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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 12 May 2020**

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 12 May 2020*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

*The House entered into hybrid scrutiny proceedings (Order, 21 April).*

[NB: [V] denotes a Member participating virtually.]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### SMEs: US Trade Agreement

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): What recent assessment the Government have made of the potential effect of a US trade agreement on SMEs. [902520]

**The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss)**: We are working on a dedicated small and medium-sized enterprise chapter in the US trade deal to help the UK's 5.9 million small businesses. Some 31,600 UK SMEs already export to the US, and we want to help them by cutting red tape on customs and tariffs.

**Daisy Cooper** [V]: SMEs are the backbone of the UK economy, but while the US Government are engaging with their SMEs, SMEs in the UK say that there is no equivalent engagement from the UK Government. Will the Secretary of State commit to having a dedicated chapter in every trade deal that they are looking to develop, and will she create a mechanism for SMEs themselves to help shape it?

**Elizabeth Truss**: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. We have been in touch with a number of organisations representing SMEs—for example, the Federation of Small Businesses, which has come out in favour of a US trade deal, saying:

“For small businesses, the US is the number one single market of choice for importers and exporters for the next three years, which is why these negotiations are so critical.”

We are committed to working with businesses of all sizes in this trade process through our expert trade advisory groups, which we have with all industry sectors, and I am very happy to engage with the hon. Lady about how even more SMEs can be involved in this process.

### US Free Trade Agreement

**Mark Eastwood** (Dewsbury) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential merits of a free trade agreement with the US. [902522]

**Alun Cairns** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential merits of a free trade agreement with the US. [902529]

**The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss)**: A free trade agreement with the United States is set to deliver a £15 billion increase in bilateral trade, benefiting every region of the UK, including the nation of Wales and the great county of Yorkshire, and delivering an extra £1.8 billion for workers' wages.

**Mark Eastwood** [V]: In the light of the difficult circumstances we find ourselves in globally, I would like to congratulate the Secretary of State on setting up talks with the US. With the UK set to leave the EU at the end of the year, it is also important that we have free trade agreements in place with other nations, particularly our Commonwealth partners and countries in the far east. Therefore, could my right hon. Friend provide an update on progress with the potential trade deals with Australia, New Zealand and Japan?

**Elizabeth Truss**: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We will shortly be launching negotiations with Japan, Australia and New Zealand, and pressing for early accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. This is an important step in diversifying our trade and making sure we are not just dependent on a small number of countries for our imports and exports. It is also important that we work with like-minded free market democracies to help set global standards in trade.

**Alun Cairns** [V]: Does the Secretary of State agree that all parts of the UK and all economic sectors stand to gain from a trade deal with the United States? However, some lobbyists are concerned about their specific interests, so what reassurance can my right hon. Friend give that fairness to both the UK and the US, as well as economic opportunities for all parts of the country, will be central to her thinking in the negotiations?

**Elizabeth Truss**: A free trade deal with the United States is set to benefit every nation and region in the UK, including Wales. We will strike a hard bargain, and seek a deal that is fair for our producers. For example, we want to make sure that we gain access for British lamb and Welsh lamb in the United States market. It is the second biggest importer of lamb in the world, and it represents a massive opportunity for our farming sector and for the nation of Wales.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the warm welcome that she has given me in this new role and for the co-operative discussions that we have enjoyed so far in relation to both coronavirus and US trade. On the latter subject, she will be aware that the Trump Administration and the US Congress see the US-Mexico-Canada agreement on trade as a template for every other free trade agreement that they are looking to sign

around the world. Can the Secretary of State make it clear to them today that she will not agree to any version of article 32.10 of the USMCA that would constrain the UK's ability to negotiate our own trade agreement with China and would therefore represent an unacceptable breach of the sovereignty of this Parliament?

**Elizabeth Truss:** First, I welcome the right hon. Lady to her seat. It is great to see her in the flesh, even though we have had a number of calls over the last few weeks. I am committed to working with the Opposition to ensure that we get the best possible deal for all parts of the UK in the US trade deal. I can assure her that when we negotiate with the United States we will negotiate in the UK's interest, ensuring that we have full freedom of manoeuvre and making our own sovereign decisions as a country. Of course, we are looking at a number of precursor agreements for the text we use in those trade negotiations, but my No. 1 priority is to ensure that we have our own sovereign capability to trade with the rest of the world as we see fit. One important benefit of a US trade deal and the trade deal we are looking to strike with Japan is that we need to be setting standards with fellow free market democracies and ensuring that we have proper transparency in our operations and proper setting of standards.

**Mr Speaker:** The Secretary of State really needs to think about the other Members who need to get in, so if she could shorten her answers, it would be helpful to all the Members who are waiting. [*Interruption.*] It is very good, actually.

**Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) [V]: Business and trade are all about the bottom line and numbers, and we know from the Treasury estimate that Brexit will cost about 6% of GDP. An American trade deal—and remember that the USA is a quarter of the global economy—will only give an average lift of about 0.2% to GDP, or a thirtieth of what Brexit will cost. Is there any prospect of that number improving? What are the GDP lifts for the deals with Australia, New Zealand and Japan and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership? We need to get to the numbers at the bottom of Brexit.

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He will be aware that there is a projected benefit to Scotland from a US trade deal of over half a billion pounds on gross value added, which is a significant figure. In fact, Scotland is one of the parts of the UK likely to benefit most from a US deal. We will shortly publish the economics behind the Japan, Australia and New Zealand deals when we launch the respective trade negotiations.

### Free Trade Deals

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What recent progress her Department has made on negotiating free trade deals. [902526]

**The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss):** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We will shortly be launching negotiations with Japan, Australia and New Zealand. This is an important opportunity for the UK to form closer ties with a fast-growing group of countries and look forward to joining the CPTPP, which comprises 11% of the global economy.

**James Wild** [V]: I warmly welcome the ambitious agenda that my right hon. Friend sets out. Can she confirm that any trade deal with the United States will not lower our standards on imported food, and that these talks and the other ones she referred to represent a great opportunity for world-leading companies in west Norfolk such as Bepak and other pharmaceutical, engineering and manufacturing firms to benefit from reduced tariffs and the removal of other barriers to trade?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I can confirm that we will not lower our food import standards as a result of the US deal. We are going to maintain those standards; it is an important part of the quality assurance we have here in the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend will be aware that there are lots of opportunities for Norfolk farmers and producers from a US trade deal, and overall the east of England stands to benefit by £345 million.

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP) [V]: Around a third of the value added of UK trade comes from indirect trade—indirect links—where goods and services are first exported to one country and subsequently exported to the UK. Given the importance of indirect trade and value chains generally, I am sure the Secretary of State would agree with the Dutch Trade Minister that we should rethink our trade deals to take a closer look at the sustainability of those value chains. Will she go further and agree that we should not just be looking at sustainability, but that trade deals should be as inclusive as possible and based on World Trade Organisation rules, and because of the importance of value chains and indirect trade—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think the Secretary of State will have got the question.

**Elizabeth Truss:** The hon. Gentleman is correct to say it is very important that we have resilient trade as well as trade that benefits our economy. That is why our strategy is to strike trade deals with more partners, to ensure that our companies have more options and that we are trading with a wider variety of nations than we were before.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab) [V]: Our priorities for the last four years were supposed to be in this order: first, securing a free trade agreement with the EU; secondly, rolling over all our existing deals with third countries; and thirdly, agreeing free trade deals with the rest of the world. Can the Secretary of State explain why the Government have failed on all three?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I would argue strongly that we are succeeding on all three of those aims. We have opened talks with the United States; David Frost is making significant progress in his talks with the EU; and we are making significant progress in increasing the number of countries that we are able to agree continuity trade deals with. We are on course to succeed in all those areas.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP) [V]: As the WTO makes clear, coronavirus will lead to a substantial fall in global trade. It suggests a reduction in the range of between 13% and 32% in 2020. Although it is true that this is primarily a health issue, trade will be an important ingredient of the recovery, so does the Secretary of State agree with the WTO that keeping markets open and predictable will be crucial to securing the renewed investment that we need?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman; he is right that protectionism would be a disaster for the global economy at the moment. That is why we have been pressing at the WTO to keep trade open, and why the UK has unilaterally lowered tariffs on key medical goods, to keep that trade flowing.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab) [V]: Will the Secretary of State tell the House what the UK's approach will be to chemicals regulation during any future trade negotiations? Will we retain the precautionary principle, or is she looking to relax our current laws?

**Elizabeth Truss:** It is a very important principle that the UK Government have responsibility for their own regulations. That is not something that we will trade away in a trade deal; that is a matter for UK sovereign Government regulation.

### Protectionism

11. **Ruth Edwards** (Rushcliffe) (Con): What her policy is on protectionism. [902524]

**The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss):** As we emerge from the covid crisis, it is vital that we keep free trade flowing. That is why the UK has been making that case with G20 Trade Ministers and the WTO. We have another G20 meeting this Thursday, where I want to see further action to cut tariffs on medical products, and for longer-term WTO reform.

**Ruth Edwards** [V]: Stilton producers, such as the excellent dairies of Cropwell Bishop and Colston Bassett in my constituency, face a 25% tariff when they export to the US market. Can my right hon. Friend tell me what progress has been made, in the first week of negotiations, to reduce those tariffs?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are determined to get those tariffs reduced and removed on products like Stilton, and the brilliant producers in my hon. Friend's constituency. The Stilton Cheese Makers' Association has backed a US deal, saying that a US free trade agreement will help recognise Stilton cheese further in the US, and bring down some of the existing barriers that we are currently facing.

### Import of Medical Products

12. **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): What steps he is taking to expedite the import of essential medical products during the covid-19 outbreak. [902518]

13. **Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): What steps he is taking to expedite the import of essential medical products during the covid-19 outbreak. [902543]

**The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands):** We continue to work tirelessly to secure vital supplies of medical equipment from overseas partners to meet UK demand. Hundreds of millions of units of PPE have been procured and over 2,000 ventilators have arrived in the UK thanks to our trade and FCO networks.

**Grahame Morris** [V]: Across the world, we are being advised to wash our hands with soap regularly to keep us safe from the virus, but the average import tariff on soap among WTO members stands at 17%, with some

countries charging tariffs of up to 65%. What steps has the Minister taken to seek global agreement to reduce tariffs on the import of soap and other hygiene products, to combat the spread of covid-19?

**Greg Hands:** That is a very good question and I thank the hon. Gentleman for asking it. We are working tirelessly, at different international forums, to ensure that trade barriers—either long-standing barriers or ones that have been thrown up as a result of the crisis—are reduced or removed. For example, just last month, at the UK's initiative, the G20 Trade Ministers met and discussed a lot of these and took significant action. We have also been lobbying bilaterally, most successfully, with India to ensure that such barriers are reduced or removed.

**Dan Carden** [V]: It is shameful that our national stockpile of PPE dwindled during years of austerity. The Government's response since has been one of confusion and panic—missing three chances to join the EU scheme to bulk buy PPE, and the recent fiasco of flying in unusable gowns from Turkey. What discussions are Ministers having with the Governments of New Zealand, Singapore and other WTO countries to support global efforts to keep medical supply chains running during and beyond this crisis?

**Greg Hands:** We are extremely active at the WTO and other forums, including the G20, to ensure that products flow. We have delivered 1.22 billion items of PPE to the NHS, which is a tremendous achievement. That includes 40 million safety goggles and 1.3 billion face masks; the numbers are substantial. On the action that we are taking at the WTO, we continue to lobby at all levels. May I just correct the hon. Gentleman on one point—about the delivery of 400,000 Turkish gowns? That number represents a tiny proportion of the total, and only a tiny proportion of those gowns were actually found to be defective. We are very thankful to Turkish suppliers for what they have done.

**Mr Speaker:** It would be remiss of me not to welcome the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) to her new role.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. May I also thank my colleagues for asking such vital questions about shortages of PPE and other essential medical supplies?

One area where we have, thankfully, not seen shortages to date is the supply of prescription medicines, thanks to the so-called Brexit buffer of supplies built up in preparation for a no-deal Brexit. But given that this buffer only provides somewhere between three to six months of supplies, will the Minister tell us how the Government are getting on with replenishing these stocks from imports, so that we do not experience any shortages once the Brexit buffer starts to run out?

**Greg Hands:** I join the Secretary of the State in welcoming the right hon. Lady to her position. After four years of the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), we always look forward to seeing somebody new at the Dispatch Box.

Again, we are active in all available forums to ensure that the UK's supply of prescription and non-prescription medicines continues. For example, following the restrictions

that India put in place on 3 March, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been very active with the Indian Trade Minister to get almost all those restrictions removed. We will continue to be active with all our trade partners to ensure that products continue to flow to our NHS at this time.

### Human Rights

15. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with UK trade partners on including clauses on human rights in future trade deals. [902551]

**The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands):** The UK has a strong history of safeguarding human rights and promoting our values globally. Our strong economic relationships with trading partners allow the Government to have open discussions on a range of important issues, including human rights. We continue to encourage all states to uphold international human rights obligations.

**Dr Huq [V]:** Twenty-one countries have been listed where negotiations are ongoing with regard to rolling over existing trade agreements beyond 31 December. A number of those countries have shockingly poor human rights records, including Cameroon, Egypt, Singapore, Uganda and South Sudan. Will the Minister tell us whether human rights are part of those discussions? Also, in order to ensure that there is no saying one thing and doing another while everyone is diverted by coronavirus, will he guarantee the inclusion of human rights clauses in any eventual deals?

**Greg Hands:** I think the hon. Lady is referring to the various EU agreements. She was a passionate campaigner—and, I think, still is—to remain in the EU. Of course, if we had remained we would still be in those trade agreements with the self-same countries that she mentioned, but we are clear that the UK will remain a strong voice for human rights and that more trade does not have to come at the expense of human rights, and we will continue to encourage all states to uphold international human rights obligations.

### Covid-19: Business Support

16. **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): What recent steps she has taken to support businesses trading internationally that are affected by the covid-19 pandemic. [902555]

17. **Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): What recent steps she has taken to support businesses trading internationally that are affected by the covid-19 pandemic. [902539]

**The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands):** In response to covid-19, the Department continues to support UK businesses to trade. Office for National Statistics data states that 75.4% of businesses are continuing to trade.

**Vicky Foxcroft [V]:** For British companies that trade overseas, the one thing guaranteed to make a very bad situation even worse would be the loss of free frictionless trade with the rest of the EU at the end of the year, so will the Minister reassure UK firms that the top priority when it comes to trade is securing the free trade agreement that we need with Europe?

**Greg Hands:** Of course. The hon. Lady will have seen that the UK is continuing the negotiations, which the chief negotiator David Frost has been doing virtually. We have completed the first round and we look forward to getting the trade agreement that I believe is in the interests of both sides and which will bring relief to British business and others at this important time.

**Julie Elliott [V]:** In Sunderland and the wider north-east, lots of businesses—large, small and start-ups—rely on international supply chains as they trade internationally. What are the Government doing in these challenging times to ensure that international supply chains are protected?

**Greg Hands:** The hon. Lady asks a good question. One important thing that we will learn from this crisis is the importance of the robustness of supply chains. Currently, most of the focus is obviously on medical supplies, but that will extend more broadly. We need to make sure that we have diverse sources of supply, that the supply chains that ensue are robust, and that we have choice and diversity in respect of where we procure our goods from.

### Covid-19: Trade Barriers

18. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the effect of trade barriers to UK exports on the UK's contribution to the global economic recovery from the covid-19 pandemic. [902533]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart):** The hon. Lady is right to highlight the negative impact of trade barriers. OECD analysis shows that cutting tariffs and addressing unnecessary costs associated with non-tariff measures could increase trade by more than 20% among G20 economies. We are working to remove barriers for UK exporters around the world—from helping British beef and lamb to export in Japan to obtaining geographic protection for Scotch whisky in Indonesia.

**Deidre Brock [V]:** The most recent WTO review saw G20 economies implement 28 new trade-restrictive measures, estimated to cover around \$460 billion of trade, and import-restrictive measures in force for the period January-October 2019 are now estimated to cover \$1.6 trillion, which suggests that import restrictions have continued to grow. It is obvious that we need resilience in our economies, but does the Minister agree that that cannot be an excuse to engage in economic protectionism or simply close down value chains?

**Graham Stuart:** I entirely agree with the sentiments expressed by the hon. Lady; she is absolutely right. Pre-covid, over the past decade, perhaps since the financial crash, there has been an increase in the number of trade barriers that have been erected, which is why, as an independent nation once again, we are so determined to champion free trade and to use the WTO and the other international forums referred to by colleagues to make sure that we make that case. It will lead to prosperity for all.

### Africa: Trade Negotiations

19. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): What recent progress her Department has made on trade negotiations with African countries. [902527]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart):** I thank my hon. Friend for his work as chair of the all-party group on Ethiopia and Djibouti. The UK has signed continuity trade agreements that secure our long-term trading relationship with 11 African countries, and a further 35 will benefit from our unilateral preferences scheme. We continue to work with our partners on arrangements for the remaining African countries covered by EU agreements, in a way that reflects the current economic and public health realities.

**Mr Robertson [V]:** I thank the Minister for that response. Does he agree that trade is the best way out of poverty for developing countries? Bringing that idea together with the fact that the United Kingdom is looking to forge trade agreements around the world would create a bigger benefit. Will the Minister do everything he possibly can to bring about strong trade agreements with African countries?

