Ricky Burns hails from the town of Coatbridge; a three-weight world champion and an inspiration to many, Ricky and his fighting spirit encapsulate the town perfectly. Then there is Bellshill's own Matt Busby. Sir Matt will need no introduction in this place: the figurehead of Manchester United and that side known lovingly as the Busby Babes.

And then there is my own home village of Viewpark. An area much like Scotland as a whole, it is always punching well above its weight on the international scene, none more so than in the sporting arenas. With a population of under 14,000, the sporting achievements of Viewpark are surely unparalleled. This wee village has three UEFA European cup winners' medals in its back pocket. Not anywhere in Germany, Italy, France or Spain—indeed, nowhere in any of the great footballing nations—will such an achievement be matched. There are two medals for the mercurial John Robertson, won under the stewardship of the great Brian Clough and his formidable Nottingham Forest teams of 1970 and '71; and one for Viewpark's greatest son—the late, great, Jimmy “Jinky” Johnstone, won alongside that most famous team, Celtic FC's Lisbon Lions. A statue to the wee man stands proudly in Viewpark today as a fitting memorial and a small measure of the esteem in which he is held. And then there is Michael Kerr, our double Paralympian for the Team GB wheelchair rugby team. The only Scot ever in the GB squad, Michael went on to captain the side, competing at both the London and Rio Olympics. His achievements also include European golds and world titles. I know you would not know it by looking at me, but we are a sporting lot.

I would like to place on the record my gratitude to my former employers and, more importantly, my work colleagues throughout the years, for the part they have all played in my journey to this place. My working life began with British Home Stores, where I had two spells before I was made redundant in 2008, when my daughter was only five months old. I wanted to take this chance to thank Philip Green for that harsh life lesson, which so many of us endured under his employment. I will not use his given title of “Sir”, as I think it is a disgrace that he still holds it. To see it stripped would go some way to repairing the damage that his immeasurable greed and indifference for his employees and their families created.

I went on to work for Debenhams in both Glasgow and Dublin and the iconic John Lewis partnership before becoming an elected councillor and now being

elected to this place. Without the love and consideration of family, that would not be possible, as many Members will know, so to my Mum Margaret, KellyAnn and Sara, I say thank you and I love yous. It is that strong and loving family support that allows me to come to this place now and carry out the role requested of me.

As with many citizens of Scotland, the removal of our rights as European citizens has had a personal impact. My daughter is what I jokingly call “half Polish, fully Scottish”; with a Polish mum and a Scottish dad, it was by the grace of God she was born in Scotland and able to avail of the wonderful birthright of a Scottish accent. At least I will not have to apply for settled status for my own wean.

The good people of the towns and villages of this diverse constituency delivered an emphatic mandate for an MP committed to Scottish independence. The election results between 2017 and 2019 should crystallise one thing: my election to this place, and that of many of my colleagues on these Benches, is a direct response to our recent treatment from the UK Government. I have been sent here from a constituency that feels that it has very much been overlooked and underestimated by this place and its Governments. The contempt we have been treated with in respect of the Brexit negotiations, and how they have been handled over the last three years, will not be forgotten for a long time in Scotland—or easily forgiven.

The SNP's emphatic victory in Scotland is in complete response to the disregard that has been held for our people and our democratic decisions, brought into sharp focus since the day we overwhelmingly voted for the retention of our European rights and privileges. It is a direct response to the treatment of the Scottish people, of our elected representatives, and of our Scottish Parliament. Madam Deputy Speaker, those days are numbered.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Greg Smith to give his maiden speech.

7.36 pm

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; it is a pleasure and a privilege to follow three such eloquent and powerful maiden speeches.

I had originally intended to make my maiden speech on 15 January. However, something much more exciting happened at 1.30 in the morning that day, when my wife gave birth to our second child, Charlie. With your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the wonderful NHS staff at Stoke Mandeville Hospital for the care they gave my wife and Charlie. Most importantly, I would like to thank the 37,035 electors of the Buckingham constituency who voted for me in December. I will work tirelessly to repay their trust, determined and principled in my advocacy of all my constituents' concerns.

As with all of us, my being here today is only possible due to the support I receive from those nearest to me—not least my incredible wife, Annalise, for whose support and patience I will remain forever grateful, plus our three-year-old son Jacob, who does not understand why Daddy is not around so much. I hope he will read this in *Hansard* one day and understand just how much of my daily motivation comes from him.

I also pay tribute to the dedication of my predecessor, John Bercow, who served Buckingham for over 22 years. During the campaign, many local residents remarked on how assiduous a constituency Member of Parliament he had been—a trait I seek to emulate. However, I am certain John and I would have clashed, certainly in more recent years, over our views on Britain's membership of the European Union. As someone whose first interest in politics was sparked by horror at the treaty of Maastricht, it is with particular pride that I have been elected as part of this Conservative majority, mandated to get Brexit done, and to be making my maiden speech in the first debate since our country became an independent nation once more. As we forge a brave, new, outwardly-looking path in the world, I look forward to playing my part in supporting this Government's positive agenda, on the side of aspiration and opportunity, low taxes and high wages, delivering world-class public services and spreading free markets across the globe.

The 335 square miles of the Buckingham constituency are as beautiful as they are dynamic. From the medieval market town of Princes Risborough and the oldest recorded parish in England of Monks Risborough, the market towns of Winslow and Buckingham accompany over 100 vibrant, community-spirited villages and hamlets, too many to mention here today. Steeped in history, Stowe, Ascott House and Waddesdon Manor all add to the rich heritage of the constituency—not to mention the Prime Minister's country gaff, Chequers. We have a rural economy, where farming is so important, but that is coupled with manufacturing, retail and new, high-tech industry and jobs in our enterprise zones. The University of Buckingham, under the leadership of Sir Anthony Seldon, is the largest single employer. In an era of our universities having a reputation as seedbeds for left-wing radicalism, I was delighted to discover the Hayek library in the centre of its new Vinson building, complete with the country home of the Institute of Economic Affairs. And it is an absolute personal pleasure, as a motorsport fan since I was eight years old, to represent roughly half of the iconic Silverstone circuit. As an aside, going completely off topic, is it not time that the greatest living British sportsman, with six world championships and counting, should be recognised with a knighthood in our honours system?

My constituency faces threats on multiple fronts: HS2; the Oxford-Cambridge expressway; and over-development, not least from the outrageous, expansionist plans of Labour-run Milton Keynes. One of my early mentors in politics, a former Member of this House, the late Eric Forth, once said to me that the most powerful question in politics is simply "why?" So let me put it this way: why would we take people's homes, cut their farms in two, blight the landscape, destroy 108 ancient woodlands and risk the chalk streams of the Chilterns, all for a 60p return on every pound spent and no benefit to my constituents, when other solutions exist? It is my passionate belief that our countryside is the defining feature of our United Kingdom. There may be those who believe it is somewhere to occasionally go for the weekend, and what does it matter if we build over it or slam a new railway through the middle, but they are wrong, for when it is gone, it will be gone forever. Nor should our countryside ever be treated as just the bit between the towns and cities, for we are dynamic, home to thousands

of successful rural businesses, big and small; many of which, but by no means all, grow and rear the food everyone needs and enjoys.

Turning to the Agriculture Bill, I must declare an interest, in that my wife's family are farmers, in receipt of subsidies. I have learnt so much from a real hero of British farming, my father-in-law, not least because at family dinners he only has two settings: silence; and talking about farming. It is extremely welcome that this Bill now recognises the central aim of food production. Freeing our farmers from the CAP is one of the major benefits of leaving the EU, but unwinding from decades of bureaucracy and building a system that properly rewards quality food production and the enhancing of our biodiversity is not straightforward—to give that classic countryside answer to the city dweller who stops to ask directions, "I wouldn't start from here." This Bill gives certainty, and I welcome it. But as the clock is against me, I cannot better conclude than by quoting Margaret Thatcher's closing words in her speech to the National Farmers Union in 1986:

"There is an independence and a stability in farming upon which Britain depends and which Britain cannot afford to lose...Agriculture means so much, our farming future must be assured."

7.44 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): It is a huge honour to follow a quartet of excellent maiden speeches from Members from across the House, each of whom has big shoes to fill and a big personality to match. My advice, as someone who has been there, is: be yourself, and you will do wonderfully well and be a big personality in your own right.

The Secretary of State was right when she said at the beginning of this debate that farming is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland. Therefore, some of the issues could be wrongly dismissed out of hand when we consider farming, its impact and what it means for the British mainland. Northern Ireland produces an awful lot of the food consumed on this side of the channel, so it is important that we have a joined-up approach to our agrifood matters. I am delighted that my colleague in the Northern Ireland Assembly Edwin Poots is the Minister for agrifoods and the environment there. I hope it will make a relationship with the Secretary of State easier because of the good connections and good support we have had from the current Government.

However, the Secretary of State and this Bill have to address the fears that too many farmers in Northern Ireland have about potential tariffs east-west, on the movement of foods, grains and other products from the British mainland to Northern Ireland. The potential for those tariffs creates a volatility in prices and has helped to drive down farm incomes in previous years. Those and threatened tariffs will only serve to do much more. This Bill is important, providing a new opportunity for agricultural product and agricultural payments that should be flexible, to meet the needs of the regions of the United Kingdom. I say that because the needs of Northern Ireland and what we produce will be different from those of Wales, Scotland or England. Therefore, these things must be flexible. They must address and support the primary producer where it matters most; help increase his or her sustainable productivity; help

[*Ian Paisley*]

put money back into the pockets of our farmers; improve food security; and protect our naturally beautiful countryside.

In Northern Ireland, agriculture is king, with 75% of all its land being used for agriculture. It is used to produce meat, dairy and eggs, which account for 80% of our food output. In Northern Ireland and Ireland, animals use more land than is used to grow any crops, including indigenous products, such as potatoes. Therefore, it is essential to understand how important land and agricultural produce are in Northern Ireland; our turnover is £4.5 billion, employing one in eight people, which works out at more than 25,000 farm businesses in our country. That is threatened by volatility in the market. The big issue is that farm incomes have fallen by 23% in the past year and a half, from £467 million to £360 million in the past year.

I go back to the key point: the tariffs between Great Britain and Northern Ireland that could be introduced as a result of Brexit would drive that down further, which is why all the commitments made from the Dispatch Box about ensuring that those tariffs will be minimal or non-existent, and ensuring that things are frictionless, have to be met in reality, otherwise farmers will be put out of business in Northern Ireland. What will that do? It will help to destroy food security here in the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, we produce most of the milk consumed on this island. We produce some 73% of the beef consumed on this island. Do not destroy your food basket in Northern Ireland, and make sure that our products are protected by this Bill.

We export about 800 tonnes of milk a year to the Republic of Ireland, so we are also an export nation in food production. I have already given the figure for the amount of beef eaten in the United Kingdom. We want to produce so much more of that product, and if this Bill does anything to encourage agrifood production, to increase the opportunities for farmers to produce more, that will do more to sustain farming and increase farm incomes, and will address many of the problems and concerns people have about cheap food coming into the UK.

Agritech has been mentioned in the debate. I am sorry to get on to this subject, but in Northern Ireland every year 1.1 million tonnes of solid animal waste is produced. Its calorific value is 15 millijoules per kilogram. At the same time, Northern Ireland's heating demand represents around 24,650 GWh. If we bring those two things together with agritech, we will be able to utilise that solid waste, which could account for around 20% of Northern Ireland's heating need. There is a huge opportunity that has to be grasped, but how? Can the Bill support such innovative technology? Can it ensure that those who wish to get behind such technologies have the financial support to allow them to invest and create not only jobs but the opportunities that arise from addressing those needs? Of course, that would also give environmental support. As we all know—it has already been raised—phosphates are destroying much of our land and affect water pollution, which can also be addressed by agritech.

The needs I have described require investment, and the only way that we can do that is to ensure that the Bill really gets to the heart of it and addresses the needs

of the primary producers, who care most about the environment because they work in it and need a good environment to make the best, tastiest food on these islands.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is a pleasure to call Selaine Saxby to make her maiden speech.

7.51 pm

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in the debate on this key Bill for North Devon where, I am assured, we have a higher density of sheep per square acre than south Wales.

It is easy to be the one-woman tourist board for North Devon: it boasts stunning surf beaches at Woolacombe, Croyde and Saunton; the Tarka trail connects our sand dunes from Braunton to Instow; and Members should not miss a stop at Fremington quay for afternoon tea—cream on first, for anyone not sure how to tackle their scones. We have the Lynton to Lynmouth funicular railway; miles of idyllic rural walks, by day or night, with Exmoor being the first international dark sky reserve in Europe; and our vibrant market and coastal towns of Ilfracombe, Barnstaple and South Molton. We are proud to boast 139 pubs that will warmly welcome last week's announcement on reducing their business rates. I visited a mere 40 of them in the campaign, so there are still plenty to go in my support of the village pub, which is vital to North Devon's rural communities.

Getting to North Devon is about to get somewhat easier, with the improvements to the North Devon link road starting this year, championed by my predecessor Peter Heaton-Jones. Peter stepped down as MP so late that many colleagues in the House were more than a little surprised to see me. I pay tribute to his hard work in putting North Devon on the map. In his maiden speech he referred to the need for more infrastructure, and in particular faster broadband. It is with some disappointment that, despite his best efforts and some hard-won improvements, broadband remains top of my wish list for infrastructure developments in North Devon.

I am what is known as a “blow in” back home in Devon. Drawn there a few years ago by its heady mix of sand, sea and rolling hills, I am far too old to ever become a local, but it is the best place to have blown in to. When I leave here and switch my work suit back to my wetsuit, I wake to the sound of the Atlantic crashing over the bar and into the double estuary of the Taw and Torridge, tucked behind a sand dune on Instow beach, which George—my rather plump Labrador—and I love to walk, with stunning sunsets and the idyllic view out to Lundy.

Over three quarters of Devon's landscape is farmed, yet managed by less than 1% of the residents. I am therefore delighted to be speaking up for them in the debate on this Bill, which will both boost food production and champion our environment, which is another key concern in North Devon. The Bill will ensure that farmers are finally rewarded for being the stewards of the environment that they always have been, and that

that is related to how the land is used, managed, protected and preserved, rather than solely to how much land is owned. The National Farmers Union is aiming for English and Welsh agriculture to be carbon net zero by 2040, and the Bill will ensure that that endeavour is rewarded. As the environment is so important to those of us who have the privilege of living in stunning North Devon—so much of which is highly designated to ensure that we are able to safeguard it for future generations—I will champion working towards net zero in the House.

Levelling up will mean a lot to all of us in North Devon. We have the eighth highest percentage of people in work, but our productivity per head is £5,800 below the UK average. That is possibly no wonder given that our average broadband speed is only 60% of the UK average. That has to change. Connectivity is so poor that one village resident explained to me at a farmers market that they were struggling even to get “The Archers”. Having run a dotcom myself for 15 years, I know how important broadband is to small and medium-sized local businesses.

It is an absolute privilege to represent the community in which I love to live, and a particular honour to be its first ever female MP. I wish to take this opportunity to thank Baroness Anne Jenkin and the Women2Win team for their ongoing support. I suspect I am like many ladies on this side of the House in attributing our presence here in large part to Women2Win. I very much hope that I may go some way to inspiring young women and girls in North Devon to fulfil their dreams and reach beyond what they thought might be possible.

My personal journey to this point has been varied, as life's paths so often are, and I hope that that rich experience will serve me and my constituents well. Members may have noticed that I like my statistics: my short time teaching maths opened my eyes to our education sector and the need to raise our young people's aspirations. I never knew that my decades as a fitness instructor would be so much needed, given the miles I walk daily getting lost in the corridors of the House.

I stand here to champion the people of North Devon, however they voted last December. On countless doorsteps I said that I would get things done, and I will. I am delighted to speak in the debate on this vital Agriculture Bill in this, our first week as an independent coastal state, which I hope will lead to good news for my local fishermen. I hope that by the time there is another MP for North Devon—in many years to come, of course—they will not be asking for better broadband in their maiden speech.

7.57 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): It is an honour and a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby), who represents a part of the country that I have been to with my family and that we very much enjoyed. More importantly, it has been really helpful to learn how to eat scones, making sure that we do the cream first. I am sure that she will continue to make excellent contributions for her constituency in this place.

I welcome the changes made to the Bill relating to the importance of soil and the plans to assist farmers, but the Bill is not robust enough and remains vague on key areas of importance. It provides many powers but very

few duties for the Secretary of State to take action, and for a Bill on food production it remains remarkably vague on food. It is silent on action to reduce food poverty and there are no provisions to promote healthy foods. It is also a missed opportunity to provide a much clearer priority in respect of food sustainability. In the world's sixth richest country, no one should be going hungry. Food is a basic human right, but the Government's welfare policies have seen food bank usage rise, and continue to rise. The climate crisis and reckless post-Brexit trade deals could make food insecurity even worse.

I pay tribute to the volunteers who work so hard for the food banks in my constituency, including the Trussell Trust and the Whitefoot and Downham Community Food+ Project, which I founded to meet the increasing demand for food in my community. It is shocking that there are now more food banks than ever throughout the country. The latest figures from the Trussell Trust show that in 2018-19 there was an 18.8% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed, compared with the previous year. That is shocking. It is shocking that there are now more food banks than ever before across our country and in particular that children are in food poverty. Clause 17 requires a five-yearly report on food poverty, but the first report is, coincidentally, timed to be after the next election. That is not good enough. We do not need more talk and inaction. We need a robust plan to tackle food poverty head-on and to end food banks completely.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Anthony Browne to give his maiden speech.

8 pm

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): The greatest thing about speaking in this debate on agriculture policy is that we are having it at all. The last Agriculture Bill passed by this House was in 1947. That means that no one under the age of 93 has had the chance to elect an MP who could vote on farming policy—until now.

It is a special honour to speak here on behalf of my home constituency, South Cambridgeshire. It is where I grew up, went to school and got married. It has lots of farms, one of which I grew up on. My predecessor, Heidi Allen, represented the constituency with great commitment, great passion—and great political versatility. She was diligent in attending local parish meetings and famous for dancing into the night at local events, and I certainly will not be able to follow in those dancing shoes. We do not agree on everything, but we do agree that it is a fabulous constituency. One resident told me that South Cambs has more Nobel prizes than France and that is a fact too good to check. [*Laughter.*] It is true—apparently. It is certainly true that just one building, the Laboratory of Molecular Biology, has produced 12 Nobel prize winners itself. We also have the global headquarters of AstraZeneca, one of the biggest drug companies in the world. We have Addenbrooke's hospital, one of the top hospitals in the country, and one where I had my life saved when I had my appendix out. It has been joined by the newly opened Royal Papworth Hospital, the top heart hospital in the UK. Other MPs have urged Members to visit their constituencies if they want a great day out. My hon. Friends, I urge you to visit my constituency if you want a great heart transplant.

Neil Parish: I am not looking for one just yet.

Anthony Browne: My hon. Friend will be very welcome to come.

The Government are planning a new children's hospital and a cancer hospital. It is proof of our Government's commitment to the NHS. We are the life science capital not just of the UK, but of the world. Even tiny villages boast their own science parks. Take Hinxtton, which now has the Wellcome Sanger Institute, leading the world on gene sequencing. It is now decoding the genes of 500,000 people, starting a revolution in personalised medicine.

The traditional heart of my constituency is rural. Farmers are some of the most affected by EU membership. Many get subsidies from the EU and many export to it, but the overwhelming majority of farmers I met were pro Brexit. There is a good reason for that: the common agricultural policy is not fit for purpose. Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money are given to people basically for owning land, and with great subsidies come great rules—600 pages of them. There are 15 pages alone defining when a hedge is not a hedge. Farmers have to employ administrators just to help them survive the red tape.

I know that Brexit has its challenges. I spent five years as the chief executive of the British Bankers' Association, which included negotiating Brexit with the EU institutions—the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. But on CAP, we can all agree. The left-wing columnist in *The Guardian*, George Monbiot—not often quoted by Conservative MPs—wrote recently:

“I'm a remainer, but there's one result of Brexit I can't wait to see: leaving the EU's common agricultural policy.”

As we heard earlier this evening, Labour has long opposed the CAP. I remember meeting the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) 20 years ago when she was the Environment Secretary railing against the CAP.

As Europe correspondent of *The Times*, I covered the European summit where Tony Blair gave up a portion of the British rebate, which had been so hard fought for by Margaret Thatcher—hooray. He gave it up in return for a promise from Jacques Chirac that France would think about reforming the CAP. I can tell Members that the French President did not think very hard.

I am a former environment correspondent of *The Observer* and of *The Times*, and I now chair the all-party group on the environment. Green issues are close to my heart. Most environment groups, most farmers and all major political parties have long wanted to scrap the CAP, but there was nothing that we could do about it. I found it an affront to democracy, so nothing gives me greater pleasure than voting for this Bill. It uses public money for public goods, such as improving the environment and animal welfare.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has shown what can be achieved at its Hope Farm in my constituency, where environmentally friendly farming has led to a 1,500% increase in overwintering birds. This Bill has very wide support from farmers' groups and from environmental groups. Certainly, there are questions to ask. It is good to have a seven-year transition from one scheme to the other, but what is the profile of that transition? Should there be a food security review every

five years or every year to start with? The great thing is that we can now debate this and decide this. Voters can make their views heard and we will listen. It is part of the renaissance of British democracy.

Farming still faces challenges. It is essential that, when farmers export, they do so with a level playing field. They must not be undermined by competitors who cut costs by cutting environmental or animal welfare standards. The Bill does mean that many farmers will have to change the way that they do things, but the farmers I have spoken to are up for the challenge. They welcome being paid to protect the environment. Many are already diversifying what they do. Last week, I met a farmer who had started producing crisps and is now exporting them by the container load to America. Other farmers are improving productivity by automating. One company in my constituency, Dogtooth, is leading the world in producing artificially intelligent strawberry-picking robots. It is one of many agritech companies in South Cambridgeshire that are unleashing a new agricultural revolution.

Yes, there are challenges ahead that need managing, but we must have confidence in ourselves as a country. One millennial said to me recently that we could not possibly survive outside the EU, and I was left thinking, “How have we come to think so little of ourselves?” There are roughly 200 countries in the world, and only 27 are part of an international government that makes laws for each other. No one else has followed the EU, so there are roughly 170 countries that fully make their own laws and of those we are the fourth biggest economically—in the top 2%. If we cannot survive, what about the 98% of fully independent countries that are economically smaller than us? That includes such successes as Canada, Australia, Singapore and South Korea.

I am half Norwegian, part Irish, part French and married to a Canadian. I have lived overseas and worked and travelled in more than 70 countries. Often I see Britain as others see us—an extraordinary country capable of extraordinary things. But how has such a great country lost so much of his mojo?

We have left the EU. The new political divide is no longer between Brexiteers and remainers; it is between optimists and pessimists. Whatever side of the argument you are on, we must now come together and work together to embrace the opportunities. It starts here with this agricultural policy. I commend this Bill to the House.

8.7 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a great pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne). One thing on which we can certainly agree is the wisdom of George Monbiot. I hope we will have many other opportunities to quote from his copious writings and agree with one another in the forthcoming months and years.

I welcome some improvements made in this Bill compared with the earlier version, but I want to set out where it still is not going far enough if the Government are serious about climate and nature. First, it is good to see stronger protections for farmers from unfair trading practices. Having previously tabled an amendment to

bring the whole of the supply chain within the remit of the Groceries Code Adjudicator and, indeed, any new regulator, I can say that is a step in the right direction. It would be better still if the Bill placed a proper duty on the Secretary of State to act rather than simply conferring powers to do so, and I personally cannot see the case against turning many “mays” into “musts” throughout this clause and indeed throughout this Bill. I am sure that others will applaud the excellent work of the Sustain alliance, but all eyes will be on the detail, delivery and, crucially, enforcement.

Secondly, the inclusion of soil in the public goods in part 1 is another welcome move. However, as a member of the Environmental Audit Committee that conducted a whole inquiry into soil health, it is disappointing to see so many of these recommendations still not acted on given the overwhelming importance of soil carbon storage. For example, the Committee called for rules with greater scope, force and ambition to deliver restoration and improvement of soil, so why have the Government still not banned practices that do unforgivable harm to soils, such as burning on blanket bogs or the use of peat in compost. With organic farms supporting healthier soils with 44% higher capacity to store long-term soil carbon and 50% more wildlife, why does this Bill not seek a major expansion of organic farming? Furthermore, if the objective is to have healthy living soils for carbon storage, biodiversity and fertility then surely we prioritise policies that minimise inputs that exterminate that precious biological life, yet there is nothing in this Bill to phase out pesticides either.

That illustrates a wider point—the gaping hole in the Bill is on the crucial role of regulation, not just on pesticides but to drive innovation and to deliver environmental, public health and animal welfare goals.

The third positive is the new mention of agroecology in the Bill. The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) has championed that as chair of the all-party group on agroecology, but I suspect that she would share my mixed feelings. Although agroecology is recognised in the Bill, it is in a bizarrely minor way. In clause 1(5), the Bill states that

“better understanding of the environment”—

one of the purposes for which the Secretary of State may give assistance—

“includes better understanding of agroecology”.

That seems like a fundamental misunderstanding of what agroecology is and what a wholesale shift to agroecological farming should deliver for nature, climate, public health and farmers. It should not be consigned to a legislative footnote—it should be at the very heart of the Bill and the Government’s wider farming policy.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give the House guidance on what she thinks about meat eating and what sort of scale of meat eating is reasonable, given her environmental objectives?

Caroline Lucas: I support the better eating campaign that suggests that overall in this country we should seek to reduce meat eating by about 50%, but in that shift to plant-based diets we want to eat less but better meat. In other words, we still want to support our farmers. Crucially, they need to be supported during that transition.

It is no good simply setting up new goalposts and not supporting farmers with finance, help and advice to enable them to make that transition.

Over the past 18 months, an incredibly strong case has been made for a 10-year transition to agroecology. I would like that vision to take shape as a green new deal for the food and farming sector. One example of the growing mountain of evidence that makes that case is the RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, a major, two-year, independent inquiry that includes leading experts from industry and civil society, as well as inputs from farmers and growers across the UK. It includes abundant detail on how to make that transition, including a proposal that every farmer should have access to trusted, independent advice, including through farmer support networks and establishing a national agroecology development bank to accelerate a fair and sustainable transition. Crucially, the inquiry found that “most farmers agreed that they could make big changes to the way that they farm in five to ten years—with the right backing.”

It is that right backing that we have to make sure that the Bill provides.

Time is of the essence if we are to reverse the loss of biodiversity and meet climate goals. A goal of net zero by 2050 is in line with neither science nor equity, and climate delay is almost as bad as climate denial. The Bill needs more than one line on that topic, especially as that one line simply says that the Secretary of State “may”—not even must—give financial assistance for climate mitigation or adaptation.

The Bill desperately needs a link to carbon budgets, unambiguous duties to deliver, and the incorporation of Committee on Climate Change advice, in particular, strengthening the regulatory baseline. I hope that the Minister will explain precisely how the Government will deliver major emissions cuts during the seven-year transition period, not just afterwards.

On biodiversity, it is truly shocking that the Bill contains nothing really on pesticides. As a minimum, it should set bold, national targets to cut pesticide use and introduce regulations to protect the public from the hazardous health impacts of pesticide use near buildings and in public spaces. There was broad, cross-party support for my amendment on pesticides last time round, yet it is rumoured that DEFRA’s inadequate pesticide plans are being diluted even more as the Department caves in to agrochemical industry lobbying. Why do Ministers not listen instead to the 70 scientists who recently called for the phasing out of synthetic pesticides and fertilisers as an urgent, no-regrets action as part of a road map to insect recovery, designed to reverse the insect apocalypse?

What is DEFRA’s response to the letter from over 2,500 scientists across the EU that warns of the unequivocal scientific consensus on the intensification of agriculture and the ever-increasing loss of biodiversity that could soon become irreversible?

Another glaring omission is on trade. Many of us have raised it tonight, but the Bill needs a watertight requirement for all food imported into the UK to be produced to at least equivalent standards on animal welfare, pesticides, environmental protection and public health. It is simply unacceptable to ask our farmers to meet higher standards, then allow them to be undermined by cheap competition from countries that do not meet

[Caroline Lucas]

those standards. I refer the Minister to the amendment to the Trade Bill in the other place that sets out that argument clearly.

Finally, the Bill should be used to introduce new measures of success for our agriculture sector so that the payments for productivity in clause 2 do not undermine progress on biodiversity, climate and animal welfare. Just as there is growing consensus on the need to measure economic progress with indicators that incorporate ecological health and human wellbeing, which GDP fails to do spectacularly, so we must adopt new indicators for agriculture. The Bill should require the Secretary of State to begin that work to develop those new metrics, to steer us towards a truly sustainable future for food and farming, and they must include overseas as well as local impacts. Greenpeace research shows that UK chicken, for example, is contributing to deforestation due to the imported soya in its animal feed. We need to design new farm policy to deliver value, not volume; diversity, not monocultures; and people nourished per hectare, not tonnes of yield.

8.15 pm

Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con): I should declare an interest, as my parents are tenant beef farmers, and I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I rise to offer my maiden speech as the new Member for my home constituency of West Dorset. My family has farmed in West Dorset for almost 100 years. My grandmother, who during the second world war was in the women's land army, met my grandfather when she came to work on our farm, and it is with nearly a century of farming insight and experience—of which I am the fourth generation—that I address this House today.

I am not an academic and I did not go to university, but I must pay tribute to two people in West Dorset who did. The first is my predecessor, Sir Oliver Letwin. Sir Oliver has been greatly contentious in more recent times in this place, and Members shall have their own view on that. As Sir Oliver's association chairman since 2016, I can tell the House that there was no shortage of correspondence to tell me! But what the press and Members of Parliament would not have seen so prominently was Sir Oliver's tireless efforts to support his constituents in the greatest of need—work that I have already committed to continue as his successor. But despite he and I having differences of opinion on the European Union, he was highly regarded by many as a hard-working constituency Member of Parliament.

I should also like to pay tribute to the vicar of Sherborne, Canon Eric Woods, who first came to my hometown in 1993—the year in which I started secondary school. Eric has been a good friend to West Dorset and announced his retirement last week after 27 years of service.

West Dorset is the home of the Jurassic coast, from Lyme Regis to Chesil beach. It is Thomas Hardy country. Glorious Sherborne Abbey stands proud above a town that is a world leader in education, where Alan Turing, who cracked the Enigma code during the second world war, was educated. The oldest post box in Britain is in Holwell—the village where I went to primary school. There is even a village called Loders. Morcombelake is

home to the famous Moore's Dorset Knob—a savoury biscuit so famous that we even have a Dorset Knob-throwing festival! We are also home to Dorset Blue Vinny cheese—and to wash that all down, our very own beverages from Palmers brewery, Fordington gin and countless vineyards to name just a few, which can almost certainly be bought at Felicity's farm shop! As you can see, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am living proof that you will rarely go hungry with such good local produce.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) told us last week of white chalk horses in his constituency. Now I am not one to boast about size, but it would be remiss of me not to point out to my hon. Friend that in West Dorset we have the Cerne Abbas giant—a 55-metre-tall chalk fertility symbol, standing to attention while dominating the hillside of the Cerne valley in all his glory.

As beautiful as it is, we still have many challenges and difficulties in West Dorset—including rural isolation, broadband speeds and the continued reduction of rural transport—made worse, I am afraid, by the recent announcement by FirstGroup of its intention to remove the No. 6 bus between Beaminster and Bridport. We have a three-hourly rail frequency, and the railway lines are mostly single track since the Beeching cuts some 50 years ago. There is much to do.

The idyllic countryside does not appear by accident. Our farmers work hard in all weathers, in all seasons and at all times of day. But we are seeing unprecedented levels of media depictions of our farmers as the enemy of our environment, even going as far as advocating criminal repercussions against them. Those who say that British beef, sheep and pig farming is the enemy of the environment are completely wrong. Farmers in the UK are the best and biggest advocates of our environment, and that has been the case for so many years.

This Bill is the most significant piece of UK legislation on agriculture for some 70 years. I recall the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), coming to Beaminster several years ago and telling me that he could not do lots of things because of the common agricultural policy. I am so pleased that that will no longer be the case. We will no longer be bound by the EU's common agricultural policy, spending £44 billion a year and achieving none of its objectives. We can finally define our agricultural destiny, and I am absolutely delighted that domestic agricultural law and policy decisions have been returned to this House of Commons.

Agriculture contributes £8.6 billion to the UK economy every year, with 72% of UK land being used and cared for by our farmers. It is easy for everyone to see our farmers' inborn environmental instinct just by looking at the rolling hills of our green and pleasant land. For far too long, farmers have been price acceptors, having to accept whatever price and conditions the supermarkets dictate, no matter how low. This Bill supports farmers, with provisions for fairness in the supply chain and assistance during times of exceptional market disturbance. British farmers need stability and certainty, and that is exactly what this Bill will provide.

The Bill is a groundbreaking piece of legislation that will transform our farming sector. It is key to achieving a green Brexit, and will unleash our nation's farming potential and make our environment better for all of us.

8.23 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder). I congratulate him on a very impressive maiden speech, and have no doubt that he will make a great impression on this place and serve his constituents well.

As other hon. Members have said, this Bill will determine the future of agriculture for decades to come, so it is crucial that the course it charts is the right one. Several aspects will need to be addressed in Committee, but in the time allocated to me this evening I shall concentrate on two areas that have not been addressed in the second draft of the Bill: the need for a pan-UK intergovernmental structure to agree, establish and monitor common frameworks on agricultural policy and funding; and, as other Members have mentioned, the need to uphold UK farming production standards in the context of international trade negotiations.

On Second Reading of the Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) Bill a fortnight ago, I made the point that replacing some of the CAP's associated frameworks would be to the benefit of all four nations of the UK. As the nations develop future policy, the question of how they will co-operate to ensure the effective functioning of the internal market of these islands looms ever larger. It is disappointing that the Bill before us today does not answer that question, but luckily for the Government, the Farmers' Union of Wales has produced a policy paper outlining how common frameworks could work in practice, and how the four Governments—in the form of an intergovernmental body—could come together to agree the principles underpinning them, oversee their operation and resolve any disputes that may arise.

Agreeing common objectives need not limit the ability of any Government to tailor policies to best support their respective industries, but by establishing common parameters and thresholds, damaging market distortion and disruption to supply chains can be avoided. This is not an academic or hypothetical concern. For example, reflect for a moment on the consequences of the Bew review into allocations for UK agricultural funding, which over the next two years will see the difference between average annual Scottish and Welsh farm payments diverge to about £16,200 a year, or 175%; or consider this Bill, which offers Welsh Ministers scope to maintain financial assistance to farmers in the form of the basic payment scheme in a way that is not replicated for farmers in England and is not even needed for Scotland. There are already signs of divergence. The only question is how harmful a distortion it will cause.