**Graham Stuart:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is a win-win situation for the UK economy and those developing countries in Africa, and it is so important that we work together. To those considering seeking to put up barriers to foreign produce in our consideration of the Agriculture Bill tomorrow, I should say that not only would that breach the WTO's global rules and hurt our good name in the international community, but it could also have the effect of restricting imports from developing countries, including those in Africa. Surely no one should wish for that.

## DEFENCE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### South China Sea Operations

**Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con):** Whether the Royal Navy plans to continue operations in the South China sea. [902468]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace):** May I just pay tribute to the men and women of the armed forces who have risen to the challenge of helping to deal with covid? We will find them up and down this country, and indeed in Whitehall, embedded right across the system helping to deliver the response. May I also welcome to his place the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey)? I look forward to working with him to tackle the issues around defence.

The Royal Navy, along with other NATO allies, will continue to uphold the right of navigation across the globe. This is an inviolable right, and, where it is threatened, the UK will always be at the forefront of defending it.

**Andrew Lewer [V]:** The Royal Navy is at its best when it works closely with our allies. Will the Minister update the House on recent co-operation with the Royal Australian Navy?

**Mr Wallace:** The Royal Navy and the Royal Australian Navy collaborate across the globe on a near daily basis. Only this morning, I had an hour-long conversation with my counterpart in Australia. The Type 26 Hunter-class frigate partnership has flourished through the Global Combat Ship user group. Operationally, we have worked

closely on the management and challenges of covid-19 in the maritime sector, as well as in the Strait of Hormuz, providing security to global shipping.

**Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con):** I echo the comments of the Defence Secretary and say thank you to our armed forces for what they are doing to tackle the coronavirus. The British people may have come together as one nation, but the same cannot be said on an international level, which is a very different picture. Our world order was already in a fragile state, but now, under the fog of covid-19, countries such as China and Russia are exploiting this global distraction to further their own geopolitical agendas. May I ask him to call for an urgent meeting of the National Security Council to review our competitors' activities, which, left unchecked, could lead to serious conflict in the future?

**Mr Wallace:** My right hon. Friend makes the important point that there are adversaries and competitors around the world seeking to use this horrendous outbreak not only to exploit our differences, but to further their ambitions. I urge them to focus on the matter at hand, which is tackling covid collectively around the world, rather than taking advantage of that. On the point about the NSC, the decision to call an NSC meeting is a matter for the Government Security Directorate in the Cabinet Office, the Cabinet and the Prime Minister. It is not the case that, by not having such a meeting, we have no agenda on security. We meet the threat every single day and, indeed, many of the decisions made at the NSC are enduring and do not need to be refreshed unless there is a major turn of events. We will keep the situation under review, as will, I know, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

### Covid-19: Departmental Support

**Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con):** What support his Department has provided in tackling the covid-19 outbreak. [902472]

**David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con):** What support his Department has provided in tackling the covid-19 outbreak. [902477]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace):** On any given day, up to 4,000 men and women of the armed forces support the Government's response to covid.

**Dr Wallis [V]:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in times of crisis such as the current covid-19 pandemic, our best approach is a united one? Can he therefore describe how the military has helped the people of Wales in dealing with covid-19?

**Mr Wallace:** Joint Military Command Wales has provided mobile decontamination teams and drivers to support the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust. It has also provided general duties personnel to unload PPE from aircraft at Cardiff Airport and transfer it to civilian trucks for onward distribution to Bridgend. As of 10 May, there are 30 military planners also embedded with the Welsh Government.

**Mr Speaker:** Let us head up to north of the border to David Duguid.

**David Duguid [V]:** I welcome the intervention of the Ministry of Defence in supporting the covid-19 testing capacity across the whole UK, but can my right hon. Friend tell me what discussions he has had with the Department of Health and Social Care and the devolved Administrations on the effectiveness of those MOD testing facilities, and will he meet me, at least virtually, to discuss specific issues that we have had recently in Peterhead in my own constituency?

**Mr Wallace:** Mobile testing is a capability developed between the Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Defence under DHSC direction. NHS Scotland decides on the location to which each mobile testing unit will be deployed in Scotland. Peterhead, to which my hon. Friend refers, was an isolated incident in which the opening of the site was delayed due to capacity issues with central laboratories. Unfortunately, the site incorrectly remained open on the digital booking portal for a few hours longer. Such bookings were accepted when the site opened on 4 May. I am happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss further the use and deployment of mobile facilities throughout Scotland.

**Mr Speaker:** In calling the new shadow Secretary of State, I welcome him to his post.

**John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab):** Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Secretary of State for his welcome, too. It is a privilege to take on this role, which has always been so important to the Labour party. We will do right by our armed forces and veterans and we will promote their role as a force for good at home and abroad. Like the Secretary of State, I pay tribute to our military's essential role in helping the country to respond to the covid crisis. They are keeping us safe, and it is right that we do everything we can to keep them safe.

The US Defence Department has increased its testing capacity to 30,000 military personnel a week. It has set out a strategic testing plan and has now tested everyone deemed a priority for national security, including strategic deterrence, nuclear deterrence, anti-terror forces and healthcare as well as, of course, its entire covid support force. Has the Secretary of State done the same here in the UK?

**Mr Wallace:** I am grateful to the right hon. Member. May I place on record a tribute to his predecessor, the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), who did a great job as shadow Defence Secretary, sometimes in difficult circumstances?

We have done it slightly differently from the United States with testing our personnel. We have no problems whatsoever testing whoever we want, when we want. The best example I can give is that, before embarkation, we tested all 799 of the crew of the Queen Elizabeth carrier. We will test them again throughout their period of sailing and when they return.

We have a strategy around protecting the national security-vital parts of our forces, which involves testing and quarantine. That is also being carried out in areas that I will not particularly comment on; nevertheless, the right hon. Member mentioned what the Americans view as strategically important. We do not have a mass programme; we have testing that is available—we do not have any problems acquiring it—and, as we bring

forces up to either readiness or deployment, there is an opportunity if required, if quarantine has not done the job, to test them as well.

**Mr Speaker:** We need to shorten the answers.

**John Healey:** The Secretary of State talked about testing who we want when we want, but he gave no definition of that. The last published figures show that we had tested just 1% of our entire military personnel. This is about keeping our armed forces safe and safeguarding our national security. There is no fix for coronavirus without mass testing, and we really expect the Ministry of Defence to lead the way, not lag behind, so will he get a grip of this? Will he produce a plan for testing our military, set a target for the number of tests and publish the results, just as our allies in the US have done?

**Mr Wallace:** I am grateful to the right hon. Member. The reality is that we have a grip, because we do have a plan. We have certain individuals whom we treat as a priority and, at the same time, we have all the availability we need for testing; getting it is not a problem. He will know that the vast majority of our military in the UK have been sent home to self-isolate in their homes and follow what the rest of society is doing; they are not on duty, en masse back in their barracks unless they are part of the covid force.

Those who are part of the covid force and either feel symptoms or come into contact with someone will be tested. There is a clear path for them, through the medical officers and the direction of the commands, to get testing. There is a plan. Unlike the United States, we have sent many of our personnel home. They can acquire testing, if they feel the need, in the same way as the rest of the public. When we bring them back for duty, we will have a proper regime for getting back to work, following the Government's changes to advice. In getting back to work, a comprehensive testing plan will be included.

#### **Covid-19 Support: Armed Forces**

**Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con):** What assessment his Department has made of the additional support that armed forces personnel could provide to help tackle the covid-19 outbreak. [902479]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace):** Defence remains ready to contribute however requested, with a further 16,000 troops available at high readiness if required. We keep our support under constant review and adjust the capabilities available to meet demand. We have liaison officers deployed in the other Government Departments and local resilience forums, which provide the standing joint commander and the Defence head office with insight into developing needs.

**Stephen McPartland [V]:** As the crisis develops in our care homes across the country, does my right hon. Friend agree that our military are ready and able to help our local authorities if they need that support to get into care homes and provide the logistical support to get PPE to the people who need it?

**Mr Wallace:** My hon. Friend raises a very important point about care homes. There are two parts to the issue: one is infections in care homes; and one is, effectively,



leakage of infections from care homes into the wider community. Only this morning I spoke to the Prime Minister about offering up more military support if needed to make sure that our local resilience forums and care homes get the assistance they need, whether that is bringing testing to care homes or helping them with the routine and structure of decontamination, so that staff can come and go better from care homes. We stand ready to do that as required by the Department of Health and Social Care and any other stakeholder.

### **Covid-19 Support: Armed Forces**

**Royston Smith** (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): What assessment he has made of the contribution of the armed forces in tackling the covid-19 outbreak. [902484]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace):** Reflecting on where the armed forces have been needed most shows that we have helped the most in logistics, command and control, and testing. The MOD's strengths of moving at pace, assessing the situation, and resilience have been key enablers to the rest of Government.

**Royston Smith** [V]: I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all our armed forces personnel for their significant contribution to the nation's efforts to tackle the covid-19 virus. What plans does my right hon. Friend have for service personnel in the continuing battle as we enter phase 2 of this process?

**Mr Wallace:** As I have said, the armed forces have played a vital role in supporting the NHS and others to manage the situation, and I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to them. Defence remains ready to contribute, as requested, by any civil authorities through the MACA—military assistance to civilian authority—system. After this crisis started, as Defence Secretary, I took the decision very early on to devolve the power to grant military assistance right down to the regional commands—so it is not from my desk, from the bureaucracy of head office—and those regional commanders stand ready to call on the whole forces of the covid force for support as needed.

**Mr Speaker:** We go up to Sunderland again—I welcome the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), to her new position.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The armed forces are indeed playing a vital part in helping the country through this coronavirus crisis, as are our veterans, who, across the country, are volunteering to help their local community, and I commend them all for their contribution. Many are helping other veterans because the Government have closed the Veterans UK helpline. Will the Secretary of State set out why he decided to close the helpline in the midst of this crisis, when many veterans will need its help and support?

**Mr Wallace:** From my understanding of the helpline, the activity that it did remained and, in fact, the vast majority moved online, reflecting the changes to the working patterns that we all have to face. We have found that the services are still being delivered. My hon. Friend the Minister for Defence People and Veterans

has reported that there is no decline in the service being given to those veterans—this is about the medium that is currently being used. However, as soon as possible—indeed, maybe it has already started—we will be returning to some form of telephone service alongside the online service. The feedback, both from charities and veterans, is that they are getting the service they require, and my hon. Friend is absolutely, on a daily basis, keeping on top of that.

### **Covid-19: Disinformation**

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling the spread of disinformation on covid-19. [902492]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace):** Defence is supporting the Government's campaign against covid-19 disinformation, specifically to counter disinformation, misinformation and malign information from abroad. The Government are also working closely with social media platforms, academia and civil society to tackle this issue, although I stress that this is not a role undertaken by our military personnel. The Government's particular focus remains on promoting factual public health advice and countering inaccurate content.

**Chris Law** [V]: In many cases, disinformation about covid-19 can travel faster than the virus itself and pose just as great a threat to our security. Does the Secretary of State agree with me and with the majority of the public surveyed by the Open Knowledge Foundation that the Government need urgently to impose compulsory action on social media sites to clamp down on the spread of such disinformation?

**Mr Wallace:** The hon. Member will know that, not just in this world of the coronavirus battle but previously, in the world of exploitation, misinformation, radicalisation and other areas, the biggest challenge for Governments across Europe has been how to deal with social media companies, many of which are based abroad. The extent of our powers and jurisdiction is sometimes limited. We have consulted widely about duties of care, but in this outbreak we are seeing media outlets way away from this part of the world that have no regard for the facts or truth magnifying or spreading propaganda in real time. That is the challenge we have. No amount of legislation will be able to deal with some foreign outlets that are based elsewhere or linked to Governments elsewhere, and that is a challenge. To be fair, the mainstream social media outlets, which are often United States-based, have been more responsible in this; Facebook, Twitter and so on have stepped up to the plate and removed lots of content when it has been pointed out to them.

### **Covid-19: Defence Science and Technology Laboratory**

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What work the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory is undertaking to tackle the spread of covid-19. [902469]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin)** [V]: Two hundred and seventy-five civilian scientists and 13 embedded military personnel from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory are currently deploying their unique capabilities right across Government.

That includes statistical analysis, decontamination trials, assistance on testing laboratories, and experiments on how the virus survives in the atmosphere.

**Patricia Gibson** [V]: It has been reported that the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory is conducting studies on Citriodiol, an ingredient found in insect repellent, to test its effect on covid-19. Can the Minister tell us if and how our armed forces are involved in those tests? If the tests show that the ingredient is effective against the virus, when will it be available for use on the covid frontline?

**Jeremy Quin** [V]: As the hon. Lady will be aware, Citriodiol is a natural extract of lemon eucalyptus oil, and it is readily available to the public in a range of insect repellents. It has been issued to members of the armed forces to use at their discretion if they wish to. We are aware that it was efficacious against SARS. There is no evidence as yet as to whether it is useful against covid-19, but I can confirm, as per the hon. Lady's question, that, at the request of the Surgeon General, Dstl is conducting tests on this product to see whether it is efficacious. If it is, we will of course let the House know and let that be known more widely as soon as possible.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP) [V]: May I, too, put on the record my thanks to the armed forces, particularly for helping with building the NHS Louisa Jordan in my home city, Glasgow?

This Citriodiol issue is deeply serious. The Minister has just said himself that there is no evidence that it is effective in the fight against covid-19, yet it was dished out to the armed forces without being tested. Can he tell us on what basis it was given out? Will he publish the guidance that was given to members of the armed forces? Did it go through an ethics committee? Who signed it off without its being tested? A false sense of security can be deadly.

**Mr Speaker**: I do not know whether you got that, Minister; it was a bad line.

**Jeremy Quin** [V]: As I emphasised in response to the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), Citriodiol is a natural product—it is a natural extract of lemon eucalyptus oil—and it is readily available to the public as an insect repellent. We know that it was efficacious in the past, and the view was that if it was efficacious against SARS in the past, it may have properties that are useful against covid-19, but we have been very clear that that is not as a result of tests. It is very early days. Those tests are ongoing. If they prove that there are positive properties, that will be shared. However, this is just one very small element in a range of protections provided to our armed forces personnel, including appropriate PPE and all the appropriate hygiene and other instructions that are widely shared and widely known.

**Mr Speaker**: We need to speed up the answers as well.

#### **Covid-19: Government Procurement**

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to support Government procurement during the covid-19 outbreak. [902471]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin)** [V]: Defence's considerable commercial expertise is actively supporting the national effort in providing procurement, supply chain and logistics advice and expertise across Government. As a purchaser of some £19 billion of equipment and services annually, we are also working closely with our suppliers to support them at this difficult time.

**Stephen Metcalfe** [V]: In times of trouble, we rely on our armed forces as much now as we did 75 years ago, as embodied by Basildon resident and veteran Don Sheppard, who celebrated his 100th birthday last week. There are many who also rely on defence procurement for their livelihoods. How has my hon. Friend ensured that small businesses and the jobs they provide, which are particularly important in my constituency, are being protected at this time?

**Jeremy Quin** [V]: I am sure we would all wish to congratulate Mr Sheppard on his century, just as we all thank his extraordinary generation for their fortitude and service to our country.

My hon. Friend is right about the importance of defence jobs. There are 119,000 employed directly in the defence industry, and we are hugely grateful to all who have persevered in maintaining critical defence tasks at this difficult time. Our suppliers have made clear their determination to ensure safe working environments. We have worked with them to support the industry right through the supply chain, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, and we are grateful for all their work.

#### **Covid-19: Defence Industry**

**Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the defence industry. [902473]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin)** [V]: We remain closely engaged with our strategic suppliers and continue to monitor the impact of covid-19 on the defence sector during this difficult time. We are engaged with defence primes and with SMEs, directly and via the prime contractors. As I said, the sector employs 119,000 people directly, and we are committed to its success.

**Mr Speaker**: We now go up to sunny Manchester and Lucy Powell.

**Lucy Powell** [V]: It's always sunny here, Mr Speaker.

The UK's world-leading defence industry is critical to our national security as well as our prosperity, particularly here in the north-west, as the Minister has just outlined, but its future capability is inextricably linked to the aviation industry, which is now suffering a collapse in demand. Will the Government now commit to bringing forward major research and development programmes and clean tech to help support the whole sector, especially SMEs and others, to retain jobs and capability?

**Jeremy Quin** [V]: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question from sunny Manchester. The Government are providing a range of help and support across the board to every industry, as she is aware. In defence in particular—she is absolutely right that many defence

companies have aerospace arms—we have been clear that we want to do everything we can to help. That includes ensuring prompt payment and looking, where appropriate, at interim payments to support companies where they are requested and required. We are doing our utmost to work with the industry, and I will be saying that again at the defence suppliers forum, which I will chair virtually later this week.

#### Armed Forces: Capabilities

**James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that the projected capabilities of the armed forces over the next 10 years are adequate to meet future expected threats to national security. [902475]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin)** [V]: The Ministry of Defence has rigorous processes to test its capabilities and force structure to ensure they are robust against the ever-evolving threats to our country and our allies. We will be assisted in doing this by the forthcoming cross-Government integrated review.

**James Sunderland**: I pay tribute to everyone involved in the covid support force. Will the Minister give an early indication of how this current deployment might influence the integrated review and whether defence planning assumptions will be amended to reflect the fact that the MOD has again provided extensive liability to support the civil power?