There is danger from divergence in other areas, such as equivalence in standards, labelling, eligibility rules for different schemes, rules defining what constitutes a farmer who is genuinely eligible for support and interventions, or the rates at which direct support, environmental payments, payments for providing public goods and other interventions should be capped. Agreeing common parameters in those areas will ensure a level playing field for farmers across the UK and should be prioritised in the Bill.

I turn to an issue that has already been discussed this afternoon: the lack of commitment in the Bill to upholding farming production standards in the context of international trade negotiations. In this regard, I support the efforts

and comments of the NFU, particularly its call for a standards commission to ensure that any imports meet the standards of UK products. I suppose it is quite disappointing that the Bill and this evening's debate do not give us an opportunity for a detailed and meaningful discussion on what sort of standards or outcomes we wish to see in international trade negotiations, or how best to determine equivalence and what we actually mean by the word. Instead, it seems as though we must persuade the Government of the importance of making such a commitment in the Bill, and of the futility of developing a comprehensive and ambitious domestic policy whereby our farmers produce quality food in a sustainable manner, only for their efforts to be undermined by the importation of products not produced to equivalent environmental and animal welfare standards. As far as I can glean, the Government's argument is that such a commitment on the face of the Bill is not required, and that instead we should take Ministers at their word—after all, as has been said this afternoon, it was a manifesto commitment. But as the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) will know, if manifesto commitments were always adhered to, particularly by this Government, I would have travelled here by an electrified south Wales main line from Swansea; of course, I did not.

When one considers the words of the Prime Minister at the UK-Africa summit only a few weeks ago, when he proudly proclaimed his wish to see more Ugandan beef shipped to the UK, it is no surprise that hon. Members from across the House are anxious to see a commitment in law that food imports will be of an equivalent standard to UK produce. It was good to see the Prime Minister recognise in his written ministerial statement today the importance of maintaining existing sanitary and phytosanitary measures, but as he stated that the Government's goal is a Canada-style free trade agreement, the question arises as to whether that will apply to sectors such as beef and lamb. Although the Canada-EU trade deal eradicates tariffs on the majority of goods, sensitive products such as some food products—including beef—are not included. There is a danger of the Prime Minister, on the one hand, appearing to project himself as the champion of free and frictionless trade while, on the other, partly conceding that there will be some technical barriers to trade where once there were none. This inconsistency is a cause for concern, as is the Government's apparent unwillingness to introduce some friction to UK-EU trade.

It must be stressed that this approach would be damaging to Welsh agriculture. I know that the Minister fully recognises the importance of the EU market for Welsh agricultural exports, particularly sheepmeat. It need not be highlighted again that approximately 35% to 40% of all lamb produced in Wales is exported, of which over 90% is destined for the EU market. Following today's statement and the possibility that Welsh farmers will have reduced access to the EU market, it is even more important that we see a commitment in this Bill that future trade policy will not also expose them to competition from imports of a lower standard.

8.29 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): This is the first chance I have had, Mr Deputy Speaker, to pay tribute to you for being back in your rightful place in this House.

[*Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown*]

I also pay tribute to the six excellent maiden speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards), for Buckingham (Greg Smith), for North Devon (Selaine Saxby), for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne), and for West Dorset (Chris Loder). They are a highly talented group of men and women in whom I think our party will have an asset for many years to come. They are fantastic advocates for their constituencies, and they will all no doubt have long and industrious—illustrious, rather—political careers.

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): And industrious.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: And industrious too, no doubt—industrious in particular.

I declare my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, in that I am a farmer and receive income from farming.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham reminded us, this is the first debate that we have had since we left the European Union—and we have well and truly left the common agricultural policy, so we now have the opportunity to design a new domestic agricultural policy that will recognise the unique characteristics and needs of the UK farming industry as opposed to 27 European countries.

The Government, in the shape of my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), originally said that they would negotiate

“a comprehensive customs agreement that will deliver the exact same benefits as we have”.—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2017; Vol. 620, c. 169.]

However, more recently, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said in the *Financial Times* of 17 January that farms have had three years to prepare for a new trading relationship. But to prepare for what—a free trade agreement with full benefits or a no-deal situation where beef and sheep exports face 50% to 60% adverse tariffs? The future of agriculture is very uncertain at the moment. However, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in her excellent speech, this landmark legislation could not only boost productivity but give some of the highest environmental protection in the world, setting an example to others.

This is an industry that employs 474,000 people, with a net annual contribution to the UK economy of some £8 billion. Last summer, the National Audit Office produced a report with some frontline statistics, which it is very good at doing, saying that there were 85,000 recipients of CAP payments in England in 2017. It went on to say that of those, 82,500 would participate in the new environmental land management scheme by 2028. That seems a very high and optimistic target, I say to my hon. Friend the Minister, and it will be achieved only if the scheme has properly defined objectives, is relatively simple to apply for and operate, and, above all, has an absolute commitment from the Government to pay on time for the work done, in line with their commitment to other small businesses. As I said, this is a highly

ambitious target. I remind the Government that only 20,000 farms, as opposed to 82,500, had enrolled in the countryside stewardship scheme after 42 years of operation.

The NAO report goes on to tell us that without direct payment, 42% of farms would have made a loss, assuming that everything else had remained the same. The Government are committed to making payments at the same level this year, thereafter moving to a system of public goods for public money. However, having tabled amendments to the previous Bill, which fell due to the general election, to ensure that food production is at the heart of this legislation, I find it somewhat disappointing to see that public goods do not secure more of our food supply. For farmers, it will be difficult to compete in the same market as those who either have a one-sided subsidy such as the CAP or regulations that discriminate against our farmers. I understand that this year, 95,000 tonnes of rapeseed was imported into this country from Ukraine—a country that is allowed to use neonicotinoids, which are banned in this country. So we are simply exporting environmental risk to other countries by doing this.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is perfectly legitimate to defend our producers against anti-competitive distortions being introduced into our market?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. That is precisely what I am trying to get at—our farmers can compete with any farmers in the world, provided they have a level playing field.

It is not only regulation that could be an obstacle to them. There could be a tariff schedule that broadly supports European farmers and disadvantages British farmers. For example, lamb producers in the Cotswolds, who work in a very important farming sector, could be undercut by New Zealand lamb being brought into this country with zero tariffs, while they face an adverse European tariff that prevents them from continuing their lucrative export to Europe.

The new ELMS and productivity scheme needs to be implemented on time, to see how it works in practice and to play an important role in achieving net zero goals. If it is not introduced on time in 2024, there will be a gap in funding. Many experts believe that introducing it on time will be extremely difficult, and that it is more likely to slip from 2024 to 2028, which will produce a gap in funding. We have an opportunity, post Brexit, to create a progressive, carbon-neutral model of farming in the UK, with the NFU committed to an ambitious target of the sector being carbon-neutral by 2040.

The Bill prepares our farming industry for the future, so that it can meet the needs of this country, and with that comes consideration of the younger generation of farmers. The lump sum payment provisions should be more geared towards encouraging young people into farming. As they stand, the provisions could well lead to some areas of the country simply not being farmed, because there will be land without the ability to get any subsidy whatsoever.

Farming has experienced a huge technological transformation in the past 10 years, with better IT, better animal husbandry, better use of GPS, improved agricultural chemicals and soil sampling, and a host of other technological improvements. Those advances in the agricultural industry will no doubt continue at pace.

Younger generations can quickly adapt to new technology, as I am finding with my son, who has just moved to my farm. We must support them, so that they can play a bigger part in British agricultural production, considerably increasing productivity and environmental and animal welfare standards.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The time limit is five minutes with immediate effect. I call Tim Farron.

8.37 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a great honour to share this debate with so many Members making incredibly impressive maiden speeches on both sides of the House. I did not expect there to be even one mention of Nottingham Forest, but there were two from our new colleagues. It is a team with a rich European heritage and, like the United Kingdom, I am sure, a prosperous European future at some point.

Today, Brexit goes from the emotional to the practical, and we are instantly reminded that “Get Brexit done” is the most misleading political slogan since David Steel told Liberals to go back to their constituencies and prepare for government. Brexit is not done and will not be done for perhaps 10 years or more, but our agricultural industries might well be done if the Government get this wrong—and there is every sign today that they will. We must design an agriculture policy that supports agriculture and food production and rewards farmers for the public goods that we rely on them for. We need to begin by acknowledging that this Bill will be a bad deal for Britain if it is not a fair deal for farmers.

First, we must address the transition from the current system. I have been horrified by the Government’s wilful deafness to the farming community over the phasing out of direct payments. ELMS may be a step forward, but the Government’s own figures show that 85% of livestock farm incomes come through direct payments. The phase-out begins in 11 months, even though ELMS will not be fully available until 2028. That is seven years of lost income and uncertainty, when we may lose hundreds of the farmers needed to feed us and deliver vital environmental and public benefits—how short-sighted and foolish. The answer is simple: the Government must not begin to phase out the BPS until 2028, when ELMS is available to all. The Government must listen to our farmers in Cumbria and across the country and make that announcement today.

In order to achieve a fair deal for farmers, it is essential that public goods are defined, to recognise the incredible work that they are already doing. The ultimate public good that farmers provide is food. We must have a coherent food production strategy, and yet the Bill fails to address that. It is a dreadful missed opportunity. Food production is the central motivation for most farmers, and food security is a real challenge for our farmers. Some 50% of the food we consume in the UK is imported, compared with 35% about 20 years ago. We are in a precarious position. How stupid would we be to put our farmers in a similarly precarious position?

We could solve so many of our problems if our farmers got a fair market price for their produce. The Liberal Democrats were proud to introduce the Groceries Code Adjudicator during our time in coalition, but of

course the Conservatives limited its powers. The adjudicator could be empowered to take referrals from advocates such as the NFU, the Tenant Farmers Association or, indeed, Members of Parliament. They could expand its scope to investigate unfairness in every element of the supply chain. It must have powers to penalise those who abuse their market power to pay farmers a pittance. In short, it must have the power to secure a fair price for farmers.

A fair price for farmers will be made harder by the Bill’s failure to impose import standards. The consequences of cheap goods flooding our market would be catastrophic. Cheap imports, a market watchdog that lacks teeth and the phasing out of farmers’ main source of income in less a year are threats to farms that are plain for all to see except, it would appear, by this Government. If we fail to support farmers to be productive and to survive, there will be no farmers left to deliver any public goods.

The public good that I fear is in most danger of being overlooked is the one hardest to quantify or reward—the work farmers do in maintaining the aesthetics of our land. It is a privilege to call the Lake district and the dales of south Cumbria my home. Two or three years ago, UNESCO granted world heritage site status to the Lake district, largely due to the contribution of our farmers to the maintenance of our landscape. As well as being worth £3 billion a year to the economy, tourism in Cumbria provides 60,000 jobs. Without farmers to maintain the landscape, the entire industry would be undermined.

This is not just true of Cumbria. Helping farmers to deliver public goods and improving the productivity and resilience of UK agriculture mean releasing farmers from bureaucracy, badly run payments agencies and, worst of all, insecurity. If we want a diverse and bountiful ecology, we need farmers to steward and deliver it. If we want a better environment, we need farmers. The intentions behind this Bill may be good. In practice, though, it looks set to do more harm than good, because the Government have not listened to the farming communities that will bear the brunt of a poorly managed, detail-free transition.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We have less than an hour before the wind-ups, and I still have 17 names on my list. If Members can make their speech in less than five minutes, they will help not to squeeze out somebody else—so no pressure at all on Fiona Bruce.

8.42 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I am delighted that leaving the EU means we can take back control of our agriculture policy, and there is much in the Bill to commend it. I want to make three points in the short time I have.

First—on part 1, chapter 1—it is encouraging that clause 1(4) states:

“In framing any financial assistance scheme, the Secretary of State must have regard to the need to encourage the production of food”.

That is right. The primary focus of any financial assistance must be to support our farmers in their production of food and their contribution to our food security. That is

[Fiona Bruce]

critical not only as our nation's population increases, but as the global population is predicted to increase from 7 billion to 9 billion by 2050.

I admire the innovation and diversification of many farmers in Cheshire over recent years, but the priority for most of them is food production. It surely must also be the Government's priority to have a robust and resilient agriculture sector. It should be a sector where, in my view, farmers have the dignity and respect due to them for the incredible hard work that they undertake to produce our food. Going forward, the emphasis on Government financial assistance must be to encourage the sustainable production of food. Supporting the development of a sustainable farming model both environmentally and economically is surely common sense. It is surely common sense that the more viable a farm business is, the more able a farmer will be to deliver positive environmental and animal welfare outcomes, while also contributing to our food security. Will Ministers confirm that this is indeed the Government's priority?

On part 2, chapter 1, I welcome the fact that, under clause 17, the Government will be required to report on the state of the nation's food security, but I suggest that every five years is too long a period. The clause states that a report must be produced

“at least once every five years”.

At a time of profound change for our country, may I suggest that such a report ought to be an annual requirement, at least during the seven-year managed transition period? Will Ministers consider that? The need is clear. The farming sector—certainly in Cheshire, and I believe elsewhere—has experienced substantial uncertainty, challenge, and change over recent years, and it is critical that the Government are appropriately agile in recognising and addressing those challenges and changes going forward. An annual report would better facilitate that.

As an example of some of those challenges and changes, let me mention, with great respect, a well-received speech that was made recently by Richard Blackburn, chair of Cheshire NFU, at Chester cathedral. He highlighted how many challenges farmers in Cheshire have had to address in the last two or three years, and emphasised their resilient ability to do so. Those challenges included the weather, with an exceptionally dry 2018 being followed by an unusually wet 2019. In 2018, more than 2,000 cows in Cheshire were put down because of tuberculosis, and protracted Brexit negotiations during the last Parliament led to uncertainty and a drop in many prices. Horticultural businesses faced the uncertainty, and in many cases the reality, of a shortage of farm workers. Cheshire also saw the closure of our county's only market place at Beeston, and the collapse of a dairy at Wrexham. As we enter a new era having left the EU, an annual rather than a five-yearly analysis of our food security, and the other issues mentioned in clause 17 such as the resilience of the supply chain, would surely be preferable.

On the delegated powers that appear in parts 1 and 2 of the Bill, will the Minister confirm that the Government are committed to listening to farmers and involving them in the design of future measures that affect the farming industry? Will he confirm that opportunities will be taken to consult continuously with farmers? In

that regard, may I repeat my request for a ministerial visit to Cheshire for a meeting with farmers in my county at an early date?

8.46 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): I seek to underline the importance of the Bill, and the way that we transact and scrutinise it, and the provisions contained therein. My ambition is for a very different Scotland—a Scotland that speaks to the world on her own terms. We are not there yet, however, so it is important to my constituents, and those elsewhere across Scotland who are involved with the farming sector and food production, that the Bill is carefully scrutinised and amended where necessary. We must ensure that the priorities of the Scottish agricultural sector, and those of other devolved Administrations, are not swept aside in the interests of what is thought to be optimal for England, should any divergences exist in priorities or ambitions.

I raise that point because in my short time in this place I have witnessed Ministers offloading certain issues as simply “devolved” and therefore not requiring a response. Something can be a devolved responsibility when that suits the Government's agenda, but they are much less enthusiastic to consult those devolved Administrations about meaningful ways to inform policy, with the principles of subsidiarity very much to the fore. A Union of equals? It does not feel like it if we consider the ways that powers are repatriated in post-Brexit Britain.

A key example of that is the total indifference of Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and their colleagues in the Home Office, when listening to calls from the agriculture sector—farmers, suppliers, processors, and others—who say that 10,000 seasonal agricultural workers are patently insufficient for the industry's operational requirements. All we get from the Government is a deaf ear. That is simply not good enough, and it threatens the sector severely and imminently. I urge the Government to take urgent steps to address that matter soon.

The National Farmers Union of Scotland supports the application of Scottish Government policy and Scottish Parliament scrutiny of agriculture policy to the greatest extent. That must be unconditional in its application, not just when it suits UK Ministers—it should be a co-operative endeavour.

Confidence in UK Ministers is also an issue. We are reassured by the Prime Minister that

“There's no question of there being checks on goods going NI/GB and GB/NI...we're part of the same customs territory”.

Yet today, Stena Line, a key ferry operator in the Irish sea, confirmed its position that there will be checks and inspections on goods transiting between the two islands. The degree of inconsistency the industry is exposed to by the Government is simply not acceptable. It adds another layer of uncertainty for agricultural producers, processors and especially hauliers in Britain and Ireland.

We have, appropriately, talked at length about the need for producers and consumers in the UK to be protected from cheaper imports of meat produced to lower standards of animal welfare and environmental protection, but the Government must go further. Many people are choosing to eat less meat, for a range of personal reasons, but whether they are concerned about

health, animal welfare or the environmental issues, including food miles, the Government can wring their hands or get on the front foot and try to ensure that when consumers are deciding what meat to buy in this country, they will choose the best prospect, which is meat produced in Scotland, Wales, England or Ireland. I see nothing in the Bill that will prioritise that.

Notwithstanding the minimal provisions of the Direct Payments to Farmers (Legislative Continuity) Act 2020, forecasting for future operational planning and the purchase of capital equipment remains far too uncertain for the sector. The Government must get their act together, and nothing in the Bill gives us any confidence that that will happen.

8.51 pm

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I draw Members' attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I warmly welcome this vital Bill. I support the broad aims of shifting support for the sector to public money for public goods, alongside support for innovation and productivity gains. The new public goods model could be good news for upland areas in Yorkshire and other regions, as farmers there will finally be able to get direct payments for providing public goods such as iconic landscapes, flood defences with upper river catchment management schemes, and maintaining the quality of the 70% of our drinking water that comes from the uplands. UK peat has capacity to absorb carbon similar to that of the Amazon rainforest, soaking up more CO₂ than all the world's oceans combined, so paying farmers to restore and maintain peatlands could make an important contribution to public policy priorities relating to climate change.

As chair of the all-party group on science and technology in agriculture, I stress that the new technologies of the fourth industrial revolution are transforming agriculture as we speak. It is wise to concentrate support on facilitating the growth and efficiency gains of tomorrow.

The need to introduce the Bill afresh has allowed the Government to make substantial improvements incorporating many of the changes that would have been made via amendments to its previous incarnation. In the Second Reading debate on the previous Bill, I shared the sector's concerns that food production and food security were not sufficiently central, so I am glad to see that clause 1(4) of the current Bill states

"In framing any financial assistance scheme, the Secretary of State must have regard to the need to encourage the production of food by producers".

That clear recognition of the importance of food production—something that was absent from the previous Bill—suggests that food has not been forgotten in the shift to public money for public goods.

There is also a specific legal requirement for the Secretary of State to conduct regular audits of food security. I welcome that, but share other Members' concern to ensure that those audits are more frequent. I want reporting back to Parliament to be much more frequent than the recommended five-year periods. I am reassured by further evidence that the revised Bill shows greater awareness of the needs of agricultural production and a positive relationship between that and protecting the environment. These are entirely complementary goals

and it is important that that is reflected. I am also really pleased that soil quality has been included in the Bill and recognised as a public good.

There is a lot to be positive about in the Bill. However, despite a lot of improvements, I urge the Government to remain alive to the possibility of unintended negative consequences, as with any such legislation. The Minister will be fully aware of the classic example of the notorious three-crop rule from the common agricultural policy. We cannot have a situation where policies incentivise farmers to take many acres out of possible food production, to cease farming altogether or to lay off workers and just to receive payments for managing land for public goods. We need balance and food production must be part of that. The new state-funded environmental land management system that the Government envisage must not serve to reduce our country's capacity for domestic food production or drive down the numbers employed in agriculture.

In conclusion, I am really positive about the future of agriculture. The Bill is a great start, but we have to bear in mind our future trade talks and trade policies. They have to run at the same time as the Bill. If they do, we will be in a good place. If they do not, things might be difficult, but I support the Minister and the Department on what they are trying to achieve, and I look forward to seeing the Bill through Second Reading and into Committee.

8.56 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): Although the Bill includes some welcome provisions for the future of our farming, including supporting public money for public goods, if the Government are serious about tackling the climate change crisis and putting the environment at the heart of our agriculture industry, they must go much further than this.

According to statistics from the Welsh Labour Government, agriculture contributed 13% of all greenhouse gas emissions in Wales in 2017. The Committee on Climate Change has recommended a target of a 95% reduction in carbon emissions in Wales by 2050, due to our reliance on our farming, steel and power industries. I praise the Welsh Labour Government's work and commitment on that issue in promising to go even further and reach net zero before that date.

The Welsh Government are working with a number of agricultural organisations on policies for reaching net zero in agriculture and are consulting on their clean air plan for Wales, with consultation due to be completed next month. That is an example of what can be done under a Labour Government—one who truly recognise the severity of the climate emergency and put the wellbeing and futures of their citizens and industries first.

I am unable to see any such targets for reaching net zero emissions for the agriculture industry in the Bill, but the Government must address that if we are truly to tackle the climate change crisis, especially at a time when extreme weather is regularly impacting on our farming and food production across the UK. The Government's track record on missing key environmental targets does not give me a great deal of hope, but I urge the Secretary of State and the Government to take the decisive action that is necessary, set a target for net zero emissions in agriculture and show that we are serious about tackling the climate emergency.

[Gerald Jones]

With regards to food standards, we have heard—and as has been noted by various agricultural organisations, including NFU Cymru—that it is alarming to see nothing in the Bill to legislate against importing food produced to lower standards. Vague manifesto promises that we will not have chlorinated chicken and hormone or antibiotic-fed beef in our supermarkets, and that our agriculture industry will not be undercut by cheaper imports from abroad, are not enough. I urge the Government to rethink this now and work with the dozens of farming organisations that have voiced their concerns to provide real, legal safeguards for our food and environmental welfare standards as part of the Bill.

If the Government will not set up a trade and standards commission and will commit only to monitoring international standards, how will the Bill protect our farmers from being undercut in the trade deals that the Prime Minister plans to make with other countries? Will it encourage people to buy Welsh and British produce? How will it ensure that Welsh and British farmers can compete on a level playing field post Brexit? I hope that the Minister can give some answers this evening.

I pay tribute to initiatives in Wales and across the UK, such as Crucial Crew, that do great work to educate our young people on the vital issues of safety. I recently attended a Crucial Crew event with two schools in my constituency, Pantysgallog and Coed-y-Dderwen, where organisations such as the Food Standards Agency and other partners provided interactive workshops and important messages on issues, including food safety, for pupils to take onboard and apply to their daily lives.

As we have heard, there is in the Bill an alarming lack of consideration given to tackling food poverty. After a decade of harsh Tory austerity measures, the number of those living in poverty and relying on food banks continues to rise in Wales and across the country, while the latest figures from the Trussell Trust show an increase of almost 20% in the number of emergency food parcels distributed in 2018-19 compared with the previous year. There are more than 2,000 food banks in the UK, which means there are now more food banks than McDonald's outlets, of which there are only 1,300. This is clearly unacceptable in Britain in the 21st century, and it is disappointing not to see any robust commitment in the Bill to addressing food poverty or any measures to promote and improve access to healthy and sustainable food.

Farmers in Wales and across the country have also had to deal with serious labour shortages since the Tories' decision to scrap the seasonal agricultural workers scheme. This is another missed opportunity in the Bill. It could have been reinstated in the Bill, rather than the Government's replacement scheme, which will allow for only 10,000 seasonal workers to come to the UK. The Bill does nothing for agricultural workers. It could have taken that step and reinstated the Agricultural Wages Board, which was scrapped by the coalition Government in 2013. Although the Welsh Labour Government quickly reinstated the board in Wales, despite operating on a budget from Westminster that has been cut by £4 billion since 2010, there are still many thousands working in the agricultural industry in England and the Bill does

nothing for them. I urge the Government to take on board these legitimate concerns and give us reassurances this evening.

9.1 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak after so many excellent maiden speeches on both sides of the Chamber today. I would invidiously single out the contribution of my constituency near neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), who is one of seven Conservatives now representing constituencies in north Wales.

I strongly welcome and support the Bill, which ensures the Government's continued support for all those across the United Kingdom whose livelihoods depend on the agricultural sector. It provides certainty and I am sure great reassurance to farmers across the country. I represent a Welsh constituency with a strong agricultural heritage in which a great deal of economic activity and employment are linked to and depend on farming, particularly livestock farming. Indeed, the importance of livestock farming to my constituents is such that the decision to include within the Bill changes to the red meat levy will be greatly appreciated. The current system of levy is seriously flawed, in that it depends entirely upon the location of the slaughterhouse rather than the place of production. In north Wales, the decline in the number of slaughterhouses means that animals reared in north Wales are increasingly sent to England for slaughter. The consequence has been a severe loss of income to the Welsh meat promotion entity, Hybu Cig Cymru, and therefore a reduction in its ability to promote Welsh meat, which is, of course, among the finest in the world.

The Welsh livestock industry has long been calling for reform of the levy basis. The provisions in the Bill to enable the creation of a more equitable scheme, under which those who rear the animal and add value benefit from the levy payments, have already been widely praised by industry groups. It is essential that, once the powers provided by the Bill are in place, the Government, the devolved Administrations and the meat promotion bodies work swiftly together to ensure that a fair and effective scheme is implemented as soon as possible.

It is also good that the Bill imposes an obligation on Ministers to report regularly to Parliament on the issue of UK food security, although, like other contributors, I would suggest that a more regular report might be appropriate. In an increasingly uncertain global environment, food security should be at the forefront of our minds and be subject to constant reassessment. It must always be remembered that farmers, although they are also certainly stewards of our landscape, are primarily food producers. While protecting our environment is of course a matter of fundamental importance, so is ensuring that as we move out into the wider world after Brexit, farmers do not just become "land managers". Rather, they must be given every opportunity to become efficient and highly competitive businesses in the global marketplace, and to enable even more of our world-renowned agricultural products to be sold in markets old and new the world over. I am therefore pleased to note the provision in clause 1(4) that, in framing any financial assistance scheme, the Secretary of State must have regard to the need to encourage the production of food in an environmentally sustainable way. It is, of course, an England-only provision, but I am sure that

farmers in my constituency will hope that it will be emulated in the Welsh Government's own agriculture Bill.

In that connection, I have to say that it is a disappointment that the Welsh Government have decided not to take powers in this Bill to operate new schemes in Wales post Brexit, as was the case under the 2018 Bill, but to introduce their own domestic legislation later. The delay may well push the implementation of a new scheme beyond the Welsh Assembly elections in 2021, with the risk that payments under the basic payment scheme will have to be reduced for the 2021 claim year. I therefore hope that the Minister will be able to give my constituents some reassurance about the level of support that they will receive for the 2021 claim year in the absence of timely legislation from the Welsh Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. After Nadia Whittome's contribution, I will try to get everyone else in, but I am afraid that there will then be a three-minute speaking limit.

9.6 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Apart from Stonebridge City Farm, there are no farms in my constituency. However, like all the other Members in the Chamber, I represent people who need food to eat and a healthy planet on which to live, and a deregulated, race-to-the-bottom Brexit will put both at risk.

We have less than a decade in which to save the planet from climate breakdown. To do that we need post-war scale investment in infrastructure, and we need to decarbonise our economy by 20% every year in every industry, yet there are no targets in the Bill for the agriculture sector to reach net zero. Will the Minister explain why, despite the clear will of organisations such as the National Farmers Union, the Bill contains no targets for net-zero emissions in farming? In fact, while providing many powers, it provides very few duties for the Secretary of State to do anything.

I welcome the principle of a farming payments system that provides public money for public goods, but why are environmental public goods only possibilities for the Secretary of State, rather than requirements? Why does a Bill about agriculture not recognise sustainable food production as a public good? This Bill is a huge missed opportunity for the UK to take a lead on agroecology. It fails to prioritise sustainable food production, despite experts' warnings about our future food security. It could have given us a chance to enshrine in law the "right to food" that Labour has promised, promoting the local growing and distribution of food to bring people closer to food production.

I am disappointed, but not surprised, that the Government have chosen to ignore the crisis in food poverty. More than a million people are being forced to use food banks as a result of their calamitous work and pensions policies. How can we rely on the Secretary of State's good will to end that crisis when her own colleague, the Foreign Secretary, has dismissed people who are forced to turn to food banks as merely having a temporary cashflow problem? In Nottingham, more than 26,000 people, including nearly 11,000 children, have used food

banks for emergency supplies in the last year, and, shamefully, there are more food banks than branches of McDonald's in this country. While we subsidise food in Westminster, outside this building there are children going to school and to bed hungry. In the sixth richest country in the world, this is a political choice. It is also a political choice to remain silent on this issue in the Bill before us today. We know that many Conservative Members—like the one sniggering over there—fantasise about a deregulated post-Brexit world where laws and regulations on food and the environment are weakened, but the fact is that my constituents and those in constituencies up and down the country do not want chlorinated chicken and hormone-injected beef.

Mr Steve Baker: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Nadia Whittome: No, I will not.

Why has the Secretary of State ignored the sincere requests from Labour Members, from the NFU and from the DEFRA Committee to enshrine in law a guarantee that British farmers will not be undercut through the importing of substandard produce as part of new trade deals?

The Bill needs to say much more about access to healthy, sustainable food. It needs to say more about cutting emissions, and it needs a guarantee that British farming and food standards will not be undercut. I support the reasoned amendment today because the Bill fails on food standards, it fails on food production and, most of all, it fails to tackle food poverty.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We have just about half an hour, so Members may have three minutes each. If anyone takes any interventions, they will be pushing one of their colleagues off the edge.

9.11 pm

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): We have heard half a dozen maiden speeches today, all more eloquent than mine, and I congratulate my colleagues on both sides.

I welcome the Government's opening statement that farmers put food on our plates. Domestic production is vital in a volatile world, and North West Durham has a bit of everything as far as production goes. We do poultry, beef, arable, milk and lamb. I thank the Secretary of State for her recent visit to my upland peat areas, which show that the environment and our grouse moors can go hand in hand.

Farmers in my constituency will welcome leaving the common agricultural policy and adopting a more flexible approach from the Government. They will also welcome the new measures in the Bill to deal with greater transparency in the supply chain, particularly when it comes to supermarkets, and the prominence of food production and food security in the Bill. As we move towards payment for public goods, environmental protection, public access and, crucially for my farmers, safeguarding livestock and plants, it is for many of my upland farmers the safeguarding of livestock that is important. I hope that any new regime recognises this as a crucial part of our environment. Our native breeds

[Mr Richard Holden]

are an essential element of the environment. Furthermore, forestry is an important part of the future, particularly for my upland areas, and it is vital that the Government have a joined-up approach to ensuring that whatever is proposed in this area is viable.

There is concern among my farmers about the speed at which things are moving and about the seven years. There is a need to ensure real simplicity, especially with regard to the proposed environmental schemes.

I welcome the clear and balanced direction of the Bill and look forward to working with the Government at later stages to address the concerns of the rural communities in North West Durham.

9.13 pm

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I commend my new colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden), for taking a minute less than required under your strictures, Mr Deputy Speaker. He is obviously due for swift promotion.

I am pleased to speak in this debate, having sat on the Committee that looked at the previous Bill. I should declare at this point that I am a farmer and therefore have benefited from the structures that are being replaced by the Bill. I am pleased that the Government have followed several of our recommendations, in particular the requirement for a periodic analysis of food security and the provision for multi-annual financial plans. The initial transition plan is for seven years. I would prefer to see subsequent plans also covering seven years, rather than five, reflecting crop rotations rather than election cycles.

I should like to make three quick points. The first relates to the need for the Bill to ensure that British food producers are able to maintain viable businesses now that we have left the European Union, while also improving the environment. As we move away from the one-size-fits-all approach of the CAP, we have the chance to reform and connect the support in a coherent way between schemes for different custodians of our land, including those responsible for farming, forestry, natural wilderness, wetlands and wildlife areas.

As this Bill is being debated before the imminent Second Reading of the Environment Bill, we can rewrite the rules and regulations governing land use in the UK. We must ensure that the Bill supports agriculture while being well aligned to improve the environment and that it is sufficiently adaptable that improvements can be made through regulations if we find that certain activities or aspects of land use inadvertently fall through the cracks. For example, the new ELM scheme will now be available only from late 2024, with significant reductions in direct payments before the new scheme can be accessed, whereas the previous Bill had envisaged such arrangements arriving in 2021.

Encouraging farm productivity is welcome to help farm businesses compete in a less protected trading environment, but many parts of the countries, such as the upland sheep farming areas mentioned earlier, have limited scope to diversify other than perhaps into forestry. That is where coherence and clarity are required in the interplay between different support schemes, and I will be grateful if the Minister confirms whether it will be

possible for the House to see the detailed regulations that will set out programmes for different land use before Third Reading.

My second point is to agree with the sentiment already shared across the House about ensuring that we have world-class standards for British food and drink and for our environment. I expect further measures to be proposed in Committee to ensure that that is the case.

My final and main point is to encourage the Government to use the opportunity of leaving the EU to allow a “buy British” policy in food procurement for the public sector.

9.16 pm

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I congratulate all those who have made maiden speeches, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie): a hearty llongyfarchiadau—congratulations—to her. I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this debate and represent the many beef and sheep farmers in my constituency.

Now that the debate on leaving the European Union is over and the sky still has not fallen in, as was promised, we can begin an incredibly exciting chapter for our farming sector. We have been part of a common agricultural policy that has all too often acted like a straitjacket on UK farming. I know just how tight that straitjacket is, having been part of the UK Government’s negotiating team during the last CAP reform when we tried to work with the European Commission on the greening requirements—a particularly awkward piece of legislation that meant that farmers would lose 30% of their direct payment if they did not plant three different crop varieties. The Minister made excellent representations to the European Commission, but we were still prevented from implementing that policy in our own way. We are now free to design a policy that works for our farmers, our consumers and our environment, and that is the real prize at stake.

Tackling climate change is a priority. We need farmers on our side if we are to make any progress. Farmers are a small part of the problem, but an enormous part of the solution. Who else will maintain the hedgerows, watercourses and flower-rich meadows that we need, and who else will steward a system based on grass-fed cattle that is part of a virtuous circle—good for our stomachs, good for our health and, above all, good for our economy?

As I said, I represent one of the largest beef and sheep farming constituencies, so I am here to promote the benefits of livestock farming. With six in Brecon and Radnorshire, we have more livestock markets than supermarkets, so it is incredibly important that we maintain a future for the livestock industry. This Bill gives livestock farmers the space they need to continue to deliver for the natural environment while producing world-class food.