**Jeremy Quin** [V]: My hon. and gallant Friend is absolutely right that the lessons learned will be picked up by the IR. There will be many points to take on board from what has been a formidable military effort, including the value of being plugged in early for effective working at regional and devolved level. The huge value of our reserves, not only to their local links but for the specialist skills they can bring to bear, and for their agility in coping with all the tasks of our brilliant military planners and logisticians, is a point that will not be lost on my hon. and gallant Friend, a former commanding officer of 27 Regiment Royal Logistics Corps.

#### VE Day Commemoration

**Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to commemorate VE Day. [902478]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey)** [V]: I am sure the whole country was disappointed that the planned parades and commemorations could not take place, but the activities we did manage were, I felt, still a very fitting tribute to the greatest generation. From the Red Arrows over London to our ships at sea and the military banners in the gardens of Downing Street, I was proud of the way our armed forces still managed to mark such an important moment for our nation.

**Mrs Murray** [V]: My dad fought in Burma during the second world war, and clearly VJ Day has always been very significant to my family. What plans does my hon. Friend have to celebrate VJ Day in the middle of August?

**James Heapey** [V]: First, may I thank my hon. Friend for her unstinting support for our nation's armed forces? Like everybody, I am hoping the lockdown measures will have been lifted further to allow us to celebrate and commemorate VJ Day properly later in the summer. That day is every bit as important as VE Day, and the MOD wants to make sure that it is marked just as enthusiastically.

#### Covid-19: Overseas Territories

**Paul Bristow** (Peterborough) (Con): What support his Department has provided to the overseas territories during the covid-19 pandemic. [902485]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey)** [V]: HMS Medway and RFA Argus, along with 30 military personnel, are currently deployed in the Caribbean, and our garrisons in the overseas territories have been engaged in supporting the local communities as they are required.

**Paul Bristow** [V]: It is great to hear how our country has helped the Caribbean overseas territories during this emergency. Will the Minister also assure me that our armed forces will have enough resources to support any future humanitarian assistance or disaster relief, if that is needed?

**James Heapey** [V]: People in the overseas territories will be reassured to see their plight being raised by my hon. Friend in the House today. HMS Medway and RFA Argus are already on post in the Caribbean, but additional naval assets and personnel are on standby. The commitment of our armed forces to support the overseas territories in times of pandemic or national disaster, or whatever else, is unwavering.

#### Covid-19: Support for Veterans

**Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Con): What support his Department has provided to veterans during the covid-19 outbreak. [902470]

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What support his Department is providing for veterans during the covid-19 outbreak. [902480]

**Paula Barker** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): What support his Department is providing for veterans during the covid-19 outbreak. [902482]

**Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): What support his Department is providing for veterans during the covid-19 outbreak. [902483]

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): What support his Department is providing for veterans during the covid-19 outbreak. [902489]

**The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer)** [V]: I have used this unprecedented situation to continue to modernise and improve our support for

veterans in the UK. Last week, I launched the first stage in placing veterans' care in the palm of the hand of every veteran in the country, with the launch of the smartphone application of Veterans UK. I have also secured £6 million of funding from the Treasury for service charities at this time.

**Christian Wakeford [V]:** Although the UK was unable to celebrate VE Day as originally planned, because of the threat of covid-19, it is still important that we remember and support the veterans who bravely played their part in fighting for peace and who sacrificed so much for our freedom. The UK's armed forces compensation scheme, which helps veterans claim for injuries obtained while they were in the armed forces, was temporarily paused because of the covid-19 lockdown. Can the Minister assure my constituents that payments will be made as soon as possible? When will those payments be made?

**Johnny Mercer [V]:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I am afraid he may be slightly misinformed; we have not missed any payments. We made 470,000 payments last month. Veterans' care has not been suspended in the UK. We have, as the Secretary of State mentioned earlier, changed the way we provide services, but I am unaware of a single veteran currently in the care of Veterans UK who has not had their need met during this time.

**Andrew Gwynne [V]:** But that is not good enough. Other Departments and businesses have found ways of operating call centres safely, so at a time when the nation has been awed by the efforts of Captain Tom Moore, why has the Ministry of Defence closed its vital Veterans UK helpline—the telephone service? It is not good enough.

**Johnny Mercer:** I am certainly not going to take lectures on what is and is not good enough from a Labour party whose veterans' care I experienced over a number of years. No services have been closed. We have changed the way of doing business. Clearly we cannot do new face-to-face consultations at this time. Again, I reiterate that not a single veteran in the care of Veterans UK has had their needs unmet at this time. I would caution Members against politicising what is clearly a very important issue.

**Paula Barker [V]:** Half of respondents to a recent Army Families Federation survey said that they had received no information at all about the Ministry of Defence's future accommodation model. What are the Government doing to rectify that?

**Johnny Mercer:** Again, I find that hard to believe, because we have gone out on a huge programme of engagement around the future accommodation model. This is a significant part of what the Government are doing to invest in what we call the offer to keep people within the military. If anybody requires that information, I am more than happy for them to get in touch with me. We have used the Army Families Federation's publications and so on. I am always happy to do more. This is a communications battle we are determined to win. It is a positive step, and I look forward to engaging further with the Army Families Federation in future.

**Mr Speaker:** The final question is from Emma Hardy in Hull.

**Emma Hardy [V]:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Minister has heard me speak previously about how fortunate veterans in Hull are to be supported by the Hull Veterans Support Centre and Hull 4 Heroes, which have been doing an incredible job in providing resources and mental health support. But I remain concerned that these are charities and are therefore competing with all other charities for donations at this time. So what specific funding can the Minister make available to support veterans' charities?

**Johnny Mercer:** I pay tribute to Hull 4 Heroes, which the hon. Lady knows I have been in contact with. It has done an amazing job during this time, as have many in the veterans' sector. We have secured an initial £6 million out of the Treasury to support veterans' charities at this time. But make no mistake—the environment that these charities operate in is changing, and will change, as a result of covid-19. I am absolutely determined to make sure that the ambition the Prime Minister has set out—that this is the best country in the world to be a veteran—is realised in due course.

**Mr Speaker:** Excellent. We now come to the urgent question. I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, and wish him a happy 40th birthday. He should speak for no more than three minutes.

## Covid-19: Economic Package

12.32 pm

**Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op) [V] (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's economic package in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak)**: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your warm wishes.

This Government's plan is one of the most comprehensive anywhere in the world. We have provided billions of pounds of cash grants, tax cuts and loans for over 1 million businesses, tens of billions of pounds of deferred taxes, income protection for millions of the self-employed, and a strengthened safety net to protect millions of our most vulnerable people. These schemes speak to my and this Conservative Government's values. We believe in the dignity of work, and we are doing everything we can to protect people currently unable to work.

Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out our plan for the next phase of the public health response, and today I can confirm the next stage of our job retention scheme. This scheme has been a world-leading economic intervention, supporting livelihoods and protecting futures. Seven and a half million jobs have been furloughed—jobs we could have lost if we had not acted—and nearly 1 million businesses supported which could have closed shop for good.

As we reopen the economy, we will need to support people back to work. We will do so in a measured way. I can announce today that the job retention scheme will be extended for four months, until the end of October. By that point, we will have provided eight months of support to British people and businesses. Until the end of July, there will be no changes whatsoever, from August to October the scheme will continue for all sectors and regions of the UK, but with greater flexibility to support the transition back to work. Employers currently using the scheme will be able to bring furloughed employees back part time. We will ask employers to start sharing with the Government the cost of paying people's salaries.

Full details will follow by the end of May, but I want to assure people today of one thing that will not change: workers will, through the combined efforts of the Government and employers, continue to receive the same level of overall support as they do now, at 80% of their current salary, up to £2,500 a month.

I am extending the scheme because I will not give up on the people who rely on it. Our message today is simple. We stood behind Britain's workers and businesses as we came into this crisis and we will stand behind them as we come through on the other side.

**Mr Speaker**: I now call Anneliese Dodds, who is speaking virtually. I ask her to speak for no more than two minutes.

**Anneliese Dodds**: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. I would also like to wish the Chancellor many happy returns.

As a constructive Opposition, we want to work with the Government to ensure that people's jobs and incomes are protected and the furlough scheme is a critical

element of that. Many of the more than 6 million people who are currently furloughed were taken aback by comments made in the media by Government spokespeople suggesting that, for example, people needed to be weaned off an addiction to the scheme. There were many intimations that changes might have been announced to that scheme by the Chancellor, potentially in the media, without the opportunity for proper scrutiny.

I have only heard about these changes in the last few seconds. We will look at them very carefully, but there are some critical principles that the Chancellor surely must follow as he redesigns the scheme.

First, we must acknowledge that people did not want to be furloughed. It occurred through no choice of their own and through following the Government's advice about the closure of sectors. It is critically important that they are not penalised for that choice.

I welcome the flexibility mentioned. We have asked for that repeatedly; it applies in many other countries. It has been a long time coming, but I welcome the fact that it is occurring now.

That flexibility includes an employer contribution, so the Chancellor needs to provide more information about that employer contribution now. He also surely needs to provide more information about alternatives to the scheme. Other countries have job creation, training schemes and redeployment schemes. We do not have those yet. Will the Chancellor work with me, trade unions, businesses, local authorities and further and higher education institutions to create the support that is so desperately needed?

**Rishi Sunak**: I thank the shadow Chancellor for her warm wishes and for the constructive support for today's announcement. I will address two specific points that she raised. First, the word addiction is not one that I have ever used and it is not one that I agree with. Nobody who is on the furlough scheme wants to be on the scheme. People up and down the country believe in the dignity of their work, of going to work and providing for their families. It is not their fault that their business has been asked to close. It is not their fault that they have been asked to stay at home. That is why I established the scheme to support those people and their livelihoods at this critical time. I wholeheartedly agree with the shadow Chancellor in that regard.

On the next steps, I am pleased to tell her that I have already been talking to the TUC and, indeed, the CBI about the future; helping those people to get back into work who, unfortunately, may lose their jobs through this period. That issue weighs heavily on my mind. Every person who loses their job through this difficult period is a person the Government are determined to stand behind, whether that is with new skills, new training or indeed through supporting businesses to create new jobs. We are determined to make sure that that happens. I look forward to continuing my conversations with Opposition Members and with the trade unions, the CBI and other business groups as we look forward to a brighter future. As we get through this crisis, people can come back to work and we can create the jobs and opportunities, and a brighter future for tomorrow.

**Mel Stride** (Central Devon) (Con) [V]: I broadly welcome the statement the Chancellor has made relating to furlough and, in particular, the additional flexibilities

[Mel Stride]

that he has outlined, most notably about part-time working. However, as we come through this crisis, many businesses will be saddled with significant debts just at the time that we are looking to those businesses to invest and to grow the economy. Does he therefore agree that it is vital that the Government come forward as soon as possible with a clear plan as to how they are going to assist those companies with that indebtedness in terms of debt forbearance and equity finance so that they can fire up the economy and grow the jobs that the country will so desperately need?

**Rishi Sunak:** As always, my right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I agree that debt is not the answer to all businesses' problems at this time, which is why we have provided business with unprecedented degrees of direct cash support, with cash grants of £10,000 or £25,000 for up to 1 million businesses and 750,000 businesses benefiting from a cut in their business taxes and tax deferrals. All of that will help. With regard to equity in supporting the future, I hope he will agree that the Future Fund that we have announced will be part of that solution, with the Government matching essentially quasi-equity investments in early-stage companies to ensure that they are here to power the growth and innovation we will need as we recover from this crisis.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP) [V]: I wish the Chancellor a very happy birthday. The coronavirus job retention scheme has kept people from unemployment at a cost to other parts of the UK Government's spending and to the economy as a whole. I welcome his commitment to extend it to October and to look at flexibility in the scheme, because that is something that many, including the Scottish National party, have been calling for. We await the details of that, which I hope we will see before too long. Does he recognise that removing or reducing wage support levels in the furlough scheme prematurely would increase universal credit claims, force workers back to work before it is safe for them, and risk a second peak? The Scottish Government have been clear that the stay-at-home advice has not changed, so will the Chancellor commit today to ensuring that the job retention scheme will remain in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland if our lockdowns continue longer than in England? Lastly, will he commit to looking at the gaps within the scheme for new starters, and will he look at those businesses who are still waiting for money under the scheme, because he said that he would do whatever it takes, and if he does not fill those gaps, that will ring very hollow?

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank the hon. Lady for her warm wishes as well. To clarify, there will be no reduction in the level of support for those on the scheme. That is the commitment that I made earlier, so I am not entirely sure whether I understood her question right. It is crystal clear that those on the scheme have the reassurance that the level of support they will receive will not be changed. Those wages and support will now be shared by the Government and employers, but the levels and percentages of support will not change. I committed to bringing forward further details by the end of this month, while we work through some of the technical details of implementing part-time furloughing. As I

said at the outset, this is now an extension for four months to the end of October, which will provide eight months of support in total to all regions and all sectors of the United Kingdom. I think it provides a good, generous runway for businesses and firms to plan against, so that they can start getting back to work when the time is right, as per the Prime Minister's plan that was outlined on Sunday and Monday.

**Ben Everitt** (Milton Keynes North) (Con) [V]: We know that international comparisons should be made carefully, but I note that polling released yesterday showed that the UK is considered the best in the world for supporting businesses and jobs during the crisis, so what steps is the Chancellor taking to ensure that this success is continued for companies in Milton Keynes and elsewhere as we gradually come out of the lockdown?

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank my hon. Friend for mentioning that. He is indeed right. I was pleased to see polling that showed that people in this country felt that businesses were well supported, as compared with almost any other developed country. Indeed, the full scale of the economic intervention that we have put in place as a percentage of GDP stands as one of the most comprehensive anywhere in the world. I am very happy to continue listening to my hon. Friend to see what more we should be doing to support his businesses in Milton Keynes as they look forward to a future when they can start to reopen, start to get their employees back to work and start to rebuild our economy as we emerge from this crisis.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) [V]: I welcome the continuation of the furlough scheme and its new flexibility to allow part-time work. That is vital for businesses in Brighton, particularly those in tourism and hospitality. Will the Chancellor consider further support for that sector through a reduction in VAT on tourism? It is a policy that many of his Government MPs support. Will he consider revising the self-employed scheme by including small business owners who take their income in dividends, as well as those who combine PAYE with freelance work?

**Rishi Sunak:** Those who work for their own companies can indeed avail themselves of the coronavirus job retention scheme for the PAYE part of their income already. With regard to support for the hospitality and leisure sector, I agree that it is the sector that has been most impacted by what we are all going through, which is why it is the sector that has received the most support, with cash grants of up to £25,000 for those businesses—almost a million are eligible—and an entire business rates holiday worth almost £12 billion for the entire 12 months of this financial year. I believe that to be considerable support, but, of course, as we emerge from this crisis I keep all economic measures under review.

**James Daly** (Bury North) (Con) [V]: May I thank the Chancellor for the speed with which he has managed to get so much money out to help my constituents in Bury? Does he agree with me that the coronavirus job retention scheme is one of the most generous in the world? I express my gratitude to him for supporting so many jobs in my constituency and throughout the country, many of which would have been lost without these schemes.

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank my hon. Friend for his support, and he is absolutely right. In Bury, as elsewhere, businesses have benefited from the support that the Government have put in place. They have been able to retain their employees through using the scheme. That means that Bury, when we get through this crisis, can be in the forefront of making sure that our economy bounces back as strongly as it can. I look forward to hearing from him what more we can do to support his constituents and his businesses through this crisis.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab) [V]: The Mayor of Greater Manchester's United We Stream initiative has raised thousands of pounds for our creative industries, which make a vital contribution to our economy and to socioemotional wellbeing. With the sector likely to be among the last to exit lockdown, and with many artists working on a freelance or self-employed basis, will the Chancellor confirm that full support will be given to that vital sector for as long as is needed?

**Rishi Sunak:** I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has engaged extensively with that sector as part of planning for a future when people can get back to work and sectors can reopen in a responsible and safe way. That work is already ongoing. Of course, many people in that sector are benefiting already from our self-employment income support scheme, which opens this week for applications. People will start receiving their lump sum payment as early as next week, and I know that will make an enormous difference to the many tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people who work in that sector and will benefit from that scheme.

**Mrs Natalie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con) [V]: May I too welcome the Chancellor's announcement today on furlough? P&O and many ferry operators are benefiting from millions of pounds of support that the Chancellor has provided for furlough and freight. However, P&O, which is headquartered here in Dover, last night announced redundancy plans for more than a thousand jobs after its Dubai owners failed to provide the support that the company needs. Does the Chancellor agree with me that companies and their investors, such as Dubai, cannot simply rely on taxpayer handouts, but need to play their full part, investing and supporting British businesses and British jobs at this time?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is an excellent advocate for the freight industry and the importance of the port in her town, which does so much to help fuel the growth of our country. That is why I was pleased to extend support to the sector, to maintain our vital freight links.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right: as I said at the outset of this crisis, we are in this together—everyone has to play their role, and that means employers and companies as well doing their bit to support and protect their staff to the best of their ability and pitch in to help get through this crisis. I would be happy to talk to her further if there is more that she thinks we can do.

**Shabana Mahmood** (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab) [V]: Women are considerably more likely to be furloughed than men, and the disproportionate impact of covid-19 on our black, Asian and minority ethnic communities is already being investigated from a health perspective by

Public Health England. Has the Chancellor assessed the equality impact of all his package of economic measures on women and our BAME communities? If so, will he publish that impact assessment?

**Rishi Sunak:** What is clear and emerging is that the sectors and people most impacted by the lockdown are disproportionately women, as the hon. Member mentioned, and those in lower-paid sectors, who probably are financially less resilient. That is why the scheme is so important in providing job and income security to millions of people. That is why today I have made the decision to extend the scheme, to maximise the possibility that those people will have a job to go back to. The hon. Member can rest assured that I keep a very careful eye on all the impacts of the scheme. I do believe that it is benefiting some of the most vulnerable in our society today.

**James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): The Chancellor will be aware of widespread concern about the future of our commercial airlines—not least in constituencies such as mine near Heathrow, Gatwick and other major hubs. The CEO of International Airlines Group appeared yesterday before the Transport Committee and made it clear that job losses at British Airways were only being considered as a direct result of the pandemic. What further support might be available from the Government for UK aviation?

**Rishi Sunak:** Companies in the aviation sector, like all others, can benefit from the considerable range of support measures already announced—indeed, I know that many companies in the sector are benefiting currently from the jobs retention programme. Of course, individual companies have the opportunity to engage with the Government on a bilateral basis, where that is appropriate, but it obviously would not be right for me to comment on those conversations.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD) [V]: May I give the Chancellor a small birthday present by welcoming the extension of the furlough scheme and the greater flexibility for employees coming off furlough—not least because the Liberal Democrats have been campaigning for an almost identical package? But may I urge him yet again to look at those employees and self-employed who have not been helped at all and are in dire straits—people who have moved jobs, and who were not on their employer's payroll by mid-March? Will he consider the new starter scheme that I proposed in early April? Will he please review his refusal to properly help those self-employed people who operate from limited companies and who have just been cut adrift?

**Rishi Sunak:** The self-employment scheme in this country remains one of the most generous and comprehensive anywhere in the world. It was designed to provide support to those people who have a different pattern of working. As I have explained previously to the right hon. Gentleman, there is a difficulty in distinguishing the dividends that company directors earn from the dividends that anyone might earn through earning a passive share portfolio.

I have seen the proposals that the right hon. Gentleman and others have sent. Of course, my team and I have considered and are considering those, but that does not take away from the fact that what has opened this week

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is a scheme that will support millions of those in self-employment and enable them to receive the same level of support as those in employment, starting with cash coming into their accounts as early as next week.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con) [V]: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his announcement today, and also, in particular, on his handling of this crisis and the support he is providing to businesses and individuals during it.

Many of my constituents in Chesham and Amersham work for British Airways, which despite furloughing nearly 23,000 staff has been threatening to make over 12,000 staff redundant. Can my right hon. Friend send a clear message to British Airways today that with this extension it should now remove all threat of redundancy, which has been adding to the anxiety and stress of so many of its hard-working and in many cases long-serving staff?

**Rishi Sunak**: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) is right to advocate for and support her constituents employed by the airline industry, and she is right to urge employers to do the right thing at this difficult time. The Government have provided considerable support to companies to help them get through this crisis, and she knows what will benefit her constituents. I will continue to support her in those efforts to make sure that we can protect as many of those jobs as possible.

**Mr Speaker**: We cross over into Wales with Kevin Brennan.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab) [V]: Prynawn da, Mr Speaker. The Chancellor has said that he is doing everything he can, but has he seen the New Starter Justice campaign for people who started or were due to start a new job after 28 February and are still cut adrift from any help from the Chancellor and his schemes? Why has he thrown this particular group of hard-working British people under the bus?

**Rishi Sunak**: When we announced the job retention scheme, I said clearly that it would apply to those of whom HMRC was aware on 28 February. We were able, while protecting the taxpayer against fraud, to extend that date to 19 March, the day before I made the announcement, which is reasonable, in the sense that without HMRC or the Government knowing whether someone was actually employed the scope for fraud would be considerable. I did not think it appropriate to expose the taxpayer to that.

That change to 19 March brought in 230,000 of the 350,000-odd people that the hon. Gentleman talks about. Yes, that left a number of people who could not be covered, but for a reason that I believe is defensible. The scheme is able to cover the 29.5 million people who were notified to HMRC on that date; indeed, 7.5 million of them are benefiting from it. We should not lose sight of that. The scheme is doing an enormous amount for several million people up and down this country.

**Saqib Bhatti** (Meriden) (Con) [V]: Time and again, the Chancellor has stepped up to ensure that our businesses have what they need to get through this difficult period,

and I welcome the measures announced today. The bounce-back loan scheme is another example of the unprecedented interventions that the Chancellor has made and this has been unequivocally welcomed by organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that work is continuing to be done to ensure that we increase the number of accredited lenders that provide bounce-back loans so that we can make sure we are getting funds to those businesses that need them, wherever they may be?

**Rishi Sunak**: I thank my hon. Friend for his advice as we looked to design and improve our lending scheme. I very much value his direct links with business and his relaying that to me. If you will allow me Mr Speaker, I can update him and the House on the number of loans that have now been approved. I am pleased to say that more than a quarter of a million bounce-back loans have been approved—267,000—with over £8 billion of capital benefiting small and medium-sized companies up and down the UK. On top of that, 35,000 CBILS loans worth more than £6 billion have now been put out. Hundreds of thousands of businesses are benefiting from the loan schemes that my hon. Friend helped to implement, ensuring that they worked well and quickly for businesses.

**Mr Speaker**: We go over to the wonder of Lancashire, with Rosie Cooper.

**Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab) [V]: As a result of the loss of income through both fundraising and small service charges, many small and local charities will be struggling financially despite being heavily involved and active in the covid-19 response and in supporting constituents. When will the Chancellor issue guidance to local authorities on providing grants to charities that are in receipt of local charitable rate relief but have up to now been excluded from securing the £10,000 grants from the small business grants fund?

**Rishi Sunak**: Just over a week or so ago, we outlined plans for a top-up fund for local authorities worth more than £600 million nationally so that they could distribute further rate relief to the businesses that they thought were appropriate. Indeed, it would be up to those local authorities to make the decisions and they could well use the money for that purpose if they so wished.

We also unveiled a £750 million package to support charities through this crisis. They are an important part of the social fabric of our country. Charities are impacted in the same way that businesses and the rest of us are, and it is important that we maintain them through this crisis, not least for the valuable work that they do on the frontline, but also for the contribution they make to our civic society as we come out of this.

**Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con) [V]: The Isle of Wight is Britain's festival island, and we have a unique tourism sector that is supported by events in the arts, music and sport. Will the Chancellor confirm that the furlough extension will help islanders in that devastated part of the economy? Will Ministers meet me, and others, to discuss how we can further protect the visitor and festival economy, which relies on specific parts of the year, and sometimes only on weekends, to generate an entire annual livelihood?



**Rishi Sunak:** Let me start by conveying the thanks of the whole House, and certainly of the Government, to my hon. Friend's constituents for the role that they are playing in trialling the new app. That will be important as we look to gain control of this virus in the second and third phase of our approach to tackling it. Will he please pass on our thanks to all his constituents? I reassure him that they are very much in our minds. We know that the sector he mentioned is struggling and will need support. The document that the Government published yesterday spoke about creating an industry taskforce, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend, and others, as we chart a future for those in the leisure, hospitality and tourism sectors.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) [V]: The all-party group for disability, which I chair, believes it is crucial that the Chancellor accelerates efforts to include people with disabilities in the economic recovery plan, enabling a disability-inclusive covid-19 response. Will he address that issue by undertaking an impact assessment of the economic recovery plan, based on equalities principles?

**Rishi Sunak:** The Government and the Treasury will, of course, undertake all appropriate equalities and disabilities assessments for policies as they are unveiled and as is required. I have talked about this issue in the past with the hon. Lady, and the Budget outlined something that she and I care very much about, which is the Changing Places campaign for those with complex disabilities. We created a fund to help local authorities and businesses to adapt or build new changing places that will benefit hundreds of thousands of those, especially young children, who suffer with complex disabilities, and who require different types of facilities so that they can enjoy time with their families out and about. I hope we can continue to work closely on that issue.

**David Johnston** (Wantage) (Con) [V]: I support the Chancellor's bold move to extend the furlough scheme to October—[*Inaudible.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Unfortunately we have to move on to the next question. I call Judith Cummins.

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab) [V]: Has the Treasury made an assessment of how many employers are currently topping up the wages of furloughed workers to full pay? If the Government reduce the amount they are contributing, many employers may struggle to top up wages. What will the Government do if employers cannot top up wages?

**Rishi Sunak:** As well as the furlough scheme, the Government have provided direct cash support to businesses in the form of cash grants or tax cuts, and allowed them to defer taxes such as VAT. We have also provided them with access to discounted and attractive loans to ease cashflow. I believe that in sum that represents a considerable amount of support for business, and we have now stretched and extended the furlough scheme to cover eight months. Sitting alongside the plan that the Prime Minister outlined, that will provide businesses with a generous and sufficient amount of time to help bring their employees back to work. Indeed, they will also benefit from the part-time flexibility to ramp up their operations.

**Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I welcome the world-leading package of measures that we are providing to support livelihoods and businesses through this pandemic, which is helping a huge number of people in Runnymede and Weybridge. Aviation is crucial to my constituency due to our proximity to Heathrow, and many constituents have contacted me who are employees of not just BA but logistics firms and others associated with the aviation industry. Getting our planes flying again is crucial to our economy through air freight and just-in-time supply lines. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in addition to direct support for the carriers and industry, we need to get planes flying again as soon as possible?

**Rishi Sunak:** I know that my hon. Friend is rightly focused on that issue for his constituents, given the location of his constituency. Of course, aviation has been impacted considerably by this, but he is right; the best way to help, in the end, is for us to find a way to control this virus, live with it and reopen those parts of our economy that are currently closed. That is the best long-term way to provide the support for the industry and his constituents that we all want to see.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab) [V]: The extent of Government support available is of cold comfort to those who are still not receiving any support. New starters are being abandoned simply by accident of the date on which they happened to change jobs. Those workers could be helped if the Government would accept evidence of their employment in the form of a contract of employment. Many of these workers have paid taxes for years. Will the Chancellor reconsider his approach and take further action so that new starters are not left behind?

**Rishi Sunak:** I do not have much more to add to my previous answer, but for those who do not benefit from this scheme or others, we have taken significant action, investing several billion pounds in strengthening our safety net in this country. Whether it is through tax credits, universal credit, the local housing allowance or the hardship fund provided to local authorities, the most vulnerable in our society through this crisis are seeing considerable extra support from Government to help them get through.

**Damian Green** (Ashford) (Con) [V]: Like others, I am grateful to the Chancellor for his extension of the furlough scheme, which is a reverse birthday present from him to workers and firms in my constituency. He will want our brilliant creative industries to come out of this crisis intact, and he knows that many people working in them are freelancers or on short-term contracts. Can he give some hope to those producing world-class work, often in precarious circumstances, that their sector will survive and flourish again after this is all over?

**Rishi Sunak:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right; the creative industries play an incredibly important part in our economy in this country, and they are also one of our great exports around the world and add to our soft power. He is right that we should do everything we can to preserve the jewel that is that industry. As I said, I am talking to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, who is engaged with that industry to find the safest way for those

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workers to get back to work. We all want to see that happen in a measured and safe way. He can rest assured that I am also thinking about it from an economic perspective and seeing whether our support schemes and everything else are optimised for that industry as we emerge from this recovery process.

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab) [V]: The furlough scheme is hugely welcome, but it needs greater flexibility. I hear what the Chancellor says, but the Opposition have set out ways in which the furlough scheme arrangements could be adapted to include new starters who have just missed out without risking fraudulent payments. Will he give those proposals urgent and serious consideration?

**Rishi Sunak**: We did give consideration to proposals that we received and worked with our systems, which is why we were able to extend the date from 28 February to 19 March, the day before I made the announcement. To me, that is a reasonable and defensible date to choose. It is important not to underestimate the operational challenge of creating these schemes and ensuring that they work for people. As I said at the time, from announcement to the scheme going live was a matter of weeks. Thousands of people worked their socks off to make that happen, and several million people's pay packets are now being supported because that all works. These things are not straightforward to do, and changing them and adding complexity to them will simply make it more likely that they do not work and that people have to wait a lot longer to get the support they desperately need at this time.

**Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con) [V]: I welcome the fantastic announcement about the coronavirus job retention scheme, and thank my right hon. Friend for all that his Department is doing to support businesses in Redcar and Cleveland, with the CJRS, the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme and the new bounce-back loans. Will he reassure me and employers in my constituency that this support will be kept under review so that it reaches the businesses that need it most?

**Rishi Sunak**: I can give my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour exactly that reassurance. I thank him for all that he is doing to support his businesses and constituents at this time. I very much welcome the advice that he has given me, as he has fed back what he is hearing on the ground from businesses in the north-east. He and I have a shared ambition to make sure that Teesside drives our economic recovery as we come out of this situation, and I look forward to continuing those conversations with him.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP) [V]: Aberdeen has been hit by the double whammy of covid-19 and a massive drop in the oil price. Will the Chancellor tell us when he last had a conversation with the industry, and will he please give consideration to announcing sector-specific support in order to protect my constituents and those in other regions where employment is centred around oil and gas?

**Rishi Sunak**: Regardless of the industry in which companies operate, they are able to benefit from our furlough scheme. That is something that we were keen

to do. It is not necessarily replicated by every scheme around the world, but we thought that that comprehensive approach was the appropriate one. Many of the companies that the hon. Lady mentioned will be able to benefit from that scheme. Beyond that, my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary engages regularly with all sectors regarding their particular concerns, and I will continue to liaise closely with him.

**Neil O'Brien** (Harborough) (Con) [V]: I strongly welcome the extension of the job retention scheme. It is the most generous in the world, and is saving a huge number of jobs here in Harborough, Oadby and Wigston. One of the great successes of policy in recent years has been a huge reduction in youth unemployment, but the virus is inevitably going to disrupt a lot of apprenticeships and work placements. Is my right hon. Friend thinking hard about how we can limit or stop any rise in youth unemployment?

**Rishi Sunak**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that he has put a lot of thought into this particular issue, and I look forward to hearing his ideas on it. As we emerge from this situation, we need to be cognisant of having the right support available for those who are most affected by this issue, especially those who are young and entering the labour force for the first time who will face this challenge, but also younger people who work in the disproportionately affected sectors of retail and hospitality; and that support might include skills, retraining and a dynamic labour market. This is about the economic impact on us all, and especially on those individuals; not having a close connection with the labour market at that early stage in their life is very damaging for their long-term prospects. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend to ensure that that does not happen.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab) [V]: If 800,000 businesses have benefited from the welcome job retention scheme, the 800,000-strong world-class automotive industry will be key to recovery, including Jaguar Land Rover, whose Jaguar factory lies at the heart of my constituency of Erdington. Does the Chancellor recognise that the continuation of the job retention scheme for as long as is necessary, together with welcome measures to help companies that are deeply in debt and battling with liquidity, will be crucial for the future, providing the necessary certainty upon which businesses, workers and trade unions can plan to rebuild?

**Rishi Sunak**: I think I find myself in agreement with the hon. Member. He is fortunate to have such a fantastic company local to him. I know that that company and its workers will be pleased that the Government, and their representative, are advocating on their behalf. We have extended some of our loan schemes for larger companies—not Jaguar Land Rover specifically—and many companies in the automotive supply chain, for example, will now be able to benefit from our larger CBILS programme, which went live last week and is already lending billions of pounds. The hon. Gentleman is right; these various schemes are important and the industry that he mentions is critical to the UK. I look forward to ensuring that it can have as strong and swift a recovery as possible.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con) [V]: I, too, welcome the announcement the Chancellor has made today. It will be particularly welcome to the businesses

in the leisure, hospitality and tourism sector, which are very important in my area and have been very hard hit. I welcome the fact that the Chancellor has extended the scheme to October. Should businesses plan on that scheme coming to an end in October if we are able to stick to the timetable set out by the Prime Minister in the Government's recovery strategy, or is there any chance that the Chancellor will be able to extend the scheme? I think some certainty for businesses will be helpful.

**Rishi Sunak:** We will of course keep everything under review, but my expectation is that by then the scheme should end. As I have said before, we have stretched and strained to be as generous as possible to businesses and workers. That is why we have made the decision we have made today, which is important to me personally, but of course, as I have also said, the scheme is expensive. It is the right thing to do—the cost of not acting would have been far higher—but it is not something that can continue indefinitely into the future. Eight months of total support is a considerable amount of time. Now that we have a plan from the Prime Minister, with a path to reopening those parts of our economy that are closed, I believe we can get the country back on track and get people back into work. This scheme will help them to do it in a measured and phased way, and protect as many jobs as possible.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC) [V]: Diolch yn fawr, Lefarydd. May I take the opportunity to wish penblwydd hapus to the Chancellor? In Wales, workplace restrictions have not been changed as many parts of the country have not yet passed the peak of infection. The economic taps must not therefore be turned off in Westminster before the public health emergency has subsided in Wales. Will the Chancellor ensure that the furlough scheme remains in place for as long as necessary and in such a form as to enable expert-led public health guidance to be followed in each nation?