I endorse the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) on the Bill’s reference to the red meat levy sector, which irons out an imbalance that is having a negative impact on farmers in my constituency in mid-Wales.

I also welcome the commitment to tackle unfair trading practices in the food supply chain. Farmers are very much price takers, not price makers, and it is

essential to give them the tools to stand up to retail power, building on the excellent work of the Groceries Code Adjudicator.

Much of the Bill will not apply to my constituents in Brecon and Radnorshire as it relates to a devolved matter. While I fully respect the devolution settlement, I hope that the Welsh Government will copy this Government's ambition.

9.19 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): I start by welcoming the Bill. The core tenet of the common agricultural policy—subsidising farming—is vital. Farming is one of our fundamental industries, and it needs our support.

I ask the Minister to touch on two areas of detail. The first is the balance between environmental protection and food production. The focus on the environment will help tackle climate change, reduce pollution and make us a healthier, happier, more sustainable country. However, we need to make sure that all our countryside organisations are working together collaboratively. Much of the Meon Valley is in the South Downs national park; I would be grateful for some indication of how the Glover report will impact on the environmental land management schemes for farmers in Meon Valley.

I am glad that this version of the Bill will introduce a reporting requirement on food security. Will the Minister explain in more detail how the Government will ensure that they get the balance right between the environment and food production, and how the funding available will reflect that?

My second issue is how targets will be set for farms, both individually and on a national level, for the public goods that we wish them to produce. Farmers need clarity and an articulated, joined-up agenda that makes it easy for them to plan for the long term. How will the Government ensure that individual farmers are advised on and funded for the best use of their land? Is seven years enough time for farmers to adapt or should it be a 25-year timeframe, in line with the environmental plan, to allow farmers to plan for longer? Will there be national targets for, say, carbon capture, and how will those be set? If we are falling behind in a national target, will the subsidies change to reflect that? I appreciate that the Bill marks the beginning of a lengthy process, but I know that farmers would appreciate as much detail as possible.

Tree planting is excellent for healthier soil and absorbing carbon dioxide, but there are other carbon capture initiatives and we need to reduce pesticides. What will the targets be for improving the biodiversity of the soil, much of which is now lacking in basic nutrients? According to the Cranfield report, 80% of soil is now dead. For all farms, some environmental protections will be more viable than others. That will differ from region to region and by land type—for example, chalk, heathland, clay and so forth. Some 159 different land types have been characterised by Natural England. Will the Government reflect that in their planning and targets?

I look forward to hearing more over the course of this debate. I will support the Bill, which is an important step in the right direction, but I would like to know

more about the balance between food production and environmental protection, and about how the targets will be set.

9.22 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): This is an excellent Bill, and I am delighted to support it. I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

This Bill is the gateway to the future for an exciting and vibrant agricultural sector. I am particularly delighted that the Bill will allow financial assistance to the shepherds in my constituency, who I have been worried about. I like the direct payment element, although sadly there is more enthusiasm in the drafting of the Bill for cuts than for increases; I hope Ministers will keep an eye on that, although there are powers to modify the scheme as and when. There is an element of in-lieu payments, which is welcome for retiring farmers, although I suspect that death duties on agricultural land will delay that policy.

The food security element is vital, of course, to our whole population. The Bill is the perfect example of how Parliament should behave on a matter of national importance. The Government have not created a quango, as they seek to do in the Environment Bill—this Bill is a far better way of legislating. The elements on exceptional market conditions and fair dealing for food chain participants are welcome.

I am slightly worried about the red meat levy, because of course I care very much about native breeds, provision for which in the Bill is welcome. However, as with "pasture-fed", there is an issue with the definition of what native breeds are—pedigree or cross-bred. The figure of 51% is not adequate: we need to amend that part of DEFRA legislation to ensure that pasture herd farmers are getting the rewards that they richly deserve. As the National Trust found, grass-fed beef production does not just reduce greenhouse gas emissions; when carbon sequestration and storage are considered, it is actually a carbon net gain. The nonsense from the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), who intervened earlier, should be put to one side. The bit of the Bill that encourages organic production should be welcomed. This excellent Bill is good for my constituents, good for their food and great for our country.

9.24 pm

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con): As part of the all-party group on skills, I shall practise the skill of squeezing an eight-minute speech into three.

In leaving the EU, we have the opportunity to rewrite the book on agricultural policy, and rewrite it we have; this Bill is potentially the biggest victory for nature in a generation. Farmland occupies more than 70% of the UK's landmass, and with more than 450,000 farmers in the UK, it is vital that we recognise the stark benefits that this Bill has over the CAP. It means that farmers are rid of the old, ineffectual direct payments system, which meant that some of our largest producers may actually have ended up worse off. The CAP's method of rewarding farmers on the basis of land size unsustainably increases rents and land costs, while forcing farmers to use as much land as possible for production. Put simply, a farmer who gets funding on the basis of land size will cover their land in crops, whereas one who gets funding

[Rob Roberts]

on the basis of their contribution to a better environment can use parts of their land to allow wildlife and natural habitats to grow; agriculture is, sadly, a contributor to biodiversity loss.

The “State of Nature” report by the National Trust found that 41% of species have experienced decline since 1970 and about a third of wild bee populations are decreasing, much to the frustration of my constituent Jonathan Thomas, who has a business producing local honey. Jon got in touch with me recently regarding this Bill, in the hope that it would produce a fairer system for farmers that incentivised them to promote biodiversity and assist in stemming the tide of this massive loss of bees.

I am sure we can all agree, perhaps some slightly more than others, that British food is among the best in the world, and people recognise that globally. We are opening up a new world of opportunities. Now that we can trade on our own terms and are no longer bound by Brussels, those on the world stage who see the results of what our farmers can do will flock to us for their carrots, peas and sprouts, and of course our wonderful Welsh lamb. They will see the UK as the agricultural giant that we in this country know we are. This Bill removes the restrictions on our farming and offers more money—the right money—to our farmhands.

With all this in mind, it is vital that any future trade deals that we have complement this Bill and allow us to both grow and import food to our own standards. As our soil quality and animal welfare standards increase, so does the quality of our foods and our meats. Do we not then deserve to have a like-for-like selection when we trade with other nations? Is it fair that our farmers are to put in the work and the effort to produce the best they possibly can when some of our trading partners are not meeting the commitments that we require of our own? All things that belong in future trade deals—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sorry, but we must move on.

9.27 pm

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): It is a pleasure to be able to welcome this groundbreaking Bill. Now that we are outside the EU, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform how we support English farmers. We have the chance to move away from the EU’s bureaucratic CAP. My constituency has a variety of farms, ranging from dairy to arable, and is one of the largest fruit producers in our region, so this Bill is of great interest to me.

Let me start by saying that I welcome the principle of public funds for public goods that this Bill recommends, but we must ensure that any future agricultural policy also supports farmers in their role as producers of food. I thank the Government for guaranteeing the current annual budget to farmers in every year of this Parliament, but we must ensure that farmers have the funding and certainty they need to plan for the longer term. Let me give a few examples from my constituency to illustrate that point.

It is difficult for local farmers to make long-term investment decisions if they are not guaranteed future payments. Buying a tractor can cost up to £100,000,

and investing in a milking parlour or slurry system can cost several hundred thousand pounds. Everything farmers do, from buying livestock to ordering seed in advance or signing new tenancy agreements, requires forward planning and investment. Farmers in Staffordshire have done an admirable job of coping in the past few years, but the situation is challenging. So I am pleased that this Bill recognises the primary role of farmers as food producers, as it is a matter of national interest that our country can feed itself and continues to be self-sufficient. Last month, I brought the Secretary of State for International Trade to meet local farmers in Stafford, who expressed concerns about this issue. We should never compromise food security, especially as an island nation, but that does not mean that we should not incentivise farmers to allow room for nature to thrive. I do not see conflict between farmers’ roles as food producers and as environmental stewards.

Dearnsdale Fruit in my constituency has also spoken to me directly about the labour supply challenges facing large fruit producers. Already this season, there has been a 20% reduction in the number of responses to applications. The seasonal workers pilot scheme needs to be running quicker, or fruit will go unpicked this season. Local producers have told me that the Home Office permits have not yet been granted, meaning that they cannot recruit from non-EU countries. Labour supply is critical to the functioning of the agricultural sector.

In conclusion, the Bill marks the introduction of an important domestic farming policy for the first time in half a century and is a great first step towards a better and greener future for farming and our environment.

9.30 pm

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I wholeheartedly support the Bill, both in principle and in detail, but farmers in my constituency in Wiltshire are hoping for some assurances from Ministers about their future.

The context for the debate is a fact that is not often mentioned—it has not been mentioned much today—which is that we have very cheap food in this country. Households in the UK spend less on food than those in any other country in the world except for Singapore and the United States. Cheap food is obviously a good thing in itself, and no Government will want to see inflation, so the question is: how do we maintain it? We can do it in three ways: first, through science and improving yields, particularly through the use of pesticides; secondly, we can keep our food cheap by subsidising its production; and thirdly, we can use competition and import cheap food from abroad. The Government propose changes to all three methods of keeping food cheap, with less pesticides, fewer subsidies over time and more competition. All those things are welcome in principle, but all could impact on farmers’ livelihoods. I am sure they will not, but I hope we can get some assurances.

First, on the science, we can and should lead the world in the development of sustainable food, but we need to be pragmatic, not absolutist, in how we proceed. I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) about the use of neonicotinoids, and particularly their impact on the oilseed rape crop. We either need to allow neonicotinoids or prohibit imports that use them.

Secondly, on the subsidies, the principle of public money for public goods is absolutely right, but surely the primary public good—the most essential good there is—is food itself, so I welcome the fact that the new system will

“encourage the production of food”.

I urge Ministers to emphasise that and reassure farmers that they will not be turned into mere wardens of the landscape.

Lastly, on competition, farmers support the principle of free trade—or at least I hope they do and think they should. We want to sell our beef and lamb to America, and we do not fear American produce coming here, but that works only if we have a genuine free market in which producers compete on a like-for-like basis across a genuinely level playing field. In that market, Britain—and Wiltshire most of all—will be a winner.

9.33 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I welcome the Bill, which is a fine transition between the EU and the UK and a real opportunity for Britain to be British and do it our way.

The Bill is underpinned by a concept of public money being paid for public good. I absolutely welcome the broadening in respect of how money will be paid, and the reduction in its being paid just for the size of the land in favour of more being paid for what is done with the land, but if the motto is that we are going to pay public money for public good, what do we mean by the public good? It is not defined in the Bill. It worries me that the technical, economic definition specifically excludes food production, which does not quite fit with clause 1(4). It seems to me that clarity on and a definition of “public good” would be a good thing. It seems to me to be equally important that the productivity necessary to deliver increased food security should be specifically included as a public good. The Bill simply provides for measuring it; there needs to be a measure to ensure that we actually do it.

There is an issue in respect of what public money is—it is also not defined. Is clause 1 exhaustive? I hope not. Given my very rural Devon constituency, I have particular concerns about the support in the Bill for beef and sheep. Currently, they are the most subsidised parts of agriculture. Although several of my colleagues have said that sheep will be well provided for, I have my doubts and would like to know exactly how that will be done.

I have a significant coastal area in my constituency, which is difficult to support, and it is difficult to make it productive. We have done very well in Labrador bay. We have special methods to ensure, as far as we can, that we increase productivity and, at the same time, environmental stewardship. That is undoubtedly something that we could spread by way of best practice across all coastal communities, but there is nothing specific in the legislation that would help.

I support the provision that means that, when there are adverse market or climatic conditions, farmers will be subsidised and supported—but I should like to know how. The definition is not there. At one point, a Minister had suggested that there should be an insurance scheme. I should like to know whether that is still under consideration.

Marketing standards are absolutely critical to this legislation, but what then are the implications for food labelling and for ensuring that we have a proper campaign for buying British? Not dealing with those two issues is very much a missed opportunity. That said, I will support the Bill as it is a great step forward for British agriculture.

9.35 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I know from farmers in my constituency that there is an appetite to see a UK agriculture sector that delivers public good for public money. We will not solve our biggest environmental challenges, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, without helping farmers to become more sustainable. Farmers do not see any conflict in their role as food producers and environmental stewards. Healthy and fertile soil, efficient agrochemical use, resilience to the impact of climate change, and abundant pollinator populations are all necessary components of productive and profitable farming.

We talk about public money for public goods. The intention behind the policy is right and proper. The Bill is welcome, not least because its primary role is to support the production of food and oblige the Government to

“have regard to the need to encourage the production of food by producers in England and its production by them in an environmentally sustainable way.”

The Agriculture Bill is crucial for shaping a more sustainable, prosperous farming sector. There is an appetite in Cornwall, particularly in west Cornwall and Scilly, which I represent, to play an active part in shaping a more sustainable, prosperous and skilled farming sector. Work is already under way to explore what are known as “novelty” crops to see how alternative crops can help to decarbonise farming while offering an attractive opportunity for existing farmers and “new blood” to make a living and to provide well-paid jobs. There is also an appetite in Cornwall to grasp the concept of regenerative farming.

This Agriculture Bill and the Government’s flagship Environment Bill have the enabling ability to transform how we provide food for our nation, and, I hope, as the Bill passes through this House and the other place, that none of this worthy intention is lost.

Finally, there is an appetite to see a UK agriculture sector that delivers high-quality and high standards and refuses cheap poor-quality low-standard imports. We should not underestimate how important confidence in good food is to the British public. When it comes to agreeing new trade deals around the world, British consumers are concerned about the likelihood of increased liberalisation of the UK food market through trade deals with new international partners post Brexit. I agree that it is futile to develop a comprehensive and ambitious domestic support policy simply for UK farmers’ efforts to be undermined by the importation of products not produced to the same level of environmental or animal health welfare standards expected of them domestically. The Minister is a friend, colleague and neighbour. He understands the challenges and opportunities that exist in Cornwall, and I know that he will do his best to make sure that this Bill works for farmers and food producers right across the UK.

9.38 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): This will be less of a speech and more of some slightly connected bullet points. I welcome this Bill. In particular, I welcome the fact that the Front-Bench team listened to the previous Agriculture Bill Committee when it comes to the importance of food security. I hope that clause 17 will be explored further in Committee and on Report. It talks about a report at least once every five years. I suggest to the Front-Bench team that we should have a report annually or biannually, particularly in the early years. The Bill is silent on what is to be done with these reports once they have been produced; it is silent on what will happen to them, and how we will act. The National Farmers Union is very keen to make sure that there is greater reporting, and I support it in that endeavour.

I was grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for what she said in support of the agritech sector and the good work that that can do in terms of driving forward environmental improvements. Again, there is some stuff in the Bill, but I think that it could be much clearer. Likewise, we have a great estate of county farms in Dorset, but they need support. I urge my right hon. Friends to read, if they have not done so, the report by the Campaign to Protect Rural England about reviving county farms.

The Bill is a golden opportunity to support our smaller, family-owned farms. Blackmore vale, which is at the heart of North Dorset is, in Thomas Hardy's words, the

"vale of the little dairies".

They are an integral part of our agricultural tapestry, and those small, independent farms need and deserve our support. The Bill allows us to remind ourselves of the importance of food, food production and the role that agriculture plays in the economy.

In closing, I want to turn to the Opposition amendment. Now is not the time to put the handbrake on the progress of the Bill. Farmers have waited too long and they want certainty. I urge Ministers to put Government Members out of their misery on what I would call the equivalence clause. It is fine and dandy that we are not going to reduce standards here, but if we are going to throw open our doors to foodstuffs produced to lower standards, there is absolutely no point in having an agriculture sector. The amendment will not be supported by Government Members, but the Minister should be aware that if the Bill proceeds to Report or Third Reading and an equivalence clause is not included, the Whips and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should expect some trouble on these Benches.

9.41 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): There we have it—an Agriculture Bill that is not really about food or public good; without public voice; an open door for our food producers to be sold out in a trade deal with Trump; and English farmers put at disadvantage compared with other nations in the UK, while doing too little to tackle the climate emergency. No wonder farmers will be here in droves on 25 March. I hope that Government Back Benchers heed that last call and wake up to the problem, because the Opposition are not prepared to sell out English farmers, workers and our countryside.

Yes, of course we want public money to be used to buy environmental benefits, and we have argued for reform for decades, but the Bill needs massive improvement. It needs deeds, not worthy aspiration, and a much tougher Environment Bill alongside it to make sure that it works.

We have heard seven maiden speeches tonight, and a number of Members had the delicate task of paying tribute to somewhat troublesome predecessors. It is quite a list they had to deal with—Ken Clarke, John Bercow, Heidi Allen and Oliver Letwin—but they all managed that delicate task with great tact and grace. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) paid full tribute to her predecessor, Albert Owen, which is much appreciated by the Opposition. She invited the Secretary of State to the Anglesey show. The right hon. Lady is unable to attend, but I am sure that shadow Ministers are willing to oblige. The hon. Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards) had the best line of the night, about fake shoes. The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Steven Bonnar) had a list of sporting heroes that any constituency would be proud to borrow, especially Cambridge United, which could do with Jimmy Johnstone or John Robertson. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) delivered a speech that was probably every Cambridge leftie's nightmare, but we could agree on one point: we do not want the Oxford-Cambridge expressway. The hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) took us on a tour of the most beautiful parts of the west country, and tactfully reminded the Government of the NFU's ambition to achieve net zero by 2040. My near neighbour, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne), highlighted the hugely important role of life sciences, and many of the wonderful institutions that abut the city of Cambridge. We have a slightly different take on the European Union, but I am sure that we can work together on the future of life sciences. Finally, the hon. Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) gave a delicate account of the status of the Cerne Abbas giant, and it was deftly delivered.