**Rishi Sunak:** As I have just said, and have said previously, this is a UK scheme. It applies equally to all regions, nations and sectors of the country. It is generous in its length, extending all the way to October, and I believe that provides sufficient runway and support to businesses wherever they might be in this country. But I thank the right hon. Lady for her warm wishes.

**Rob Roberts** (Delyn) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend and the Treasury team for bringing together the economic support package that has given businesses and families across the UK the support they need during the lockdown. Obviously, it is one of the most comprehensive packages in the world and my constituents are pleased that when they needed help this United Kingdom Government had their back. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the work is in progress so that businesses, particularly in the tourism sector, are prepared for when the lockdown restrictions are eased, as that sector is a significant element of Delyn's economy?

**Rishi Sunak:** May I start by thanking my hon. Friend for everything he is doing not just for his constituents but in providing advice to me, using his own experience about how best we can support the economy and businesses at this time? I very much appreciate all the time and effort he has put into that and hopefully he can see the fruit of some of that work in the announcements that

have been made. I can also give him that assurance on the tourism sector. That work is under way. The report talked about setting up a taskforce. I look forward to hearing his thoughts. I know how important it is to his constituency and others. The Culture Secretary and I look forward to engaging with him, creating a plan to make sure as many businesses as possible can safely open as soon as they can.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab) [V]: Many minimum wage workers have been furloughed. They are now expected to get by on just 80% of the minimum wage, even though rents, bills and food prices have not fallen. Will the Chancellor implement guarantees, so that no furloughed worker is ever forced to live on less than 100% of the national minimum wage?

**Rishi Sunak:** The scheme, as it is designed, does provide income support of 80% of those wages. Indeed, where those wages are variable the scheme allows an average to be taken to benefit the employee. We have also strengthened the safety net, as I mentioned earlier. Crucially, employees who are furloughed are then able to work elsewhere as well to supplement their incomes. That flexibility is often unnoticed, but it is very helpful. I know many people are taking advantage of that to boost their incomes during this time and I think the scheme, as it is designed, provides the required support especially to those on the lowest pay.

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Chancellor has spoken about freelancers, who often work on short-term contracts or for personal service companies. In answer to the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), he talked about optimising the existing mechanisms for those people, but will he come forward today with the suggestion that there are concrete proposals in place? These are people with clear financial records and they often have accountants, so there is a track record. Will the Chancellor support these different types of self-employed people?

**Rishi Sunak:** They are being supported. The scheme to support them goes live tomorrow, ahead of schedule. Those who are self-employed whose returns and earnings we are aware of will be contacted, and are already being contacted. They are able to apply from tomorrow and will receive cash in their accounts for a three-month grant as early as next week. The scheme is one of the most generous in the world for those who are self-employed.

**Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): Excellent birthday work on the furlough scheme from the Chancellor; the flexibility that is being added to it is very welcome. When he announced the original furlough scheme, many of us in this House and outside in the country talked about the self-employed and asked for parity. He then acted but, notwithstanding the issues that he knows I have with the people left out of the self-employment support scheme, that scheme will come to an end very shortly. To return to the call for parity, can we assume that he is working on an extension to the self-employed income support scheme? Many people will be listening carefully to what he says about that today.

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend has spoken passionately about this issue before, and I look forward to continuing conversations with him. I am of course keeping those

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measures under review. As I said at the time, there is of course parity in the level of support, but the nature of the schemes is different in the sense that employers who have been closed and have to make employment decisions, potentially 45 days in advance in respect of redundancies, do need to be treated slightly differently in that regard. I will of course continue to keep all things, including that scheme, under review.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab) [V]: Women who are eligible for the self-employed income support scheme but have taken a period of maternity leave since 2016 could receive up to one third less financial support. This discriminates against women on lower incomes in particular, penalises families with young children, and exacerbates the gender pay gap. Will the Chancellor therefore exempt periods of maternity leave from the self-employed income support scheme calculations?

**Rishi Sunak:** People have ups and downs and variations in their earnings for all sorts of reasons, whether because of maternity, ill health or something else. To deal with that, we have provided an average of income over up to three years on a look-back basis, to smooth out all the ups and downs in all people's incomes. That was something that stakeholder groups were keen to see at the beginning, it is something that we delivered, and I believe it provides the fairest way to treat everybody, on a level playing field, whatever their circumstances. A three-years averaging of earnings seems to me to be a reasonable approach to take.

**Felicity Buchan** (Kensington) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need an economic strategy that balances getting some businesses support when they cannot reopen with encouraging others to go back to work, and that today we have got that balance right?

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the plan that the Government and the Prime Minister have outlined does exactly what she says. For those who can go back to work now, they should do so in a safe way, which the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will talk about later. As the rest of our economy reopens, people will have the benefit of a furlough scheme that extends all the way to October and provides for part-time flexibility. The combination of all those things means that my hon. Friend's local businesses and many others can take the time that they need to get firing on all cylinders again.

**Zarah Sultana** (Coventry South) (Lab) [V]: It is estimated that the economic impact of the pandemic will hit the west midlands the hardest. It was announced this week that a manufacturer and supplier to Jaguar Land Rover in Coventry South has gone into administration, putting 600 jobs at risk. Will the Government therefore step up efforts to protect manufacturing jobs, especially in the automotive industry, and invest in them to provide green sustainable jobs for the future?

**Rishi Sunak:** I am very sorry to hear about the potential job losses in the hon. Member's constituency. To me, every job lost during this period is heartbreaking, which is why I am doing my absolute utmost to provide the support that I can to protect as many as possible.

I have said that clearly I cannot—and nor could any of us—save every single job or business, but the loans, the cash grants and the job retention scheme will all play a vital role in saving many millions of jobs and businesses, particularly in the automotive supply chain. The hon. Member is right that that is an important part of our economy, and it deserves our support to ensure that it can be a strong part of our recovery.

**Andrew Griffith** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con) [V]: The generous and unprecedented schemes that my right hon. Friend has put in place are doing a tremendous job, protecting thousands of employees, small businesses and the self-employed in my constituency. Many in West Sussex work in aviation, so in addition to heartily welcoming today's extension of the excellent job retention scheme, may I ask him at least to consider temporarily suspending air passenger duty as well as testing passengers on arrival as an alternative to the 14-day quarantine, to help this vital sector of the economy?

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank my hon. Friend for his support and for the advice he has provided to me, with his extensive experience of business and of his constituency. He knows that I care deeply about the aviation sector. My right hon. Friends the Transport Secretary and the Foreign Secretary are considering the issues he raised. In particular, the Government have been clear that further detail on the quarantine measures will be outlined in due course, but I will pass on his suggestion.

**Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD) [V]: In North East Fife, much of the economy is seasonal and workers, who had contracts often agreed months in advance, face no income and no access to existing support. Fundraising for some golf caddies in St Andrews is under way and, although I applaud local community efforts and their generosity, rather than have the seasonal workforce rely on charity, what support can the Chancellor offer them this year so that they can return next year?

**Rishi Sunak:** Those who were in seasonal work can use an average of their earnings over a period for furlough payments, or indeed the same month on a year-over-year basis if that is a more generous way to calculate their eligibility. That is the most generous way to treat those in seasonal employment under the scheme and ensure that we reflect their earnings appropriately.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con) [V]: These measures are exactly what manufacturing firms in Dudley South have called for as they start to reopen. Will the Chancellor undertake to work with our excellent Mayor, Andy Street, to ensure that the needs of west midlands manufacturing and its employees are fully considered as they start the task of rebuilding our economy?

**Rishi Sunak:** I can give my hon. Friend that reassurance. I look forward to speaking further to him and the excellent Mayor, Andy Street, as we all work together to drive the west midlands economy as part of the economic recovery plan. He, the Mayor and his businesses can play a leading role in that.

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP) [V]: I am glad that the Chancellor has confounded recent worrying rumours regarding the job retention scheme

that caused grave concern to my constituents. Will he liaise with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to ensure that workers are not forced back to work in dangerous conditions, bearing in mind that the Health and Safety Executive has issued no enforcement actions as yet and that employers may struggle to pay the 20% he asks for while ensuring employee safety?

**Rishi Sunak:** My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary will be here shortly to provide a fuller answer to the hon. Lady's question, but it is right that employees should not work in unsafe environments and we have put in place measures to ensure that that will not be the case, with updated guidance, risk assessments and increased resources for the Health and Safety Executive. The Business Secretary will update the House in more detail.

**Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con) [V]:** Mr Speaker, I hope you and your family are well.

About 19% of Calder Valley residents work in the manufacturing sector, and thousands of them are incredibly grateful for the Chancellor's ingenuity around the furlough scheme. Will my right hon. Friend, on his birthday, confirm how today's announcements on furlough will be a massive help to those manufacturers as they phase the return to work and deal with social distancing in the workplace?

**Rishi Sunak:** Manufacturing organisations in particular were keen to have the flexibility to bring employees back in shifts on a part-time basis while being able to furlough them for the remainder of the time as manufacturers ramp up operations, so I am pleased that we could deliver that flexibility today for the second part of the scheme. I think that that will be valuable to manufacturers in my hon. Friend's constituency and help them get back up to speed as quickly as possible in a way that they can afford as well.

**James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op) [V]:** Ranjith Chandrapala lived in Hanwell in my constituency, and he drove the 92 bus until three weeks ago, before he died of covid-19, leaving behind a loving family, including his daughter, Leshie. A week before Ranjith died, the Government announced a life assurance scheme for the families of health and care workers on the frontline during the covid-19 outbreak. Will the Chancellor commit to extending the scheme to other frontline workers and, in particular, to the families of bus drivers such as Ranjith?

**Rishi Sunak:** My heart goes out to the family of the hon. Gentleman's constituent for what they have suffered. They, like many others up and down the country, are losing loved ones who are serving on the frontline. They deserve nothing but our admiration, respect and gratitude. I know that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary has put in place a scheme to help those families who have lost loved ones during this crisis.

**Mr Speaker:** Let us head up to Staffordshire to Aaron Bell.

**Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con) [V]:** I thank the Chancellor for all the schemes that he has introduced so far. In particular, I welcome the extension of the job retention scheme today. I wonder whether he is willing to look at a couple of aspects of the other schemes. There are two schemes in particular that would benefit

from the introduction of a taper as, currently, there are cliff edges in support for both business grants and the self-employed income support scheme. It means that, in the case of two people in broadly equivalent positions, one could be entitled to support and one not. Would he be willing at least to consider the idea of a taper with these schemes?

**Rishi Sunak:** Introducing new measures to the schemes at this point would not be possible or desirable because it would just delay their operation. The problem with tapers is that there is still always an end point at the other end of the taper. With regard to the self-employment scheme, this covers 95% of all those who are self-employed, which is pretty comprehensive coverage. The 5% who are not covered have an average income of £200,000. Of course, there will be hard cases just the other side, but, on average, this is a group with relatively high earnings.

**Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con) [V]:** I thank the Treasury for a very comprehensive set of measures for businesses and employers across the country, including those in my constituency of Meon Valley. Will my right hon. Friend tell me when further guidance on the discretionary grant funding will be announced, because some councils are not happy with using their discretion? I believe, though, that the Treasury has made it perfectly clear from the start that the list was not exhaustive and that councils should use their own discretion.

**Rishi Sunak:** I thank my hon. Friend for her support. I think I am safe in saying that the guidance will be issued imminently. Of course there will be some broad guidelines on whom we think that support should be targeted at, but of course local authorities will have the ultimate discretion.

**Mr Speaker:** Returning to the north-west, let us hear from Andrew Gwynne.

**Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]:** Although I welcome the announcement on furlough, the Chancellor knows that the Government's covid response would have completely stalled without local government, yet our councils are now financially on the brink. The extra funding does not cover all the costs, which is something that Ministers promised. Will he ensure that our councils are fully reimbursed for all covid-related costs and lost income and protect the sector that has protected us?

**Rishi Sunak:** In a moment of nostalgia, let me say that the hon. Gentleman and I have a shared passion for local government and an admiration for the work that councils do, and I know that he will remain an advocate of theirs. They have been provided with more than £3 billion of extra support. Of course, we are in constant dialogue with those in local government, whether in social care or others, to ensure that they get the financial resources that they need.

**Mr Speaker:** Let us go over to Derbyshire now to Nigel Mills.

**Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con) [V]:** I thank the Chancellor for his announcement today, which is exactly what Amber Valley businesses have been asking for. Is there any way he can allow them to bring back some

[Nigel Mills]

employees part-time, earlier than his extension, so that they can perhaps reopen their businesses next month rather than having to wait until a later date?

**Rishi Sunak:** That is a very fair question and one that I have looked at. There is an issue of operational complexity in designing the part-time aspect of the scheme in consultation with business and unions to ensure that we can enforce it properly. I think that the earliest that we can reasonably do it is in the extension period, as I mentioned. Of course, if there are ways for us to do it sooner, we will, but I would not want to commit to that today as it is a complicated thing to get right.

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab) [V]: Yesterday I asked the Prime Minister about engagement with the devolved Governments in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. I would like to try again today, and, I hope, receive a more detailed response from the Chancellor. Can he please outline what specific conversations he had with the devolved Administrations about these changes and when those conversations took place?

**Rishi Sunak:** My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury speaks regularly to his counterparts in the devolved Administrations, and we engage with them regularly. I am pleased to say that more than £8 billion<sup>1</sup> of Barnett consequential has been provided to devolved Administrations across the UK as they have also responded to the virus, and that will continue to be the case. We will get through this as one nation, all together.

1.35 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

1.50 pm

*On resuming, the House entered into hybrid substantive proceedings (Order, 22 April).*

[NB: [V] denotes a Member contributing virtually.]

## Speaker's Statement

**Mr Speaker:** Following the report of the Procedure Committee, and in advance of the first remote Division taking place later today, I have a statement to make about remote Divisions. A decision of the House arrived at by a remote Division has the same effect as a decision arrived at by more traditional means. I ask all Members to pay careful attention to what the Procedure Committee says about the integrity of the system. As the Committee states, any attempt to allow anyone who is not a Member to vote is likely to be a serious breach of privilege.

The Committee asked me to get a report on the number of Members not registered on the system. I can tell the House that all Members are automatically registered on MemberHub. I have received a report from the House Service that eight Members have not used MemberHub to vote in a remote voting test. I am satisfied that steps have been taken to enable them to vote should they wish to do so.

On each relevant day, when the business motion is agreed, I will announce my provisional determination on remote Divisions for that day. That provisional determination will be based on representations received by my office. Further representations can be made in the course of the day in question, and the final determination may change in consequence. It is integral to the success of hybrid proceedings that there is greater certainty about the timing and conduct of business than would normally be the case, and I do not expect changes to my determination to be a regular occurrence.

Finally, I want to assure Members that I will keep the system under review. I will carefully consider feedback from Members and information supplied to me by the Parliamentary Digital Service and House Service in accordance with relevant recommendations of the Procedure Committee. Further guidance on the matters in this statement has been published.

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (12 MAY)

*Motion made,*

That—

The following arrangements shall apply to today's business:

Business	Timings	Remote division designation
Statement: Covid-19 and Business	Up to 45 minutes	None
Statement: Covid-19 Guidance for Transport Users and Operators	Up to 45 minutes	None
General debate: Covid-19 (Day 2)	Up to 45 minutes; suspension; up to 90 minutes	Remote division
Hybrid proceedings (extension of temporary orders)	Up to 30 minutes	Remote division
Business of the House (Private Members' Bills)	No debate	None

1. [Official Report, 2 June 2020, Vol. 676, c. 4MC.]

Business	Timings	Remote division designation
Committee of Privileges	No debate	None
Adjournment (Whitsun)	No debate (Standing Order No. 25)	None

At the conclusion of each debate, the Speaker shall put the Question on each of the motions on the Order Paper relating to the business listed in the table for that debate.—(*Maggie Throup.*)

*The Speaker declared the Question to be agreed to (Order (4), 22 April).*

**Mr Speaker:** Two items of business today are designated for remote Division. My provisional determination is that the remote Division will take place on the Question, That this House has considered Covid-19, and that the motion relating to Hybrid Proceedings (Extension of Temporary Orders) will not be the subject of a remote Division. I now call the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to make a statement, and he should speak for no more than 10 minutes.

## Covid-19: Business

1.53 pm

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Alok Sharma):** I would like to update the House on the Government's new covid-19-secure workplace guidance. On 23 March, the Government announced lockdown measures and required certain businesses and venues to close. Our message to workers was that if you can work from home, you should work from home, and millions did. At the same time, the Government provided guidance on how those who could not do their work from home could continue to operate as safely as possible in workplaces that were not required to be closed. I want to thank the many workers in distribution centres, supermarkets, transport, construction and manufacturing across the country who have been playing their part in keeping Britain moving. I hope that the whole House recognises the constructive spirit in which employers have worked with their workers to follow this guidance.

The Prime Minister yesterday set out steps to beat the virus and restart the economy, so that we can protect jobs, restore people's livelihoods and fund the country's vital public services. To support this, we have published new covid-19-secure guidelines, available to UK employers across eight settings that are allowed to be open, from outdoor environments and construction sites to factories and takeaways. This also includes guidance for shops that we believe may be in a position to begin a phased reopening, at the earliest, from 1 June. The Government have consulted approximately 250 stakeholders in preparing the guidance. It has been developed with input from firms, unions, industry bodies and the devolved Administrations. We have worked with Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive to develop best practice on the safest ways of working across the economy.

As we return to work, the Government want to give employers and workers confidence that their workplaces will be safe for them to return to, because we recognise that this is an anxious time for many. We recognise that workers want to know that their employer has taken every step to ensure a safe workplace, and we recognise that employers who take steps to keep workers safe want to know that they are doing the right thing. I believe that we have reached a consensus in doing that, and I am encouraged that businesses, representative groups, workers and trade unions can get behind this guidance.

The guidance has five key points at its heart. First, people should work from home if they can. Employers should continue to take all reasonable steps to help people work from home. For those who cannot work from home and whose workplace has not been told to close, our message is clear: they should go to work. Staff should speak to their employer about when their workplace will open.

Secondly, social distancing should be maintained in the workplace wherever possible. Employers should redesign workspaces to maintain 2-metre distances between people, stagger start times, create one-way walk-throughs, open more entrances and exits, or change seating layouts in break rooms. Thirdly, where people cannot be 2 metres apart, the transmission risk should be managed. Employers should ensure that every step is taken to reduce the risk

[Alok Sharma]

when people cannot maintain 2-metre distancing. This can include putting up barriers or screens in shared spaces, creating fixed teams of partnering to minimise the number of people in contact with one another, or keeping the activity time involved as short as possible.

Fourthly, cleaning processes should be reinforced in line with the guidance. Employers should frequently clean work areas and equipment between uses to reduce transmission, provide hand sanitiser and washing stations, and pay attention to high-contact objects like workstations, door handles and keyboards.

Fifthly, a covid-19 risk assessment must be carried out, in consultation with workers or trade unions. In line with the current health and safety law, all employers must carry out a covid-19 risk assessment. They should identify risks that covid-19 creates and use the guidance published to take measures to mitigate these risks. Employers should share the results of their risk assessment with their workforce. A downloadable notice is included in the documents that employers should display in their workplaces to show their employees, customers and other visitors that they have followed the guidance. They should also consider publishing the results on their website, and we expect all employers with over 50 workers to do so.

The aim of this approach is for employers to create a collaborative working environment, building confidence and trust between employers and workers. I think the House will recognise that this is already the case across the UK, because the UK has a proud record as a leader in health and safety in the workplace. Our guidance operates within current health and safety, employment and equalities legislation, which is some of the strongest in the world, and we will continue with this approach. We will work closely with the Health and Safety Executive, which has the resources it needs to meet current demand, but of course we want to ensure that this remains the case during the covid-19 pandemic as people return to work. So the Government are making up to an extra £14 million available for the HSE, equivalent to a 10% increase in its budget. This extra money will provide resource for additional call centre staff, inspectors and equipment if needed. In many cases, this will meet the demands of employers and employees who would like further information on how to ensure that workplaces are safe. For the extremely small minority of businesses that do not follow the rules, the HSE and local authorities will not hesitate in using their powers, including enforcement notices, to secure improvements.

The measures I have set out in respect of social distancing and cleaning are the best ways to manage the risk of transmitting covid-19. Based on the scientific evidence, the use of PPE in the workplace is not recommended by the Government except in clinical settings and a handful of other roles stipulated by Public Health England. Of course, if a worker currently uses PPE to protect against other hazards, such as dust in an industrial setting, they must continue to use it. Workers have the option to use face coverings, which are simple cloth coverings. There are some circumstances in which wearing a face covering may be marginally beneficial as a precautionary measure. The evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you but may protect others if you are infected but have not developed symptoms. Wearing a face covering is not

required by law in the workplace. If workers do choose to wear one, they should follow the workplace guidance on how to use it.

We have been guided by the scientific advice in establishing this position. Today, we provide a framework for how employers can keep workers safe in the workplace. This additional support and clarity, combined with more resource for the HSE, can give employers and workers the confidence they need to return to work safely. As we reopen new sectors of the economy, we will continue our collaborative approach when providing guidance for additional workplaces, meaning that we can provide a clear and safe route back to work for millions. I commend this statement to the House.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I call Edward Miliband, with a time limit of five minutes.

2.1 pm

**Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and add my thanks to all the workers and businesses that have kept our country going during these past few weeks? I say to him that we do not underestimate the challenges of lifting lockdown in certain parts of the economy. We agree that it is in all our interests for it to happen if it can be done safely, and that there are difficult decisions confronting Government, businesses and workers, who have to adapt to these unprecedented circumstances. I also want to welcome a number of steps forward in the guidance published last night, which he has talked about in his statement. They do represent progress from previous proposals, and I also welcome the tone of his statement.

However, I also say to the Secretary of State that what really matters to workers and businesses in these highly sensitive and difficult matters is proceeding in an orderly and judicious way. The confusion and mixed messages of the past 48 hours have been ill-advised and avoidable. Let me ask him six specific questions. First, on the impact of the Government's change of emphasis on going back to work in phase 1, Ministers say that the reproduction rate of the disease—the R number—is currently between 0.5 and 0.9. How many extra people does he expect to go back to work as a result of the Government's change of emphasis? What is the scientific advice about the impact on the R number?

Secondly, we are being told that in our daily lives, outside our places of work, we must not come within 2 metres of those from other households, for reasons I understand. I listened carefully to what the Secretary of State said, but for workplaces the overview document he has published asks for an observance of 2-metre distancing only "wherever possible". If it is not possible, the only requirement is that employers should "look into" various mitigation measures. I understand that in some workplaces 2-metre distancing may not be possible, but can he explain why there is no requirement for mitigation if social distancing cannot be observed?

Thirdly, on enforcement, the challenge is, as the Secretary of State said, not the vast majority of employers, who want to do the right thing, but the small minority who do not. I welcome £14 million more for the HSE budget, but it is a drop in the ocean compared with the £100 million of cuts over the past decade. Given the challenges of enforcement, will he discuss with the trade unions how



their tens of thousands of health and safety reps could play a bigger and, I believe, constructive role in ensuring covid-19 compliance, including in non-unionised workplaces?

Fourthly, can the Business Secretary now provide an answer for parents who are being asked to go back to work tomorrow but are not deemed “essential” workers and therefore have nobody to look after their children, because they cannot send them to school or nursery? What are parents in those circumstances supposed to do?

Fifthly, can the Secretary of State clarify the position on the 2.5 million workers who are deemed clinically extremely vulnerable and are advised to shield at home until at least the end of June? Currently, they have no automatic right to be furloughed and many have felt pressured to keep working. As workplaces reopen, the pressure will become greater. To protect their health and provide clarity, would it not make sense to place an obligation on employers to furlough these individuals if they cannot work from home?

The chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, said at the press conference last night that the reopening of workplaces was dependent on whether they can be made safe for work. Can the Secretary of State confirm that workplaces that are not safe should not reopen tomorrow and that, by law, workers who have a reasonable belief that they will be in danger do not have to be at work?

Finally, the Secretary of State will know that it is the highest-paid workers who will generally carry on being able to work from home and lower-paid workers who are being asked to go back to work. We also know from yesterday’s figures from the Office for National Statistics that, among men, construction workers have so far been more than twice as likely to die from covid-19 as the average member of the population. I know the Secretary of State will agree that working people are being asked to go back to work to help us all. Whatever the economic pressures, their health must be protected. They deserve to be safe. That is what the Government must take every action to ensure.

**Alok Sharma:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. I also thank him for the very constructive discussions that we have had, particularly last Friday, on a range of issues. He wrote to me yesterday on the issue of safer working and I hope he has received my response. I also want to thank him for the acknowledgement that what we have put out represents progress. I think there is consensus across businesses and trade unions for what we have sought to provide.

The right hon. Gentleman raised a number of issues, which I will try to address. His first question was about the R number and the numbers of people potentially going back to work. We have been very clear that we want to ensure that people are safe in the workplace and, at the end of the day, that we are saving lives. That is why we produced the guidance, which has been put together with the HSE and Public Health England. We are also very clear that people who can work from home should continue to work from home.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the fact that there was some confusion. The Prime Minister made reference to the manufacturing sector and the construction sector; those sectors are already open. Millions of people are already going to work and their employers are doing everything they can to keep them safe.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about how employees can feel safe in the workplace. We have had this discussion previously. We know for a fact that many employers are already open, and they are working incredibly constructively with their trade unions. When I held my stakeholder calls as part of preparing the guidance, that was abundantly clear.

He talked about enforcement. I am pleased that he welcomes the extra money for the HSE; we need to make sure that we provide support if it is needed. I want to be very clear that the HSE is able to do spot checks and to be proactive. We ultimately want to make sure that if employees feel unsafe in a work environment, they are able to get in touch with the HSE or with their local authority.

He asked about parents and made a very reasonable point about schools. The Prime Minister set out the timetable for that. Again, it is a question of employers and employees working flexibly together. That is already happening in the workplace. I would say to all employers that they should look to see what they can do to support their workers to continue to work from home if that is at all possible.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman raised a point about reopening, whether it is safe to open workplaces, and what to do about workplaces that are not safe. He is absolutely right. People should not have to feel that they are going into an unsafe work environment; frankly, from my experience, that is not what employers want either. We absolutely need our workers to feel safe. If they feel unsafe, they can get in touch with the HSE and with local authorities. I would say to all employers to please do absolutely everything you can, because it is in all our interests that the economy gets going again.

**Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con) [V]:** Across Keighley, we have some fantastic manufacturing, engineering and technology-based businesses, whose employees are doing their utmost to ensure that the new guidance is adhered to. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is crucial, as we move to the next phase of tackling this virus, that the needs of businesses—especially small businesses, which are the beating heart of Keighley—are taken into account? Can he confirm that the recently issued guidance applies to them, so that they are best placed to kick-start productivity and reignite their service offering?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend is a strong voice for Keighley businesses. Of course this guidance applies to all businesses. The Federation of Small Businesses, which has been part of helping us to prepare the guidance, has welcomed it, particularly for small companies. My hon. Friend should continue the engagement he is doing with businesses, encourage them to look at the guidance and encourage them to get back to work.

**Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP) [V]:** I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. Given that the Prime Minister previously attacked what he called the “health and safety fetish” as “madness”, and in 2009 said public warnings were “for the extremely stupid”, the fact that this Government are stressing the need for health and safety must be welcomed. However, it is important to give the utmost clarity.

I know that is what the Secretary of State will like to think he has done, but his advice is addressed to UK employers. Will he acknowledge, in the spirit of clarity,

[Drew Hendry]

that his advice is for England only? The advice in the other nations of the UK remains to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. Lives are at stake. We must have complete clarity. Shops in Scotland are not scheduled for phased reopening from 1 June. Will he make that clear? His five-point plan does not apply at this time in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Will he make that clear?

We welcome the measures announced today to transition the furlough scheme, because business and people would be harmed by a cold restart without protection. However, before any reductions in furlough or rates of support start, we first need to fill the gaps for those left behind: those who had a contract or letter of employment by 29 March but whose employers have not logged into Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, those agency workers who are not included, staff whose pay is combined with commission, and the forgotten but vital summer seasonal workers. Will the Secretary of State make the case for those workers, or are they still to be left behind?

Finally, the Secretary of State has made great play of building a consensus and confidence when moving forward. Will he take that message back to the Cabinet and the Prime Minister, and extend it to the leaders of the devolved nations? His Government have consistently updated Fleet Street before this House, and even before the First Ministers of the devolved nations.

**Alok Sharma:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his questions and his remarks. First, he talked about the Health and Safety Executive. We are of course providing more support. The HSE is able at this stage to progress with the funding and support it has from the Government, but we have provided an extra £14 million in case it needs it. The UK has a proud record as a world leader on health and safety in the workplace. If he compares our statistics with those in many other countries in Europe, for example, he will see that we have a very good record.

The hon. Gentleman asked who this guidance is for. This guidance is to help all employers in the United Kingdom—employers, employees and the self-employed. I also say to him—[*Interruption.*] He is shaking his head, but let me come to the point that he wants me to make. In terms of the 250 stakeholders we engaged with, 70% of those businesses operate across the UK. However, in the guidance, we make it very clear that public health is devolved in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and we talk about the guidance being considered alongside local public health and safety requirements and legislation.

My final point is about consensus. We have been driven, throughout this process, through consensus. I have had very good discussions with my counterparts in the devolved nations, and we will continue to do that. The Prime Minister has been doing that, and we will continue to do that as a Government. At the end of the day, we all have to come together to get out of this and get our economy to bounce back.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con) [V]: Welcome as this advice is, many workers will not be able to return to work and will remain at home on 80% of their pay. In my right hon. Friend's role as consumer rights Minister,

can he say something about the financial burdens being put on my constituents and on workers across the country by rip-off travel companies that are refusing to refund constituents for their holidays or flights? Be it Hosesasons, Virgin, British Airways, Ryanair or Tui, my constituents are getting ripped off, so will he run a campaign publicly to inform consumers about their rights to refunds?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. May I first thank him for the great work he is doing in the ambulance service as a community first responder, which I know is making a real difference in his community? He talks about consumer rights. The law is very clear, and it is there to protect consumers. Refunds should be issued within 14 days. However, he also knows that the sectors he is talking about are facing their own challenges. I am continuing to have discussions on this issue with my counterparts in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. He will also know that the Competition and Markets Authority has set up a covid-19 taskforce for consumers seeking refunds, and we continue to have a dialogue with it.

**Darren Jones** (Bristol North West) (Lab) [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of his statement. The whole House will know that businesses will want to do the right thing in implementing the covid-19-secure guidelines, but we also know that many businesses, especially SMEs, have struggled to buy the required kit on the open market and that many workers feel under pressure to go to work when they do not feel safe to do so. Can the Secretary of State confirm what support the Government will give to businesses to ensure that they have access to the covid-19-secure codes they need for their workplaces and set out how workers will be supported, perhaps by ACAS, in dealing with potential workplace disputes linked to this issue?

**Alok Sharma:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his election as Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, and I look forward to further interactions in the future. He raises a point about the support available for businesses. The Chancellor spoke earlier, and he set out an extension to the job retention scheme. He has also made available loans and grants, so there is a lot of support out there. On the point about ACAS, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Where employees feel that they have an issue they are not able to resolve, they absolutely should go to ACAS.

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con) [V]: I am sure we all welcome the reduction in the prevalence of the virus in the general population, but we also know that we are not going to beat this thing in weeks; it will take us months. Therefore, will my right hon. Friend join me in calling on everyone—individuals and businesses alike—to stay alert and to follow the rules, so that we can keep the very important R rate down?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The message is very clear on staying alert. It is about keeping the R rate down. That is the only way in which we can proceed—with baby steps, rather than giant strides—and make sure that we are keeping safe and preserving lives, but at the same time doing all we can to open up the economy further.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) [V]: Aviation is one of the industries worst hit by this crisis, and it will be some time still before those affected are able to return to work. The Government have also announced new quarantine measures, but with no detail about how they are going to work. In the north-east, we rely on Newcastle International airport as key to our regional economic growth, and we need certainty from Government on the way forward. The extension of the job retention scheme to October is welcome, but will the Government work urgently with aviation to plan a way through the quarantine measures and provide further support, such as business rates relief, for this crucial sector?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Lady of course raises an important point. First, may I thank her for acknowledging the welcome extension that the Chancellor has set out for the job retention scheme? She will also know that the Government have put in place a range of other measures to support businesses large and small. There is a corporate finance facility and the coronavirus large business interruption loan scheme run through the British Business Bank. When it comes to the aviation sector, we are of course continuing to have discussions with it, as we do with other sectors, but I would say to her that the primary intention is to provide a broad set of support that everyone across the economy can get access to.

**Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): As the Business Secretary will be aware, these are challenging times for commercial landlords, a group that includes many charities. They have increased costs at the moment, which have been compounded by a fall in their fundraising, and at the same time are facing increased challenges with the collection of rent from their commercial tenants. I am not asking my right hon. Friend about the package of support for charities, but what is the Government's message to commercial landlords who have tenants in receipt of rate relief and various linked grants as a result but who cannot collect rent or even a contribution of the rent due?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend makes a good point about the challenges facing commercial and other landlords. I recognise that many landlords are working closely with their tenants and following best practice, and we are closely monitoring the three-month moratorium on rents. As I said, the CLBIL and CBIL schemes are available for landlords, and people are taking advantage of them in some numbers.

**Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab) [V]: How do the Government intend to ensure that the shielded group of people and their household members do not face an impossible choice between returning to work and breaching public health advice? Will the Secretary of State advise employers to use the job retention scheme for this group when needed?

**Alok Sharma:** Our guidance makes reference to employers having to consider those who are particularly vulnerable and in those sorts of categories—expectant mothers and so on—and we want them to make sure those people are being taken care of and catered for. None of the equalities legislation has changed; at the end of the day, this is guidance, but overlaid by the current regulatory regime in place across the country.

**Edward Timpson** (Eddisbury) (Con) [V]: Businesses in Eddisbury planning on reopening will want to get covid-secure as soon as possible but also as safely as possible, especially where, as we just heard, they might interact with the most vulnerable. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that when developing this guidance the vulnerable customers and staff who might come into contact with those businesses are fully taken into account?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Yes, the guidance has been prepared with those individuals in mind. As I have said, we obviously require employers to adhere to existing equalities legislation and are also asking in the guidance for employers to monitor the wellbeing of their employees, particularly those who may be working from home, and to take into account the protection of those who may be at higher risk.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): The discussion around return to work is very welcome, but in areas such as Cambridge with above-average rateable values, many quite small but vital businesses, such as pubs and restaurants, are really struggling just above the £50k threshold. Much loved cafés such as The Copper Kettle and Benets in King's Parade and businesses such as the innovative Rainbow Rocket climbing centre all face that problem, so could the Secretary of State remind us how that £50k threshold was arrived at and what would have been the costs and benefits of a different threshold? Would he now consider a higher threshold, particularly for areas with above-average rateable values?