While we can all agree in the House on the need to shift financial assistance in the way proposed in the Bill towards the principle of public money for public good, particularly to help those who work our land to restore and improve the natural environment, it is worth briefly reflecting on why the CAP was needed in the first place. Historians will be well aware of the cycles of dearth and plenty that afflicted previous generations, with miserable and long agricultural depressions still living in the memory when I moved to eastern England over 40 years ago.

The CAP was intended to deliver stability of food supplies and security for farmers, and it did what it said on the tin, but it was of its time, had unintended consequences and has come at huge environmental cost. It is right that we now reshape our own agricultural systems to meet the new challenge. But there is a glaring omission, as has been pointed out. While supporting greater environmental, animal welfare and production standards at home, the Bill does absolutely nothing to prevent food products with lower standards than our domestic products from being imported in future trade deals. Without any legal commitment protecting us against that, the door is wide open to products such as American hormone-injected beef, chlorinated chicken and so on flooding our markets. Statements and manifesto

commitments from the Government saying that they will not allow such lower standards are nothing but warm words. Just look at what US Secretary of State Pompeo made clear last week—the US Administration want this as part of any future trade deal.

We heard from the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee that it concluded in its scrutiny report of the previous Bill that the Government should put their money where their mouth is and accept an amendment to the Agriculture Bill stipulating that food products imported as part of any future trade deal should meet or exceed British standards. There is an unprecedented coalition of agreement on this, as 62 farming and environmental organisations wrote to the Prime Minister just last week, urging him to amend the Agriculture Bill with this guarantee, and farmers are planning to rally outside Westminster to press the point. Labour simply cannot support the Bill without that cast-iron guarantee, which is why we have tabled our reasoned amendment.

There have been some improvements. Thanks to the work of farming and environmental organisations, there have been some positive changes. The inclusion of soil quality as a public good is particularly important given that our soil fertility is in decline. The reforms to agricultural tenancies and the new requirement in relation to multi-annual plans are also welcome. But in what is essentially a Bill about food production, we find ourselves asking, “Where is the focus on food?” As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) made clear, the Bill contains no clear vision for the future of the nation’s food supply and no commitment to protecting the people of this country from food poverty. There is no recognition of the production of food as a public good, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) explained so powerfully.

For all its faults, the CAP was at least focused on ensuring stability of food supplies and prices. All this Bill does is require the Government to have regard to encouraging the production of food in an environmentally sustainable way. We have to ask whether the Bill actually matches up to the scale of the environmental and climate crisis that we are facing. At the moment, I think the answer is no. There is no duty for Ministers to do anything, and crucially there are no targets for the agriculture sector to reach net zero emissions—points powerfully made by my hon. Friends the Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) and for Nottingham East. There are no provisions to secure the high baseline standards of farming and land management that we are going to need, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) powerfully stated in a particularly thoughtful speech. That is particularly important if we are going to tackle the ecological crisis that we are facing, including standards for those agricultural actors who choose not to engage with the environmental land management schemes.

By granting the Secretary of State mainly powers rather than duties, the Bill leaves farmers in the dark as to how and when the Government will implement the supply chain provisions included in the Bill that are designed to secure a fairer price for farmers for the food they produce. Where is the advice and support for farmers to help them in the transition? The Bill is silent on protections for workers, lacks overall vision for the

future of rural communities and misses key opportunities to support agroecology. And then there is the question of whether the key provisions in the Bill will actually work, how quickly and successfully a new system of ELMS will be brought into operation, and the key matter of handling the devolved issues, which was raised very effectively by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake). We should remember that there will be different approaches in the different nations; while England will go down one path, Scotland and Wales will take a different one.

So there we have it—the Bill is 14 months late, and there is ultimately no plan for food and no plan for public goods, and there are standards that will be unachievable if they are open to being undercut. It is a policy devised by some very clever people in Notting Hill; I think the House probably knows who they are, and, quite frankly, one has to wonder whether any of them has ever been on a farm. But the good news is that the Government can start making progress, by committing tonight to our amendment to guard against imports with lower standards. They do not even have to agree with the Opposition. They just need to agree with themselves, because the Secretary of State has made the promise and it is in the Conservative manifesto. Our challenge to the Government is: put it into law. If the Government do not want to listen to me, they can listen to the president of the NFU, the chief executives of the British Poultry Council, the National Sheep Association and the RSPCA, and the Chair of the EFRA Committee, who are all saying the same: put it into law.

I extend a welcoming hand to Government Members, and ask them to join us in standing up for the English countryside. They may not know this, but it is not just the Women’s Institute who sing “Jerusalem”; it has always been a Labour anthem. We will defend our green and pleasant land, and Government Members can help us to do it: put the amendment into law. Today is the first big post-Brexit test for the Government. I fear they are about to flunk it.

9.50 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): It is a real pleasure to close this debate. This is the second time that I have taken this Bill—or a similar version of it—through Parliament for Second Reading within the last two years, following the difficulties that the previous Parliament encountered. But we have now had a general election. We have a new Parliament and we have a newly elected Government who have a clear mandate to chart a different course for our country to become a genuinely independent sovereign country again and to make our own laws again.

The Bill means that, for the first time in half a century, we have the ability and the chance to create a new, independent agriculture policy. It is very encouraging to see so many hon. Members embrace that responsibility with so many thoughtful speeches today. It is particularly encouraging that so many chose to make their maiden speeches today in addressing this important Bill.

The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Steven Bonnar) talked about the importance of his family, the support that he had there, and some of his less than favourable experiences at the hands of

[George Eustice]

certain employers in the past. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) gave a moving speech in which she referred to a family tragedy. I am sure we all recognise from that that she is going to be a champion for mental health issues. She will also clearly be a champion for the agricultural industry. I or, I am sure, a fellow Minister would be more than happy to attend the Anglesey show at some point.

Sir John Hayes: Will my hon. Friend give way?

George Eustice: I will not give way as I want to cover as many of the issues raised by hon. Members as possible.

My hon. Friend the new Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards) talked about the importance of high animal welfare and environmental standards, and the Bill provides for that. As she pointed out, her predecessor was a long-standing incumbent in this House. He was a big figure in politics—somebody who I did not always agree with, it has to be said, but nevertheless a highly experienced operator.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) referred to some of the great opportunities contained in this Bill. I think he is right and I am sure that, if we get it wrong, his father-in-law will have something to say about it and my hon. Friend will have something to talk about around the dinner table. He finished with that fabulous quote from Margaret Thatcher about the importance of our farming communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) will, I know, be a champion for rural broadband. As a Cornishman, I have to take issue with her particular interpretation of the correct way to put cream and jam on a scone—it is of course jam first. I am pleased that the Prime Minister recently endorsed the Cornish interpretation of such matters during the election.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) highlighted some of the ridiculous rules that we have in the common agricultural policy, which is far too complex, with hundreds of pages of guidance. We now have an opportunity to do things very differently. Hope Farm in his constituency, run by the RSPB, is a fabulous example of some of the nature-sensitive farming that can be done, and we are keen to learn from projects such as that.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) gave a fascinating account of how his grandmother, as a member of the Women's Land Army, met his grandfather. It was a reminder of the great struggle that farmers and members of the WLA undertook to ensure that the nation was fed in the last war—something we must never forget. He talked about the importance of fairness in the supply chain and of provisions in the Bill to address that.

To turn to the points raised by the shadow Secretary of State, the emphasis of his speech was on the importance of food standards and making sure that we project British values on food standards in trade deals that we do. That was a clear commitment in our manifesto, as was dealt with by the Secretary of State earlier. The hon. Gentleman asked why a prohibition on the sale of chlorine-washed chicken or hormone-treated beef was

not included in the Bill. The answer is that it is already on the statute book as retained EU law, so it already exists.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) asked whether the Bill's conclusion had stalled as a result of some of the difficulties in the last Parliament. The answer to that is: most certainly not. The trials and pilots remain on course. Indeed, we already have more than 30 different trials in place across the country testing scheme. We will deploy a full pilot in 2021. Our progress in delivering the agricultural transition remains on course. He also mentioned the fact that food security is a global challenge and that we have a responsibility, in common with other temperate parts of the world, to ensure that we play our part to produce food for a growing world population. He is right, and clause 17(2)(a) provides for that, because the global availability of food is a consideration.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) raised the issue of currency fluctuations. She will know that, under the old regime, farmers had no certainty from one year to the next what they would be paid, since a euro volatility exchange rate was introduced to the system. We have now set that at the same level as it was in 2019, so Scotland has clarity about exactly how much funding it will receive in 2020 and 2021. That is more clarity and more certainty than it has ever had while a member of the European Union.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) talked about the importance of frameworks for the UK. I recently met members of the Farmers Union of Wales. We work closely with all our devolved counterparts, but I remind him that this is a devolved policy, and it is for each constituent part of the UK to design a policy that works for them.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) talked about the importance of food production and suggested that we have not reflected that in the revised Bill. I take issue with that, because clause 1(4) is explicit in saying that in designing any scheme under the clause, we must have regard for the need to encourage food production. That is a new addition to the Bill. He also talked about the lump sum payments that are provided for in the Bill. We know from all the work done in this area in the past that, if we want to help new entrants on to the land, we also have to help older farmers retire. That is why allowing farmers to retire with dignity and supporting them to do so is an important area to consider.

My hon. Friends the Members for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) suggested that we should have a more frequent review of food security than every five years. We have to see this requirement through the prism of clause 4, which envisages five-yearly multi-annual plans. It makes sense to align any review of food security with that provision. I would of course be happy to travel to Cheshire to meet the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton.

The hon. Members for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) talked of the importance of agro-ecology. We are clear that whole-farm, holistic schemes can be provided for under clause 1. We are looking, for instance, at integrated pest management, catchment-sensitive farming and hedgerow schemes to encourage whole-farm approaches.

I turn to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley). I recognise that agriculture is a very important industry in Northern Ireland. This is a devolved policy. Both Northern Ireland and Wales have chosen to take schedules in the Bill that give them powers to continue the existing scheme but also modify and improve it.

The hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) talked about seasonal workers. He has to recognise that we have increased the provision for seasonal workers from 2,500 to 10,000, largely due to the great campaigning work of his predecessor. Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) gave a very upbeat, positive assessment of what we could do in future. That is what I want to conclude on. I grew up on a farm and spent 10 years in the industry. We have a chance now to design a modern policy that is fit for purpose in the 21st century. I therefore commend this Bill to the House.

Question put. That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 206, Noes 320.

Division No. 27]

[9.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Cunningham, Alex
Ali, Tahir	Daby, Janet
Amesbury, Mike	David, Wayne
Anderson, Fleur	Davies, Geraint
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Davies-Jones, Alex
Ashworth, Jonathan	Day, Martyn
Barker, Paula	De Cordova, Marsha
Beckett, rh Margaret	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Begum, Apsana	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Benn, rh Hilary	Doogan, Dave
Betts, Mr Clive	Dorans, Allan
Black, Mhairi	Dowd, Peter
Blackford, rh Ian	Dromey, Jack
Blackman, Kirsty	Duffield, Rosie
Blake, Olivia	Eagle, Ms Angela
Blomfield, Paul	Eagle, Maria
Bonnar, Steven	Edwards, Jonathan
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Efford, Clive
Brock, Deidre	Elliott, Julie
Brown, Alan	Elmore, Chris
Brown, Ms Lyn	Eshalomi, Florence
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Esterson, Bill
Bryant, Chris	Evans, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen	Farron, Tim
Byrne, Ian	Farry, Stephen
Cadbury, Ruth	Fellows, Marion
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Ferrier, Margaret
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Fletcher, Colleen
Carden, Dan	Flynn, Stephen
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Fovargue, Yvonne
Chamberlain, Wendy	Foxcroft, Vicky
Chapman, Douglas	Furniss, Gill
Charalambous, Bambos	Gardiner, Barry
Cherry, Joanna	Gibson, Patricia
Clark, Feryal	Gill, Preet Kaur
Cooper, Rosie	Glindon, Mary
Cooper, rh Yvette	Grady, Patrick
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Grant, Peter
Cowan, Ronnie	Gray, Neil
Coyle, Neil	Green, Kate
Crawley, Angela	Greenwood, Lilian
Creasy, Stella (<i>Proxy vote cast by Peter Kyle</i>)	Greenwood, Margaret
Cruddas, Jon	Griffith, Nia
Cryer, John	Haigh, Louise
Cummins, Judith	Hamilton, Fabian
	Hanvey, Neale

Hardy, Emma	Osamor, Kate
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Osborne, Kate
Harris, Carolyn	Oswald, Kirsten
Hayes, Helen	Owatemi, Taiwo
Healey, rh John	Owen, Sarah (<i>Proxy vote cast by Kate Osamor</i>)
Hendrick, Sir Mark	Peacock, Stephanie
Hill, Mike	Pennycook, Matthew
Hillier, Meg	Perkins, Mr Toby
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Phillipson, Bridget
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Pollard, Luke
Hollern, Kate	Qureshi, Yasmin
Hopkins, Rachel	Rayner, Angela
Hosie, Stewart	Reed, Steve
Howarth, rh Sir George	Rees, Christina
Jarvis, Dan	Reeves, Ellie (<i>Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambous</i>)
Johnson, Dame Diana	Reeves, Rachel
Johnson, Kim	Reynolds, Jonathan
Jones, Darren	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Jones, Gerald	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Rodda, Matt
Jones, Ruth	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Jones, Sarah	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Kane, Mike	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Keeley, Barbara	Siddiq, Tulip
Kendall, Liz	Slaughter, Andy
Khan, Afzal	Smith, Cat
Kinnock, Stephen	Smyle, Peter
Kyle, Peter	Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David	Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian	Lavery, Ian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive	Lewis, Clive
Lloyd, Tony	Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Caroline	Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly	Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny	MacAskill, Kenny
Dorans, Allan	Dorans, Allan
Madders, Justin	Madders, Justin
Maskell, Rachael	Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian	Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve	McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry	McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain	McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy	McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stuart C.	McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John	McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor	McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison	McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine	McKinnell, Catherine
Mearns, Ian	Mearns, Ian
Mishra, Navendu	Mishra, Navendu
Morden, Jessica	Morden, Jessica
Morris, Grahame	Morris, Grahame
Murray, James	Murray, James
Newlands, Gavin	Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte	Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John	Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan	O'Hara, Brendan
Onwurah, Chi	Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena	Oppong-Asare, Abena

Tellers for the Ayes:
Thangam Debonnaire and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard

Badenoch, Kemi (<i>Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty</i>)	Drummond, Mrs Flick	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Nici, Lia
Baillie, Siobhan	Duguid, David	Jenkinson, Mark	Nokes, rh Caroline
Baker, Duncan	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Jenkyns, Mrs Andrea	Norman, rh Jesse
Baker, Mr Steve	Dunne, rh Philip	Jenrick, rh Robert	O'Brien, Neil
Baldwin, Harriett	Eastwood, Mark	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Offord, Dr Matthew
Baron, Mr John	Edwards, Ruth	Johnson, Gareth	Paisley, Ian
Baynes, Simon	Ellis, rh Michael	Johnston, David	Parish, Neil
Bell, Aaron	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jones, Andrew	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Benton, Scott	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Jones, rh Mr David	Pawsey, Mark
Beresford, Sir Paul	Eustice, George	Jones, Fay	Penrose, John
Berry, rh Jake	Evans, Dr Luke	Jones, Mr Marcus	Philp, Chris
Bhatti, Saqib	Evennett, rh Sir David	Jupp, Simon	Pincher, rh Christopher
Blackman, Bob	Everitt, Ben	Kearns, Alicia	Poulter, Dr Dan
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Fabricant, Michael	Keegan, Gillian	Pow, Rebecca
Bowie, Andrew	Farris, Laura	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Prentis, Victoria
Bradley, Ben	Fell, Simon	Knight, Julian	Pritchard, Mark (<i>Proxy vote cast by Sir Charles Walker</i>)
Bradley, rh Karen	Fletcher, Katherine	Kruger, Danny	Pursglove, Tom
Brady, Sir Graham	Fletcher, Nick	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Quin, Jeremy
Braverman, Suella	Ford, Vicky	Lamont, John	Quince, Will
Brereton, Jack	Foster, Kevin	Largan, Robert	Randall, Tom
Bridgen, Andrew	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Redwood, rh John
Brine, Steve	Frazer, Lucy	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Bristow, Paul	Freeman, George	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Richards, Nicola
Britcliffe, Sara	Freer, Mike	Levy, Ian	Richardson, Angela
Brokenshire, rh James	Fuller, Richard	Lewer, Andrew	Roberts, Rob
Browne, Anthony	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Lewis, rh Brandon	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Bruce, Fiona	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Robinson, Mary
Buchan, Felicity	Gibson, Peter	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Rosindell, Andrew
Buckland, rh Robert	Gideon, Jo	Loder, Chris	Ross, Douglas
Burghart, Alex	Glen, John	Logan, Mark	Rowley, Lee
Butler, Rob	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Longhi, Marco	Russell, Dean
Cairns, rh Alun	Graham, Richard	Lopez, Julia (<i>Proxy vote cast by Lee Rowley</i>)	Rutley, David
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Gray, James	Lopresti, Jack	Sambrook, Gary
Carter, Andy	Grayling, rh Chris	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Saxby, Selaine
Cartlidge, James	Green, Chris	Loughton, Tim	Seely, Bob
Cash, Sir William	Green, rh Damian	Mackinlay, Craig	Selous, Andrew
Cates, Miriam	Griffiths, Kate	Mackrory, Cherilyn	Shannon, Jim
Chalk, Alex	Grundy, James	Macleane, Rachel	Sharma, rh Alok
Chope, Sir Christopher	Gullis, Jonathan	Mak, Alan	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Churchill, Jo	Halfon, rh Robert	Malthouse, Kit	Simmonds, David
Clark, rh Greg	Hall, Luke	Mangnall, Anthony	Smith, Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon	Hammond, Stephen	Mann, Scott	Smith, Henry
Clarke, Theo	Hancock, rh Matt	Marson, Julie	Smith, rh Julian
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Hands, rh Greg	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Smith, Royston
Clarkson, Chris	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Mayhew, Jerome	Solloway, Amanda
Cleverly, rh James	Harris, Rebecca	McCartney, Jason	Spencer, Dr Ben
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Harrison, Trudy	McCartney, Karl	Spencer, rh Mark
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Hart, Sally-Ann	McPartland, Stephen	Stafford, Alexander
Colburn, Elliot	Hart, rh Simon	Menzies, Mark	Stephenson, Andrew
Costa, Alberto	Hayes, rh Sir John	Mercer, Johnny	Stevenson, Jane
Courts, Robert	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Merriman, Huw	Stevenson, John
Coutinho, Claire	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Metcalfe, Stephen	Stewart, Bob
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Henderson, Gordon	Millar, Robin	Stewart, Iain
Crabb, rh Stephen	Henry, Darren	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Stride, rh Mel
Crosbie, Virginia	Higginbotham, Antony	Milling, Amanda	Stuart, Graham
Crouch, Tracey	Hinds, rh Damian	Mills, Nigel	Sturdy, Julian
Daly, James	Hoare, Simon	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Sunak, rh Rishi
Davies, David T. C.	Holden, Mr Richard	Mohindra, Gagan	Sunderland, James
Davies, Gareth	Hollinrake, Kevin	Moore, Damien	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Davies, Dr James	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Moore, Robbie	Syms, Sir Robert
Davies, Mims	Holloway, Adam	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Thomas, Derek
Davies, Philip	Holmes, Paul	Morris, Anne Marie	Throup, Maggie
Davison, Dehenna	Howell, John	Morris, James	Timpson, Edward
Dinenage, Caroline	Howell, Paul	Morrissey, Joy	Tolhurst, Kelly
Dines, Miss Sarah	Hudson, Dr Neil	Morton, Wendy	Tomlinson, Justin
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hughes, Eddie	Mullan, Dr Kieran	Tomlinson, Michael
Docherty, Leo	Hunt, Jane	Mumby-Croft, Holly	Tracey, Craig
Double, Steve	Hunt, rh Jeremy	Mundell, rh David	Trott, Laura
Dowden, rh Oliver	Hunt, Tom	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Tugendhat, Tom
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Drax, Richard	Javid, rh Sajid	Neill, Sir Robert	Vickers, Martin
	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil		

Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather

Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Nigel Huddleston and
 Maria Caulfield

Question accordingly negated.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)),
 That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

AGRICULTURE BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Agriculture Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 10 March 2020.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(Iain Stewart.)

Question agreed to.

AGRICULTURE BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Agriculture Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) sums required for—

- (a) giving financial assistance to any person by virtue of powers of the Secretary of State under the Act;
- (b) continuing to make direct payments, under the basic payment scheme as it operates in relation to England, for one or more years after 2020 by virtue of the Act;
- (c) making delinked payments in relation to England (in place of direct payments under the basic payment scheme) by virtue of the Act;

(d) providing support under the Rural Development Regulation (EU No 1305/2013) as it operates in England in consequence of amendments of that Regulation made by virtue of the Act;

(e) operating the public market intervention or aid for private storage mechanisms under retained direct EU legislation as it operates in relation to England in response to exceptional conditions in agricultural markets;

(2) any administrative expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State by virtue of the Act;

and

(3) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided by virtue of any other Act.—*(Iain Stewart.)*

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

(EUROPEAN STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS COMMITTEE (TEMPORARY STANDING ORDER))

Ordered,

That the following Standing Order shall have effect for the remainder of this Parliament:—

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the European Statutory Instruments Committee, to examine and report on—

(a) any of the following documents laid before the House of Commons in accordance with paragraph 3(3)(b) or 17(3)(b) of Schedule 7 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018—

(i) a draft of an instrument; and

(ii) a memorandum setting out both a statement made by a Minister of the Crown to the effect that in the Minister's opinion the instrument should be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament (the negative procedure) and the reasons for that opinion, and

(b) any matter arising from its consideration of such documents.

(2) In its consideration of a document referred to in paragraph 1(a) the committee shall include, in addition to such other matters as it deems appropriate, whether the draft instrument—

(a) contains any provision of the type specified in paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 7 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 in relation to which the Act requires that a draft of the instrument must be laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament (the affirmative procedure);

(b) otherwise appears to make an inappropriate use of the negative procedure; and shall report to the House its recommendation of the procedure which should apply.

(3) The committee shall have regard to the reasons offered by the Minister in support of the Minister's opinion that the instrument should be subject to the negative procedure.

(4) Before reporting on any document, the committee shall provide to the government department concerned an opportunity to provide orally or in writing to it or any subcommittee appointed by it such further explanations as the committee may require except to the extent that the committee considers that it is not reasonably practicable to do so within the period provided by the Act.

(5) It shall be an instruction to the committee that it shall report any recommendation that the affirmative procedure should apply within the period specified by the Act.

(6) The committee shall consist of sixteen Members.

(7) The committee and any sub-committees appointed by it shall have the assistance of the Counsel to the Speaker.

(8) The committee shall have power to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference.

(9) The committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time.

(10) The committee shall have power to appoint sub-committees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the committee.

(11) Each such sub-committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report to the committee from time to time.

(12) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the evidence taken before such sub-committees, and the formal minutes of sub-committees.

(13) The quorum of each such sub-committee shall be two.

(14) The committee shall have power to seek from any committee of the House, including any committee appointed to meet with a committee of the Lords as a joint committee, its opinion on any document within its remit, and to require a reply to such a request within such time as it may specify.

(15) Unless the House otherwise orders each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament, or until this Standing Order lapses, whichever occurs sooner.

(16) This Standing Order, to the extent that it relates to a regulation-making power provided to the Government under sections 8 or 23(1) of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, shall lapse upon the expiry of the power to make new regulations under those sections and shall lapse entirely upon expiry of the last such remaining power.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

POSITIONS FOR WHICH ADDITIONAL SALARIES ARE PAYABLE FOR THE PURPOSES OF SECTION 4A(2) OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS ACT 2009

Ordered,

That the resolution of the House of 19 March 2013 (Positions for which additional salaries are payable for the purposes of section 4A(2) of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009) be amended, in paragraph (1)(a), by inserting, in the appropriate place, “the European Statutory Instruments Committee”.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

PARAGRAPH 3(3)(B) OR 17(3)(B) OF SCHEDULE 7 TO THE EUROPEAN UNION (WITHDRAWAL) ACT 2018: PRESENTATION OF DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That where, under paragraph 3(3)(b) or 17(3)(b) of Schedule 7 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, any document is to be laid before this House, the delivery of a copy of the document to the Votes and Proceedings Office on any day during the existence of a Parliament shall be deemed to be for all purposes the laying of it before the House; and the proviso to Standing Order No. 159 (Presentation of statutory instruments) shall not apply to any document laid in accordance with this Order.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

CHURCH OF ENGLAND (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) MEASURE

Ordered,

That the Measure passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, entitled Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure (HC 299), a copy of which was laid before this House on 4 November 2019, in the last Parliament, be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—(*Iain Stewart.*)

Netflix: Tax Affairs

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

10.15 pm

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): Thank you for selecting the debate, Mr Speaker, and I give my heartfelt thanks to George Turner and the investigative think-tank, Tax Watch UK, for providing me with so much information.

For many years, global digital companies have been avoiding tax. I have spent the last decade campaigning for more corporate transparency and arguing for stronger action at both the national and international level to stamp out this abuse. Indeed, the Minister, when he was a member of the Treasury Committee, was extremely helpful in exposing some of the unacceptable tax behaviour in one of our major banks—HSBC—and he effectively held the bank’s chief executive to account. In the light of his previous interest and commitment to ensuring that everybody acts responsibly and pays their fair share of tax, I hope that he will respond positively to the suggestions I am making tonight. These suggestions will go some way to tackling the shocking example of corporate tax avoidance that we have uncovered.

I have secured this Adjournment debate because until now one major tax avoider has remained under the radar: Netflix. Netflix demands our attention for a number of reasons. Not only does it deliberately dodge its corporation tax bills, but it, in fact, receives moneys from the public coffers through the high-end television tax relief.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): This is a very important issue and I thank the right hon. Lady for securing the Adjournment debate. Bearing in mind that last year Netflix UK subscribers paid some £700 million, does she not agree that the fact that it uses loopholes to avoid tax is simply disgraceful? Government really must close these loopholes and ensure that big business has to pay a reasonable rate of tax.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I entirely support the hon. Member on that.

Netflix takes out of the public purse more than it contributes in corporation tax. While Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs fails to collect money from it in corporation tax, the US Government are extracting tax from the same profits that it earns here and then hides in unknown tax havens.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing the debate. While austerity has seen billions of pounds taken out of our public services, with £300 million gone from the economy in Newcastle, is it not absolutely vital that we get this tax policy right so that we have that money to fund our vital public services? Multinationals such as Netflix should make their fair contribution.

Dame Margaret Hodge: Not only should they be making their fair contribution, but they use the services that other people’s tax pays for.

Netflix creates its content here, supported by grants that it receives here through our tax credit system, yet it pays tax on the profit that it makes here in the USA. Frankly, I say to the Minister: you couldn’t make it up. The situation is scandalous, intolerable and unfair. It is

the sort of behaviour that really winds up the British public, most of whom are law-abiding taxpayers who never try to avoid their duty to pay taxes.

Let me explain the Netflix situation in detail. Netflix is the world's biggest video-streaming service, with 167 million subscribers. The California-based company is the online home of popular shows such as "The Crown" and "House of Cards" and films such as "Marriage Story" and "The Irishman", but while we all binge-watch Olivia Colman's portrayal of the Queen, Netflix has deliberately constructed a devious financial structure that has no other purpose than to avoid paying its tax.

The Netflix strategy is to be the biggest player in the online video streaming market, to buy out or undercut any rivals and to release a sea of content to attract a truly global subscriber base. For many years, the service ran at a loss to secure this dominant market position, but it is now operating in the black. Netflix's global operating profit rose by an enormous 61% last year to £2 billion. By 2019, Netflix had 11.62 million UK subscribers, who generated a £1.08 billion income for the company, but under the ruse it employs any UK citizen who subscribes to Netflix is billed not in the UK but from a subsidiary company in the Netherlands.

The most recently published Netflix accounts for 2018—the only earnings declared here—amount to a very small proportion of its billion-dollar UK revenue. Money declared by Netflix in the UK is paid by the Dutch subsidiary to a much smaller subsidiary based in Britain, which makes up just a trivial proportion of the services the company provides. Tax Watch UK estimates that the actual profit Netflix made in the UK was close to £70 million in 2018, so the company should have paid over £13 million in corporation tax.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I appreciate the points the right hon. Member is raising about complex financial issues, but does she accept that the traffic is not all one way? In the last year, Netflix has invested more than £400 million in the UK, creating 25,000 jobs and productions, and has recently been driving the pioneering agenda of encouraging women into television and film making.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I am all for encouraging Netflix's growth here, but I am afraid that that in no way mitigates its refusal to pay its fair share of tax.

Where Netflix's UK profits do end up is a complete mystery. It uses a shady system of subsidiaries and shell companies based in tax havens to shift its profits and avoid paying its fair share in many jurisdictions. From the publicly available data and translating that data into pounds sterling, it looks as if between £251 million and £329 million of non-US profit was shifted into tax havens from the Netherlands. Netflix did pay some tax on profits. Ironically, over 90% was paid by the Netherlands-based company and went to Brazil, where the authorities use a withholding tax to extract money. Is it not astounding that Brazil is more efficient at collecting tax from digital companies than we are? If Brazil can tax Netflix, why can't we?

The UK makes up 14% of Netflix's non-US market. We provide a vital consumer base for Netflix, and much of its content is created here, so the intellectual property on Netflix's product is developed here in the UK. Google always argued in the past with me that it should not pay

tax in the UK because its intellectual property was developed in California. If that argument has any credibility, given that much of Netflix's intellectual property is created here and funded in part by the taxpayer through tax credits, the case for taxing it here in the UK is irresistible.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I am very impressed with the case that my right hon. Friend is making. Like her, I have had conversations with companies that claim that intellectual property means there have to be adjustments in national tax rates, but if, as she is saying, the sales in this country are registered to a company in Holland, although the intellectual property is here and the company is based in America, it makes no sense at all and simply looks like an avoidance mechanism.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I agree: it is nothing other than an avoidance mechanism.

It should be borne in mind that Netflix depends on services that are funded by the taxpayer, such as our physical and digital infrastructure, which is in part publicly funded, our world-class universities and our highly educated workforce, and our NHS, which keeps its staff healthy. It takes from the public purse, but fails to pay its fair share back.

There is one simple solution to this injustice, and I should appreciate the Minister's comments on it. Video streaming services must be included in the new digital services tax. At present they are excluded. Why? Why cannot the Government simply extend the provisions to include them?

The United States Secretary of State has threatened us with tariffs on our cars if we go ahead with the digital services tax, and I welcome the Government's resistance to that threat. Fair taxation cannot be a bargaining chip to be cashed in to secure a trade deal. We must maintain our stance, and have no truck with the bully-boy tactics of the Trump regime.

There are plenty of examples of other countries taking action to claw back some tax from the streaming giants. The French levy a 2% tax, and the Brazilians not only get their withholding tax but have a 2% tax that covers online streaming services and is paid to the local government. There is a strong case for extending the digital services tax to include streaming services. The tax is "oven-ready", as our new Prime Minister is fond of saying, and I urge the Minister to expand its scope to cover streaming sites so that we can fund our vital public services.

What is particularly galling is that Netflix actually makes a net profit from the UK taxpayer. In the last two years it has received nearly £1 million from the Government in tax credits, and that is just the start. According to its US accounts, it is ready to enjoy £218 million in tax credits worldwide. We do not know how much of that will be paid by the UK taxpayer, but we do know that Netflix has massively expanded its production network here, and has taken out a lease for at least 10 years on virtually the whole of the Shepperton Studios site. That implies that a huge chunk of our money—taxpayers' money—will be gifted straight into the coffers of Netflix in tax credits. It is nothing less than superhighway

[*Dame Margaret Hodge*]

robbery. The UK taxpayer is being taken for a ride. We are actually handing over cash while Netflix stashes money offshore.

However, Netflix is far from the only culprit. Tax credit abuse is rife in other industries, including film and video games. Rockstar Games, the maker of the controversial Grand Theft Auto series, is one example. In the UK we have a thriving creative industry with large amounts of production happening here, and that is to be encouraged and celebrated, but the present rules are clearly absurd. Large, profitable companies such as Netflix and Rockstar Games claim that no profit is made here, and, as a result, are simply making money on the back of the UK taxpayer. It is the worst kind of corporate welfare. Why, I ask the Minister, can we not adjust the eligibility criteria, and insist that any company that is enjoying tax credits must declare the revenue earned from its products created with those tax credits here in the UK? Why can we not make that a condition of the tax credits, so that we collect the tax?

Finally, if the Minister will indulge me, I want to talk very briefly about the role of the United States. These digital corporations are spurred on by the US Government, who, I believe, encourage such shady tax practices. As long as some taxes are paid in the US, the US Government do not care if American corporations use shell companies, offshore tax havens or other instruments. They are happy for them to avoid taxes in the UK and other jurisdictions around the world. In recent years, US-based multinationals have built up cash piles of more than £1 trillion in tax havens such as Bermuda. Since Donald Trump's 2017 tax reforms, the US has claimed all that profit for itself for American headquartered companies. If the companies repatriate their income from the tax havens, the income that the companies receive from outside the US is charged at a much lower rate of corporation tax—just 13.12%. So the US has become a tax haven for the overseas operations of its multinational companies. That explains why, in December last year, Google decided that it was moving its intellectual property from Bermuda back to the USA. Why stash your cash offshore when the US itself has become the world's largest tax haven? If companies choose not to repatriate their income, they are still charged a flat rate of tax of just over 13% on the revenue they hold and accumulate in tax havens.

An obvious way through this web is to lift the shroud of secrecy that surrounds the revenue and profits of multinational digital giants. That is why this Government supported a measure that would require companies to report their activities, their revenues and their profits on a country-by-country basis. We passed the law enabling country-by-country reporting in 2016. I ask the Minister: when will the Government bring that provision into force? Only with greater transparency will we know how much profit these digital companies make and where they should be paying their taxes. Only then can we ensure that every country gets a fair ride.