**Alok Sharma:** I understand that the hospitality, leisure and retail sectors face a particular challenge right now. The Prime Minister has set out a road map for how we might get to opening them, but we have to keep a tight grip on the R factor. The hon. Gentleman will know that there is a one-year rates holiday for businesses of all sizes in the sectors he is talking about. I hope that businesses will also take advantage of the loan schemes, particularly the Bounce Back scheme.

**Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con) [V]: Coming out of lockdown, it will be critical to encourage the public to support local small and medium-sized businesses, to help to revitalise the economy not only here in Bosworth but across the country. Will the Secretary of State consider a positive advertising campaign to get the public to back their local businesses?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. As he knows, we are already running digital campaigns across Government at this particularly vital time. Of course I agree that this is an opportunity for us to back local businesses in the heart of our communities.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP) [V]: Protecting jobs and businesses is important, but the Chancellor's announcement on the covid job retention scheme—[Inaudible.]

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. I am terribly sorry, Patricia; there seems to be a fault on the audio. We will see if we can correct it and come back to you. In the meantime, I call Maria Miller.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for all he has done to help to safeguard jobs during the pandemic. May I ask him to look particularly at the problems still facing some pregnant women who have been contacting organisations such as Working Families and Maternity Action? Will he confirm to businesses that all pregnant women are currently classed as vulnerable, and that if they are unable to work as a result they should be suspended on paid leave or furloughed? Will he consider clarifying the guidance, to help those employers who want to do the right thing?

**Alok Sharma:** My right hon. Friend is a champion for the rights of women—indeed, of all individuals—and she raises an important point about pregnant women. The Government guidance makes clear that pregnant women can be furloughed, provided that they meet normal eligibility requirements. I would go further and say, as it does in the guidance, that expectant mothers are, as always, entitled to suspension on full pay if a suitable rule cannot be found within the workplace.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP) [V]: The 14-day quarantine will have a real impact on aviation and tourism. It seems that it will be possible for people to fly into the Republic of Ireland, then cross into Northern Ireland and then to the UK mainland. Indeed, they will also be able to fly into France and take the ferry across to the mainland. This underlines the problems that we have. What impact assessment has been carried out with reference to the connectivity between Northern Ireland and the UK mainland in terms of business and tourism and the impact on airports and airlines? Will the 14-day quarantine be temporary?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Gentleman, who speaks with huge passion for his community and his area, raises an important issue about quarantine. He will understand the reason that we are looking to do this, and more details will be set out in due course, but I would say to him that businesses that previously felt that people had to be physically in the same place for meetings are now finding new ways of conducting business. Indeed, there are millions of people who are continuing to work from home, even during the pandemic.

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland) (Con) [V]: Small and medium-sized enterprises working within the construction and home improvement sectors—plumbers, electricians, window fitters—will welcome the guidance that they can undertake work in customers' houses subject to sensible precautions. Is it my right hon. Friend's advice that now is the time for our trades to get back to work, to help the economy to bounce back?

**Alok Sharma:** My hon. Friend has made his point crystal clear. He has talked about a set of workers who are the very backbone of the small business community across all our constituencies. He will also know that the Federation of Master Builders has warmly welcomed the guidance. Yes, absolutely, we want people to get back to work, but to get back to work safely.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** We are going to try Patricia Gibson one more time.

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP) [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Protecting jobs and businesses is important, but the Chancellor's announcement on the jobs retention scheme—[*Inaudible.*] Although the scheme has been extended to October, the Government's contribution to the scheme is to be cut. Can the Secretary of State explain why he thinks it is fair that 200,000 workers have been entirely excluded from the scheme just—[*Inaudible.*]

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Secretary of State, were you able to get anything that you could give a response to?

**Alok Sharma:** I was not able to catch much of what the hon. Lady said, but she will know that the Chancellor just set out his statement. I will commit that if she writes to me or the Chancellor we will, I am sure, provide her with some answers.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry, Patricia, but we did have real audio and video problems there.

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD) [V]: Many businesses in my constituency offering health services, such as dentists and physiotherapists, have been excluded from other forms of Government support yet are offering absolutely vital services that we will need when the shut-down ends. Does the Minister have any specific guidance for businesses such as these?

**Alok Sharma:** I would not say that businesses have been excluded. Indeed, if we look at the range of what is available in terms of loan schemes it covers the smallest businesses right to the very largest. We are seeing significant take-up particularly of the Bounce Back loan scheme. I made an announcement about the top-up to the local business grant fund scheme that we already have—almost £9 billion has gone out. This is a discretionary fund that is being set up to support businesses as well.

**Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con) [V]: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he is looking at how certain tourism and leisure facilities might open safely as and when the covid alert level is low in all parts of the UK?

**Alok Sharma:** I know that my hon. Friend is a champion for businesses in his constituency and he will be concerned for them. The Prime Minister has set out a timeline, but, as he has said, we also have to be cautious about how we proceed. We are currently looking at hospitality opening at some point in July, but that is entirely dependent on making sure that we keep the R factor down. In the meantime, as my hon. Friend knows and has heard from the Chancellor, additional support is being provided.

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab) [V]: The future of many small businesses in my constituency of Bedford and Kempston hangs in the balance because owners have been unable to access the Government grants as their business rate classification does not qualify them for it. Local authorities have some discretion, but will the Government issue clearer guidance and have a speedier declassification process to ensure that legitimate businesses do not fall through the net and go to the wall?

**Alok Sharma:** We have put in place the sort of measures that we have precisely because we want to support as many businesses as possible. We want people to be ready, and to be retained in the workplace so that when we get past this pandemic we can bounce back. In an earlier answer, I talked about a discretionary fund to support businesses that local authorities will administer. If the hon. Gentleman writes to me, I will be happy to provide further details.

**Sara Britcliffe** (Hyndburn) (Con) [V]: I know that my right hon. Friend will join me in thanking all businesses in Hyndburn and Haslingden for their work in responding swiftly and efficiently to the lockdown. Many of them have adapted their services to support those who need it. Can he assure me that the businesses and workers in Hyndburn and Haslingden will be both supported and utilised in the recovery process and that their safety will be paramount in the decisions made?

**Alok Sharma:** I thank my hon. Friend for everything she is doing to support businesses in her own constituency of Hyndburn and Haslingden. I have already set out a whole range of measures of support that the Government are providing, and I know that she will welcome what the Chancellor said at the Dispatch Box earlier about further support for the furlough scheme.

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab) [V]: On Sunday, the Prime Minister announced plans for workers to return to work if they were not able to work from home, giving businesses less than 12 hours to put any plans in place. The guidance issued by the Government on Monday places all the obligations on employers—for example, for social distancing and cleaning. Will the Secretary of State check to see whether these guidelines are being followed by employers? The £14 million uplift to the HSE is welcome, but this does not compensate for the £100 million budget cut and the two thirds reduction in staffing over the past decade. Will the Secretary of State commit to put the needs of working people first, properly resource the HSE to increase the number of inspectors, work with unions and not allow businesses to reopen until their safety measures have been approved and verified?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Lady raised a number of points. Let me address two of them. She asked about the HSE funding. I am pleased that she welcomes the extra £14 million. Over the years, the HSE has absolutely maintained its regulatory activities. It has invested in updating IT systems and other infrastructure, and has reduced reliance on taxpayer funding through growth in its commercial activities. Absolutely everyone in this House and across the country wants us to keep people

safe in the workplace, and every employer I have spoken to wants that to happen. That is why we have produced guidance through a process of consensus, and we will continue to monitor that.

**Dean Russell** (Watford) (Con) [V]: Across my constituency, we have an incredible business community that is supported by groups such as the Watford chamber of commerce. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that employers build confidence with their workers and customers, and that all businesses should aim to publish their risk assessments online wherever possible to reduce concerns, showcase their transparency and keep workers safe?

**Alok Sharma:** I thank my hon. Friend and the Watford chamber of commerce for everything they are doing to support local businesses. He will know that the British Chambers of Commerce has worked with us and welcomed the guidance. I agree that we should be encouraging all employers to make available the results of their risk assessment, and we have made it very clear that we expect all employers with more than 50 workers to publish the results of their risk assessment on their website.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** We are going to do the last two questions and then we have to move on to the next statement. I apologise to Members who were unable to get in.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): As secretary to the all-party parliamentary group on beauty, aesthetics and wellbeing, I know that this £6 billion sector is crucial to our economy, with many businesses on our UK high streets. By nature, it is a very hands-on industry, so can the Secretary of State assure me that clear guidelines on PPE will be issued well ahead of these businesses reopening, so as to protect both staff and consumers?

**Alok Sharma:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point on behalf of a sector that he is working to represent. We will continue to work collaboratively to come up with further guidance on sectors and industries that are not currently open.

**Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for allowing garden centres to reopen from tomorrow; that is very welcome in West Worcestershire. As he thinks about allowing more of the retail sector to open, is he considering relaxing the rules to allow a levelling up of our high street to the same sort of opening hours as we have on the internet?

**Alok Sharma:** I, too, welcome the fact that garden centres will be open from tomorrow. It will be an opportunity for us to continue to restart our economy. My hon. Friend makes an important point. I will continue to keep the situation under review.

## Covid-19: Transport

2.38 pm

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):** With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the new transport guidance for passengers and operators that has been published by my Department today.

Coronavirus has cast a shadow over the lives of everyone in this country. As we all know too well, for some it has caused unimaginable heartache. For millions more of our fellow citizens, this crisis has meant an enormous sacrifice in the national effort to beat this disease. The Government are immensely grateful to the British people for the profound changes that they have made to their lives over the last few weeks.

I also extend my thanks to transport workers and the wider freight sector for their immense efforts to keep Britain on the move during this crisis. We will always remember the way in which the industry has served the country during the most challenging of times. Public transport operators have ensured that all those frontline staff have been able to get to work and fight the virus, while freight firms have delivered vital goods and kept supermarket shelves stacked.

However, it is now time to consider how together we emerge from this crisis. On Sunday, the Prime Minister set out the first careful steps for reopening society and a roadmap for the weeks and the months ahead. Undoubtedly, transport is going to play a very central role in that recovery. It will be the key to restarting our economy and in time will enable us to renew and strengthen those precious ties that are so deeply valued by us all.

As I said last week, our nation's emergence from this crisis will not be a single leap to freedom. It will be a gradual process. We cannot jeopardise the progress achieved over the past few weeks by our shared sacrifices. We therefore remain clear that those who can work from home should continue to do so. However, as those who cannot start to return to their jobs, the safety of the public and of transport workers must be paramount. That is why the Department for Transport has today published two new pieces of guidance for passengers and for operators.

These documents aim to give passengers the confidence to travel, and they seek to give operators the information they need to provide safer services and workplaces for passengers and for staff. We encourage operators to consider the particular needs of their customers and workers as they translate these documents into action.

The first document is aimed at passengers. I will summarise some of the main points contained in the advice. First, as I mentioned, we continue to ask people to go to work only if they cannot do their jobs from home. That is because even as transport begins to revert to a full service, the 2-metre distancing rule will leave effective capacity for only one in 10 passengers overall. It is therefore crucial that we protect our network by minimising the pressures placed on it and ensure that it is ready to serve those who most need it.

As a result, we are actively asking those who need to make journeys to their place of work or other essential trips to walk or to cycle wherever possible. In order to

help us do more of that, last week I announced an unprecedented £2 billion investment to put walking and cycling right at the heart of our transport policy. The first stage is worth £250 million and will include a series of swift emergency measures, including pop-up bike lanes, wider pavements and cycling and bus-only corridors. That money should help protect our public transport network in the weeks and months ahead. It is my hope that they will eventually allow us to harness the vast health, social and environmental benefits that active forms of travel can provide. If people cannot walk, but have access to a car—I appreciate that I will be the only Transport Secretary to have said this for very many years—we urge them to use the car before they consider public transport, avoiding where possible any busy times of day.

I do, however, recognise that for some people using transport is a necessity. In this case, passengers should follow the guidance we have set out today in order to keep themselves safe. It recommends that travellers must maintain social distancing by staying 2 metres apart wherever possible to prevent the virus. We also advise that as a precautionary measure, particularly where that is not possible, people wear face coverings when using public transport. That could help protect other travellers from coronavirus where someone has perhaps unwittingly or unknowingly developed the illness, but is not showing any symptoms. We urge passengers to avoid the rush hour and replan their visits, to use contactless payments where at all possible and to wash their hands before and after their journeys.

In addition, the guidance also reminds us that at this most challenging of times, it is more vital than ever that we think about the needs of others. Our transport operators and their staff are doing an incredible job to keep everyone safe. Please follow their advice. At stations and bus interchanges, be patient and considerate with fellow passengers and staff. In particular, we should remember the needs of disabled passengers, those with hearing and sight impairments and older travellers, too.

As I mentioned, we are also publishing a second document, guidance for transport operators, today. Those organisations really are at the forefront of the national recovery effort. They know the insides and out of the needs of their customers and their workers, and they understand like no one else their industry's specific needs. That is why I have no doubt that the operators are best placed to implement the safety processes that work best for their businesses, their employees and their customers. The guidance we are publishing today advises operators across all forms of private and public transport on the measures they can take to improve safety. The steps include ensuring stations, services and equipment are regularly cleaned, and that passenger flows are clearly communicated to try to avoid crowding to try to keep everyone on the network, passengers and staff, 2 metres apart wherever possible.

The guidance will develop over time, in line with our increasing understanding of how coronavirus is spread and how it is contained. In addition, it is likely that there will be no one-size-fits-all approach to implementation. It will need to be tailored and localised, based on plans for local specific transport needs. In preparation for that process, yesterday I wrote to local authorities to set out how we can work together to prepare transport networks at a local level for restart and ensure public safety.

The documents I publish today will help ready our transport system to support our country as we seek to control the virus and restart the economy. We will inevitably encounter obstacles along the way as we embark on the next stage of our national fightback against the virus. There is no doubt that we need to continue to work together to overcome those challenges. On that note, I would like to express my gratitude to our partners in the devolved Administrations, the local authorities, the Mayors, trade unions and transport operators for their work over the past few weeks. I look forward to continued collaboration in future, because co-operation will be key to setting the country on the road to recovery.

If everyone plays their part, and if we continue to stay alert, we can control the virus and save lives. If we all follow the guidance on making essential journeys, I believe that together we can harness the power of transport to build a new and revitalised nation. I commend this statement to the House.

2.46 pm

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of the statement. I also thank him for the way in which he has maintained communication and shown a willingness to work together in the national interest.

I know that everyone in this House and at home will join me in sending our thanks to all transport workers across the country. As with all our frontline workers, they are the very best of us. It is so important that we give a voice to those workers. Even today, the official advice is found wanting and it will lead to confusion. The scenes we saw yesterday on public transport were unsurprising when the Government ordered a return to work with 12 hours' notice but without the guidance being in place on how people can be kept safe. May I therefore ask the Secretary of State why his announcement was not made before the Prime Minister's statement on Sunday?

Secondly, the Government have produced guidance for bus passengers and operators, but it leaves too much to chance and fails to protect frontline workers. It risks a postcode lottery on standards and protection, and there is far too much "should", "could", "not always possible" and "as much as you can", rather than clear, directive guidance. For bus drivers, for instance, the guidance is that PPE should not be used, but instead reserved for health and care staff. That is despite shocking figures released by the Office for National Statistics that show professional drivers, including those operating taxis, private hire vehicles, buses and goods vehicles, have some of the highest covid-19 fatality rates in the country. May I therefore ask the Secretary of State for the evidence base to support the position that the provision of PPE should not be provided for frontline staff on transport? What discussions have taken place to ensure co-operation across our devolved nations to offer clear and consistent standards for transport such as buses and rail that, of course, crosses from nation to nation?

When the Secretary of State says he announced last week a £2 billion fund for cycling, it sounded awfully familiar. Will he confirm that that actually is not new money, but was instead announced pre-lockdown back in February? In that context, can he confirm whether it has now been paid to local councils?

The Secretary of State touched on the aviation sector in the guidance that has been produced. A number of airlines have already announced a significant number of redundancies, affecting tens of thousands of jobs directly and throughout the supply chain.

Even as we transition to a green economy, protecting jobs now so that people can be reskilled for the future is critical. It will be far easier to transition from a point of strength rather than one of weakness. The Government have failed to offer a sectoral deal for aviation. There is a real chance to set conditions on staff wages, payments to UK-based suppliers and a shift to green technology, and to demand that those who seek our help pay fairly into the tax system, as well as halt the payment of shareholder dividends. Why have the Government failed to act?

Aviation is not alone. We have seen this with ferry operators and the announcement of more than 1,100 jobs at risk with P&O. The Prime Minister's 14-day quarantine proposal is a total mess. It states that everyone must be quarantined, unless they come from anywhere in the world via France, which is one of the worst affected countries in Europe after the UK. Will the Government produce the scientific advice that justifies why France should be exempt from that policy? Why have the Government decided that now is the time to implement this measure, two months after other countries introduced it? More than 18 million passengers have entered the UK since January. Will the Government publish the scientific advice that led to that change now and not earlier?