I accept that we need a new international consensus on the corporate tax regime. However, news from the OECD suggests that the United States itself is blocking progress on international tax reform. It is outrageous that the US is holding up international reform, threatening individual countries with new tariffs when those countries

try to tax global companies, and then charging those global companies tax—albeit at a very low rate—on the business they secure and the profits they make outside the US.

The case of Netflix is a scandal. If we want to stop this abuse, we can. The Government can be assured that such action would command the support of the whole House, but failure to act represents a betrayal of every law-abiding taxpayer. If the Government fail to take the practical actions that I have suggested, I know that I and others will not remain silent.

10.32 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman): May I begin by thanking the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) for calling this debate on an interesting and important topic that is of great public import? Members across the House will be aware of the interest that she has taken for many years in matters of tax avoidance, and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate and to outline work that the Government are doing to address concerns.

As the right hon. Lady will know, although I have overall responsibility for the tax system, I and other Ministers are never privy to information about the tax affairs of specific companies or individuals. This is a basic safeguard for taxpayers that is designed to ensure that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs can administer the tax system independently and without political interference. I am not, therefore, in a position to comment on the situation with Netflix as such, although I would like to reassure her that I have taken time to read around the subject of the debate, which excites a range of differing views. She will be aware that many of the wider concerns that she expresses are shared by Members across the House. I myself have written about them at some length and indeed pursued them as a member of the Treasury Committee, as she noted. In particular, she has raised several important general points about the tax system, which I would like to address.

The UK, like most major economies, taxes multinational companies based on the profits attributable to the economic activities they undertake here—for example, product development or manufacturing. That point has been well made by the right hon. Lady. That means that revenues alone are not a useful indicator of the amount of tax that a business should be paying in the UK. It is also necessary to consider the profitability of the business concerned, and the extent to which the activities that generate profits take place in the UK or abroad. However, the Government recognise that some multinational businesses have sought to avoid paying their fair share of tax in the UK by entering into contrived arrangements to divert profits to low tax jurisdictions, depriving the Exchequer of revenues needed to fund the public services on which we all rely. That is completely unacceptable, which is why the Government have taken robust action designed to inhibit or prevent it.

Internationally, the Government have been at the forefront of efforts to ensure that multinational companies pay their fair share of tax. In 2013, the UK used its presidency of the G8 to initiate the OECD's base erosion and profit shifting project, which carried out a comprehensive review of international tax rules. The BEPS project recommended a range of measures to

combat tax avoidance, which the UK has led in implementing. They include rules restricting companies' ability to shift profits using interest deductions, rules counteracting tax avoidance arrangements involving so-called hybrid mismatches, a requirement for multinationals to disclose information about their sales, profits and assets in each country to HMRC, and new rules to prevent the abuse of tax treaties.

The Government have also acted unilaterally where needed. In 2015, they enacted the diverted profits tax, which charges a higher rate of tax on profits diverted from the UK in order to encourage companies to declare the right amount of profits. In 2019, they introduced a tax charge on offshore receipts in respect of intangible property—known in the trade as ORIP—which targets companies that hold valuable intangible assets, such as brands or technology rights, in low-tax jurisdictions. Such measures have significantly curbed the ability of multinational companies to shift profits to low-tax jurisdictions and have collectively raised over £8 billion for the Exchequer.

However, we must be realistic about the scale of the problem, not merely in the UK but around the world. New digital business models continue to pose challenges for international tax rules, and the sad fact remains that the vast majority of the rules were developed prior to the digital revolution of the past two decades. The Government therefore strongly support further work that is being undertaken at the OECD to reform profit allocation rules to ensure that market economies, including the UK, can tax a fair share of the profits of highly digitalised businesses. Only last week, UK officials attended meetings of the OECD in Paris, at which countries agreed to an outline of reforms. It is a complex area and there remains much work to be done, but the Government are optimistic that global agreement will be reached.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I thank the Minister for giving way. He is right to emphasise the importance of international co-operation, but the passage of time since many of these arrangements were agreed and the prevalence of the problems today suggest that international action has not been sufficient. What about the two examples of unilateral action that my right hon. Friend mentioned: a withholding tax applied in this country, or an extension of the ambit of the digital services tax that the Government currently have under consideration?

Jesse Norman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, although it is a pity that he asks a question that has already been asked when we are short of time in a debate, because that does not allow me the time to come back to the right hon. Member for Barking, who asked the question in the first place. If they permit me, I will get to his point in due course after I address another issue raised by the right hon. Lady that is of great importance to the debate.

Turning to creative sector tax reliefs, we need to be clear that the creative industries make an important and extremely valuable cultural contribution to the UK. They are also an important part of a dynamic and diversified economy, with the UK's world-famous creative industries making a record contribution to the economy in 2017 by breaking through the £100 billion mark. The Government are committed to supporting these highly skilled and innovative industries as they support economic

growth across the UK. That is why the Government continue to offer support for the creative industries through eight sector-specific tax reliefs. The most established of those are reliefs for British film and high-end television productions. The reliefs have supported over £19 billion of UK expenditure, including the completion of 90 TV programmes and 245 films in 2018-19 alone. The success and popularity of British films overseas is well known. The UK film industry exported a record £2.6 billion-worth of services in 2017 and employed over 90,000 people across the UK in 2018.

The effect of the tax reliefs, in turn, is to help cement investor confidence in UK creative skills, infrastructure and innovation. Indeed, investment in facilities has spread to projects around the UK and includes new studio spaces such as Wolf near Cardiff, Pentland in Scotland, Church Fenton in Yorkshire, and the Littlewoods building redevelopment project in Liverpool.

I now turn to the questions raised by the right hon. Lady. She asked about the location where IP is created and whether that should determine the taxation of that IP. As she will be aware, I cannot comment on the circumstances of individual businesses, but under international tax rules, the UK is entitled to tax the shares of a company's profits that relate to those production activities. That is what we are in a position to do, so she should not have concern on that front.

The right hon. Lady also raised the question of Brazil.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I really have no time if I am to answer the right hon. Lady's questions. Perhaps I can come back to the hon. Gentleman, but I have already taken two completely irrelevant repetitions of questions that I am trying to answer.

Why can Brazil tax companies but the UK cannot? As the right hon. Lady explained, Brazil has a withholding tax. In the Finance Act 2019, the UK introduced a charge, as I have described, on offshore receipts from intellectual property. That charge, introduced in 2019, completely refutes the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) that tax arrangements have existed for a long time—in fact, trying to stop these forms of aggressive avoidance and potentially outright evasion is an ever continuing process. The effect of the ORIP rules is to replicate the effect of a withholding tax where IP is held in low-tax territories, along the lines that the right hon. Member for Barking has called for.

The right hon. Lady asked about the digital services tax. As she is probably aware, that is designed to relate to large search engine, social media and online marketplace businesses. Those are different from the case that she is discussing, as they rely on their users to create value where that value is not recognised under current international tax rules. Therefore the set of rules would have to be entirely rewritten to take into account the circumstances of the case that she is describing now, which may be important but is in any case captured by existing Government law in many instances. In any case, the DST is intended to be a temporary measure pending

[Jesse Norman]

agreement of a long-term global solution, potentially including the United States, that will address the wider challenges posed by digitisation.

I remind the right hon. Lady as she denounces the company in question, for which I hold no brief either way, that it is planning to invest about £232 million in Shepperton Studios. That is not a trivial act and is something that we should be aware of. Finally, she mentioned country-by-country reporting. Again, the law is in place. Since 2017, large multinationals have been disclosing the information to HMRC. Businesses of all shapes and sizes make a valuable contribution to the UK's creative economy, and it is absolutely right

that they should be incentivised to continue to do so. But it is equally right that HMRC should subject large businesses to an appropriate level of scrutiny, and my understanding is that it is actively investigating around half of the UK's large businesses at any given time. That is a very considerable undertaking and ample testimony to the seriousness with which it takes this issue.

Let me conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, by thanking you and thanking the right hon. Lady once again for raising this important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

10.44 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 3 February 2020

PRIME MINISTER

Department for Exiting the European Union: Closure

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): I am making this statement to confirm that the Department for Exiting the European Union closed on 31 January. Those of its functions which are still required have been transferred to relevant Government Departments. The administration of the closure of DExEU is being carried out by the Cabinet Office.

[HCWS85]

UK/EU Relations

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): This statement sets out the Government's proposed approach to the negotiations with the EU about our future relationship. Further details on this and other trade negotiations will be made available to Parliament as the process develops.

The Government wish to see a future relationship based on friendly co-operation between sovereign equals for the benefit of all our peoples. There is complete certainty that at the end of 2020 the process of transition to that relationship will be complete and that the UK will have recovered in full its economic and political independence. The Government remain committed in all circumstances to securing all those benefits for the whole of the UK and to strengthening our Union.

The question for the rest of 2020 is whether the UK and the EU can agree a deeper trading relationship on the lines of the free trade agreement the EU has with Canada, or whether the relationship will be based simply on the withdrawal agreement deal agreed in October 2019, including the protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland. In either event the UK will be leaving the single market and the customs union at the end of this year and stakeholders should prepare for that reality.

The Government will work hard to achieve a balanced agreement that is in the interests of both sides, reflecting the wide range of shared interests. Any agreement must respect the sovereignty of both parties and the autonomy of our legal orders. It cannot therefore include any regulatory alignment, any jurisdiction for the Court of Justice of the European Union over the UK's laws, or any supranational control in any area, including the UK's borders and immigration policy.

This points to a suite of agreements of which the main elements would be a comprehensive free trade agreement covering substantially all trade, an agreement on fisheries, and an agreement to co-operate in the area of internal security, together with a number of more technical agreements covering areas such as aviation or civil nuclear co-operation. These should all have governance and dispute settlement arrangements appropriate to a relationship of sovereign equals.

Future co-operation in other areas does not need to be managed through an international treaty, still less through shared institutions. The UK will in future develop separate and independent policies in areas such as (but not limited to) the points-based immigration system, competition and subsidy policy, the environment, social policy, procurement, and data protection, maintaining high standards as we do so. Co-operation on foreign affairs and related issues is of course likely to be substantial, but does not in itself require a joint institutional framework.

In its negotiations with the EU, the Government will be acting on behalf of the UK Crown dependencies and overseas territories: the whole UK family.

The UK proposes to agree similar arrangements with the European Free Trade Association states.

Further information is set out below. Unless otherwise stated, it should be assumed that the UK's aspiration and level of ambition is to reach agreement on provisions which are at least as good as those in the EU's recent trade agreements, such as those with Canada or Japan.

Free trade agreement

A free trade agreement between the UK and EU should reflect, and develop where necessary, existing international best practice as set out, inter alia, in FTAs already agreed by the EU.

It should cover the following areas:

National treatment and market access for goods

There should be no tariffs, fees, charges or quantitative restrictions between the UK and the EU. There should be a protocol setting out appropriate and modern rules of origin, in order to facilitate trade between the parties to the greatest extent possible.

Trade remedies

The agreement should enable the UK to protect its industry from harm caused by unexpected surges in imports of goods or by unfair trading practices, while making the appropriate commitments to transparency, due process and proportionate use of trade remedies.

Technical barriers to trade

There should be provisions to address regulatory barriers to trade in goods, providing for co-operation on technical regulation, standards, conformity assessment procedures and market surveillance, building on the WTO technical barriers to trade agreement. Annexes to the agreement could include provisions facilitating trade in specific sectors, such as organic products, motor vehicles, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, as well as mutual recognition agreements focusing on conformity assessment, with full coverage of the relevant sectors.

Sanitary and phytosanitary measures

The UK will maintain its own autonomous sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) regime to protect human, animal and plant life and health and the environment, reflecting its existing high standards. In certain areas it may be possible to agree equivalence provisions to reduce practical barriers to trade at the border.

Customs and trade facilitation

Facilitative customs arrangements, covering all trade in goods, should be put in place in order to smooth trade between the UK and the EU. These should ensure that both customs authorities are able to protect their regulatory, security and financial interests.

Cross-border trade in services and investment

Significant provisions on trade in services are an essential component of a comprehensive FTA. Accordingly, the agreement should include measures to minimise barriers to the cross-border supply of services and investment, on the basis of each side's commitments in existing FTAs. In areas of key interest, such as professional and business services, there may be scope to go beyond these commitments.

There should be measures to support digital trade, building on the most recent precedents.

Temporary entry for business purposes (mode 4)

As is normal in a free trade agreement, the agreement should include significant reciprocal commitments on the temporary entry and stay of individuals, so that both EU and UK nationals can undertake short-term business trips to supply services. This is of course without prejudice to the future points-based immigration system.

Regulatory framework

There should be measures that reduce unnecessary barriers to trade in services, streamlining practical processes and providing for appropriate regulatory co-operation.

Mutual recognition of professional qualifications

The agreement should provide a pathway for the mutual recognition of UK and EU qualifications, underpinned by regulatory co-operation, so that qualification requirements do not become an unnecessary barrier to trade.

Financial services

The agreement should require both sides to provide a predictable, transparent, and business-friendly environment for financial services firms, ensuring financial stability and providing certainty for both business and regulatory authorities, and with obligations on market access and fair competition. Given the depth of the relationship in this area, there should also be enhanced provision for regulatory and supervisory co-operation arrangements with the EU, and for the structured withdrawal of equivalence findings.

Road transport

There should be reciprocal commitments to allow EU and UK road transport operators to provide services to, from and through each other's territories, with associated rights, underpinned by relevant international agreements and commitments, and ensuring the necessary co-operation on monitoring and enforcement.

Competition policy, subsidies, environment and climate, labour, tax

The Government will not agree to measures in these areas which go beyond those typically included in a comprehensive free trade agreement. The Government believe therefore that both parties should recognise their respective commitments to maintaining high standards in these areas; confirm that they will uphold their international obligations; and agree to avoid using measures in these areas to distort trade.

Agreement on fisheries

The UK will become an independent coastal state at the end of 2020 and any agreement must reflect this reality. The UK will, like Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands, have annual negotiations with the EU on access to waters and fishing opportunities, and will consider a mechanism for co-operation on fisheries matters.

Agreement on internal security co-operation

Protection of citizens is the highest duty of any Government. The UK believes it is in the UK's and EU's mutual interest to reach a pragmatic agreement to provide a framework for law enforcement and judicial co-operation in criminal matters between the UK and the EU, delivering strong operational capabilities that help protect the public. The detail of such an agreement must be consistent with the Government's position that the CJEU and the EU legal order must not constrain the autonomy of the UK's legal system in any way.

Other areas of co-operation

The Government believe there is mutual benefit in an air transport agreement covering market access for air services, aviation safety and security, and collaboration on air traffic management.

The UK is ready to work to establish practical provisions to facilitate smooth border crossing arrangements, as part of independent border and immigration systems, and on social security co-ordination. All such arrangements should be reciprocal and of mutual benefit. The UK is ready to discuss co-operation on asylum, including family reunion, and illegal migration.

The UK is ready to consider participation in certain EU programmes, once the EU has agreed the baseline in its 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, and taking into account the overall value to the UK of doing so.

Finally, there are certain areas where the UK considers agreement is self-evidently in the interest of both sides, and where early progress is a test of the constructive nature of the negotiating process. For example, there should be rapid agreement that the UK and the EU would list each other for trade in live animals, animal products, seeds and other plant-propagating material. There should be rapid progress towards a civil nuclear agreement, given the implications for both sides of not doing so and the clear benefits of co-operation. Similarly, the UK would see the EU's assessment processes on financial services equivalence and data adequacy as technical and confirmatory of the reality that the UK will be operating exactly the same regulatory frameworks as the EU at the point of exit. The UK intends to approach its own technical assessment processes in this spirit.

A copy of this statement will be placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS86]

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 3 February 2020

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

PrEP Commissioning

The following is an extract from questions to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on 28 January 2020.

Mrs Hodgson: In October last year, the Government confirmed that the local authority public health grant will increase by 1% in real terms in 2020-21. However, this funding has not yet been allocated to local authorities. How will the Government financially support local authorities to establish the routine commissioning of PrEP by April?

Jo Churchill: As I said, NHS England and NHS Improvement have already agreed, within the ring-fenced funding for public health, to fund the ongoing costs of drugs for PrEP going forward. There will be an additional allocation of funds to cover the PrEP roll-out completely. *[Official Report, 28 January 2020, Vol. 670, c. 658.]*

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson).

The correct response should have been:

Jo Churchill: As I said, NHS England and NHS Improvement have already agreed, within the ring-fenced funding for public health, to fund the ongoing costs of

drugs for PrEP going forward. **We will provide information on how other elements of the programme will be funded and how commissioners will be supported shortly.**

EDUCATION

Looked-after Children: Out-of-area Placements

The following is an extract from questions to the Secretary of State for Education on 20 January 2020.

Andrew Bridgen: There is an increasing number of children in care, with the latest figures showing nearly 80,000 children in care in England alone. What steps is my hon. Friend's Department taking to reverse this trend?

Michelle Donelan: My hon. Friend is quite right. The number of children in the care sector is a worry both to me and the Government. That is why we have a number of initiatives to support families to stay together. We have spent £70 million on supporting families and £84 million on strengthening families for this very reason. *[Official Report, 20 January 2020, Vol. 670, c. 3-4.]*

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen).

The correct response should have been:

Michelle Donelan: My hon. Friend is quite right. The number of children in the care sector is a worry both to me and the Government. That is why we have a number of initiatives to support families to stay together. **We will be spending approximately £17 million on Supporting Families and £84 million on Strengthening Families for this very reason.**

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