Finally, we urgently need a comprehensive plan for transport. The public rightly demand an end to the chaos surrounding the exit plan. The risk is not just that more lives will be lost needlessly, but that the economic damage will be far deeper, hurting our communities for a generation to come. The Opposition will continue to work together in the national interest, but the Secretary of State must take a message back to the Cabinet table: no more confusion, no more reckless briefings, and no more delay. This is a national crisis that needs a Government who are fit to respond to it, and we hope for the country that that comes sooner, rather than later.

**Grant Shapps:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman and congratulate him on his new post. He is right to raise a number of those issues, in particular the extraordinary work being done by our transport workers. I thought it might be worth updating the House on the latest information I have about the number of those who have sadly died with covid-19, although that was not necessarily through their jobs—we do not know. The latest number I have from Transport for London is 42 people, and on Network Rail, including train operating companies, the latest number I have is 10. Our thoughts are with all their friends and families at this difficult time.

The hon. Gentleman is right to mention concerns about overcrowding, and I contacted the office of the Mayor of London regarding Transport for London. We are working closely with him to try to ensure that the number of services is ramped up quickly. As I said in my opening comments, however, we can have 100% of services, but that will not prevent overcrowding because social distancing now requires much more space. I am working proactively with the Mayor to try to bring in as much marshalling as possible by TfL, and elsewhere, including on Network Rail. We have been working with

[Grant Shapps]

the British Transport Police who even yesterday deployed several hundred people. Most of all, I appeal to the public to listen to our message, and to please avoid public transport unless they absolutely need to take it as a key worker. People should look for alternative means of travel, either active, or by using their car if they have one available.

The hon. Gentleman said that the advice is not specific enough, and I hope he has had a chance to read it. Other commentators have said that it is surprisingly specific and detailed across all the different sectors, including the two pieces of advice that have been provided today. I do try to provide the balance. His wider point seems to be that the advice is not specific enough, for example on what bus operators should do. Buses look and feel different throughout different parts of the country, depending on the make and model, and on the systems run by local bus operators. It is not possible to provide that level of advice company by company, operator by operator, because TfL will be very different from a Metro tram operator. We have provided very good overall advice. Our officials are working closely with the operators, unions, and others, and much of the advice is very similar. We all know about social distancing, washing hands, and the basics.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the evidence base, and I would be happy to organise a briefing for him on that. Public Health England, and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, have been very clear that there is no case for the use of medical level PPE in transportation. It depends, of course, on what someone is doing. Sitting in a cab driving a train is a fairly solitary activity, so there is no requirement in such a situation, but if someone has more contact with the public, things will vary. I extend to him, as I have done to others, the offer of a briefing on these matters. In fact, either tomorrow or Thursday we are giving a joint briefing to which I have invited unions and operators of buses and other forms of transport.

The hon. Gentleman also queried the £2 billion for cycling. I made this point clear when I announced the money. He will recall from before his time in this role that we announced £5 billion for bikes and buses. Some of this money—£1.7 billion—is part of that funding, as I said when I made the announcement. We have brought it forward so that we can get on with it, particularly given the emergency situation and the need to widen pavements and provide thoroughfares for cycling.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the airlines. I welcome the shift in tone from that of his predecessor, who never once encouraged me to support aviation. I agree about jobs, but he is wrong to say there has not been the support there. Almost uniquely, the aviation sector has enjoyed something that has not been widely advertised, but I will let him into it: not only can the industry access the very generous support provided by our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of Exchequer, which he extended further an hour or so ago from this Dispatch Box, but, in addition to all the other Government support, aviation can enter into a process of discussion if the existing types of support are not sufficient. Without breaching commercial confidentiality, I can tell him that a number of such discussions between the Department and aviation organisations, be they airlines, airports or ground support companies, are taking place.

Similarly, on P&O, perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not spot it, but we have supported a range of maritime freight—in some cases, that has included P&O—to provide connectivity, not just from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, but between Great Britain and 26 other ports in Europe.

The policy of quarantining for 14 days is a Home Office lead. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns, but I can tell him quite straightforwardly that, going into this crisis, the advice was not to instigate quarantining, mainly because we had millions of Brits to bring home, but also because, according to the scientists—I had this very conversation with the chief medical officer before the lockdown began and he explained it to me—it would at best have delayed things by three, four or five days; sadly, it would not have prevented us from experiencing the epidemic. Again, he is very welcome to see that advice.

As we come out of this, as we control the virus in this country, with the facilities now in place to track and trace and the number of tests that can be carried out, of course we very much need to stop it continuing. I look forward to working with the hon. Gentleman on that as well.

**Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con) [V]:** I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's statement and all the work that he and his team have done. He seems to be saying that self-distancing on public transport is best practice but not an absolute requirement and that PPE should be the fallback. In that regard, does he think we will have enough PPE supplies to protect our key workers and travellers? Also, seeing as we are a stoic bunch and perhaps not used to wearing face coverings, will he consider giving them away free at terminal stations and places where people use transport to ensure people use them?

**Grant Shapps:** I am grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee for giving me an opportunity to clarify two things. First, we are not advising that medical-level PPE be used—that would go completely against Public Health England advice; rather we are advising that people make their own PPE at home, using the information on the gov.uk website, which shows how to make it from an old T-shirt or to sew one. The reason for that is that it is critical, from a medical point of view, that we do not compete with medical applications for PPE. People should make their own PPE, which in this case means a face covering rather than a mask.

Secondly, on social distancing, it is of course true that there will be times when people cannot maintain 2 metres, such as when walking past somebody. The Government are doing a number of different things. The advice we are publishing today explains that if people are not face to face but are instead side by side, the risk factors are different. We are working with app companies—including Google, Microsoft and the British companies Citymapper and Trainline—to work on crush data, which would be published to enable people to see where the busiest parts of the network are and to actively try to avoid that. All those steps are in train.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I call Gavin Newlands, with a two-minute limit.

**Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP) [V]:** Although many businesses across the transport industry are fighting for survival, I note that this is the



first time since this situation began that we have seen a Transport Minister in the Chamber delivering a statement or responding to an urgent question. With that said, I welcome the accelerated investment in active travel schemes, which follows a similar announcement by the Scottish Government back in April.

The guidance for England highlights the serious challenges that operators will face in the implementation of the guidance for the foreseeable future and the real and understandable anxiety facing the travelling public. In the section that deals with vulnerable workers—those with medical conditions for whom coronavirus is a serious risk—it says that employers “should offer support”, “should consider the level of risk”

and should consider

“the guidance on clinically extremely vulnerable”

people and so on. The word “must” does not appear once. Does the Secretary of State not agree that the language is too weak and needs to be strengthened, lest some clinically vulnerable workers be put at risk?

The running of regular services with capacity cut by up to 90% is unsustainable without Government support. Has the Secretary of State estimated how much the implementation will cost and when his Department will start to fund the support required by operators and local government? Given that I am still waiting on a response to any of the letters that I have emailed to the Secretary of State, dating back to the start of April, on the support—or rather, the lack of it—offered to sectors such as road haulage, coaching, roadside recovery, holiday travel and aviation, when does he plan to make a statement covering those issues?

In Scotland, aviation businesses such as airports, Loganair and baggage handlers are exempt from business rates for a year, but people are losing their jobs right now, with businesses folding or being forced to restructure and downsize, and some, such as IAG British Airways, sadly seeing an opportunity to force through changes to workforce terms and conditions that they had been trying to implement for a decade. The extension of the furlough scheme is welcome, but with social distancing likely to be with us for some time, the aviation sector requires more support; when will the Secretary of State introduce such measures?

**Grant Shapps:** I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was able to catch the previous statement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; he answered some of the questions about what employers should be doing.

One of the main characteristics of the UK’s response to this crisis, unlike in other countries, has been that we have asked people to do things—for example, to stay at home—and that has been very widely followed and accepted. In the same spirit, we expect—indeed, we anticipate—that businesses will behave in the same way, as my right hon. Friend Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said not half an hour ago. He has increased the amount of money provided for inspections, for example, to make sure that that happens, but we do look to employers to make sure that they behave in a sensible way. Of course, employees will have all the usual routes—including ACAS, local authorities and the Health and Safety Executive—available if they do not feel that that is happening.

The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that a massive amount of support has now been provided to public transport in particular to keep it going. In England, that has involved support to all the train operating companies and to the bus operators. I realise that the finance is separate in Scotland and goes through the Scottish Government; some of the hon. Gentleman’s questions seemed to me to be more applicable to them. I do, however, think that the support provided across the United Kingdom is an indication of where we are all much better off working on these things together, and I welcome that partnership as we seek to save, where possible, aviation companies, bus operators and the others he mentioned.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers that I provided to the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), on the support that is not necessarily publicly exposed, but is none the less available, to the aviation sector and that few other sectors of the economy enjoy—it can run out of all the different schemes that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has provided, and now extended, and still have additional discussions beyond that. I can confirm that we are in those discussions, including with Scottish companies.

**Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con) [V]:** I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. The Prime Minister said that aviation is crucial for our country and our economy. I received a letter yesterday from the Secretary of State telling me that aviation supports more than half a million jobs, and about 1,700 of those workers are in my constituency. Aviation underpins the global reach of our economy, yet that global reach is currently stymied and might be about to be cut off. What are the Government doing with our allies, including the United States and other European countries, to ensure that we get aviation going again safely, without a negative impact on our economy, and that the global reach of our UK economy can be maintained?

**Grant Shapps:** I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for her question. I absolutely agree with her, as a passionate supporter of aviation, and indeed a qualified pilot, about the importance of the industry. The reach of the sector, in all the ways she described, is immense. The UK has the world’s third biggest aviation industry, and it is very important that we support it through this crisis.

The sector has enjoyed enormous support from the Chancellor—I received a letter only in the last day thanking us for the support so far—and the extended furlough scheme will be hugely welcomed. As I said, there is a process that enables aviation companies, whether they are ground support, airlines or airports, to use the various schemes available and, if that is not enough, come to the Department for Transport and work with us and the Treasury to see what else can be done.

For the benefit of the House, I should say it is important that we do not find ourselves in a situation where shareholders benefit through the good times but the taxpayer picks up the tab in the bad times. It is very important that we get the balance right, with shareholders also being asked to contribute. However, I absolutely reassure my right hon. Friend that I have daily situation reports. We are tracking it carefully and working extremely

[Grant Shapps]

hard to do whatever we can, even though, as she rightly points out, the global aviation market has now shrunk to a tiny percentage of what it would be ordinarily. The best way to resolve that is to beat this virus, which is why it is so important that people follow the guidance.

**Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab) [V]: First, may I pay my respects to the dozens of transport workers who have sadly died as a result of covid-19, working for us as public servants? They are the real key workers, and we should never forget that. Workers across the country need our protection.

The Secretary of State mentioned the funding to support cycling and walking to work. That is long overdue in my constituency, but we must understand that for many people in our communities walking or cycling to work is virtually impossible. Many of my constituents are entirely reliant on the already very poor public transport to access their employment. Those employed in unionised workplaces, with responsible employers, might just have the flexibility to access safer transport services at varying times throughout the day and evening. However, those working for unscrupulous bosses might not—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans)**: Order. I am sorry; that is going on way too long. Secretary of State, can you answer the points already made?

**Grant Shapps**: Yes, very quickly. It might interest the hon. Member that 44% of all journeys outside London are less than three miles, so there are a lot of people in a lot of circumstances who may be able to switch to cycling or walking. As I mentioned, we intend to introduce fast-tracked trials of e-scooters as a useful way of getting around. It will not be possible for everybody in every circumstance; we completely understand that. But even if a small proportion of people start to cycle—a 5% increase, say—it would relieve the equivalent of 11 million train journeys. The maths mean that you do not have to be the person cycling. If more people are cycling overall, it will help.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans)**: I am not saying this because Dr Julian Lewis is to be called next—it is a general point—but I ask Members to make their questions brief, because we have great time constraints.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con) [V]: As an alternative to using public transport during the crisis, what assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the desirability of ageing bikers like me once again using motorcycles for travelling to work, and will he be taking any steps to incentivise motorcycle usage as the lockdown is gradually eased?

**Grant Shapps**: I am not sure I accept the entire premise of my right hon. Friend's question. Motorcycles are an enormously important way of getting around—2.7 billion miles were travelled by motorcycle in 2018, the last year for which we have data. We are working on a number of projects, including sorting out potholes, which are a huge problem for people on motorcycles and other two-wheeled vehicles. I also encourage him—at whatever age—to adopt the electric motorbike.

**Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Given the perilous state of the travel industry, should Ministers not take much greater care with what they are saying? Words matter, and they can have an immediate impact. Not only do we have the chaos of the 14-day quarantine, but the Health Secretary this morning all but ruled out summer holidays, saying that they will be impossible. Are the Government, like European Governments, working towards European summer holidays happening this summer, or do we need to cancel them? If it is neither, can Ministers be a bit more careful with their words?

**Grant Shapps**: Words do matter—the hon. Member is absolutely right about that—but they matter in both directions. The more that people try to confuse what are actually pretty straightforward statements, the less that helps the public as a whole. The situation with regard to transport, and summer holidays in particular, regrettable as it is, is pretty easy to understand. We know that, as things stand, we are unable to go ahead and do these things, because most countries are not allowing people in, and in any case, the Foreign Office advice is not to travel. It is hugely sad and regrettable, but it is the fact. As we progress and get through phase 2 and phase 3, as we hope to in June and July, the situation may change, but it is not possible to give people a sense of false hope. We need to be realistic about this, and I am certainly keen to use very precise language in order to provide every possible direction to the public, but it will be a wait-and-see game, I am afraid.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Quarantine at ports of entry is a useful public health tool for preventing diseases spreading from high-prevalence to low-prevalence populations. Sadly, the UK now has a relatively high prevalence of covid-19, especially in London. In the light of page 29 on international travel in the plan published yesterday, will the Secretary of State publish the evidence base for quarantining people travelling here, especially from relatively low-prevalence countries, which is to say most of the rest of the world?

**Grant Shapps**: In terms of where we are at the moment, the last information I saw was that the central estimate is about 130,000 covid-19 active cases in the country. That is coming down all the time, as people have seen from the graphs that are shown every day. We hope to get to a position where the prevalence is relatively small. It would be crazy to then ask the British people to continue to make quite significant sacrifices through social distancing, staying at home and the rest of it, while allowing people to come here for holidays and move around who are not British citizens returning here, as was the case with people coming into the country until now. That would not be practical. There will be a number of measures in place, and there will be some exemptions. There will be much more detail on this before it comes in, which is why it is not coming in instantly. It is more likely to be towards the end of the month, but that depends on the progress we make on defeating this virus.

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: With regulations on travel currently differing in Scotland and England, what discussions is the Minister having with his counterpart in the Scottish Government to ensure that those regulations can be effectively enforced on all cross-border rail services?

**Grant Shapps:** I have sat in all the Cobra meetings and I have always found, from the First Minister to all the devolved Administrations, that working with them has been extremely constructive. I do not recognise most of what I have seen in the newspaper reports of that process. We agreed that there would be times when things were different; for example, the R rate is slightly higher in Scotland, so it is completely understandable that the message there has not shifted from “Stay at home”. That will change over time.

I have been keeping in touch with my opposite number, as have my Ministers, on an active basis, and we look to work together very closely indeed, particularly where rail and other services cross the borders. We have been working very closely with the devolved Administrations throughout.

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Stoke-on-Trent, in normal times, is a city blighted by congestion, poor air quality and a lack of good public transport. Therefore, improving buses in Stoke is a major priority, highlighted by our transforming cities fund bid. Can my right hon. Friend provide greater clarity on the £2 billion available to local authorities for local transport—specifically, the process that each will have to go through to secure funding?

**Grant Shapps:** Although I cannot provide that clarity to my hon. Friend today, because I would want to come to the House first to announce the details of how that money would be divided up, I take the opportunity to pay tribute to him in Stoke-on-Trent North, and to his colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) and for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon), for the extraordinary work they have been doing in securing the transforming cities funding for their residents. I am sure he will be very pleased when we allocate the £2 billion.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC) [V]: Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), the Government are now urging people in England to use face coverings in confined areas such as public transport. There are many people who commute daily across the Wales-England border to go to work and for other rightful activities. Will the Minister ensure that there is clear information on cross-border public transport—such as in announcements, or on large posters—and proper enforcement by the British Transport police, consistent with the fact that in Wales, wearing a mask is not sufficient, and that people must stay at home unless their journey is absolutely necessary? Will he give us some of the detail, please?

**Grant Shapps:** I am grateful for that point. We have been careful to make it clear in the guidance—including in the 60-page document released yesterday, but also in the transport guidance—that rules do vary. We have made it clear, for example, that people from England should not be travelling to Wales to take their exercise—that would be wrong, because it does not fit with the “Stay at home” message in Wales. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that I will definitely take on board his point about ensuring that the cross-border discussion—specifically, how transport works—is fully reflective of that different advice. I will even take his idea about announcements and so on into account as well.

**Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con) [V]: Rural bus transport is a lifeline for so many people, particularly in rural constituencies such as mine in North Norfolk. We have the oldest constituency demographics in the whole country, with many older people who cannot drive and, crucially, rely on buses as their only form of transport in isolated areas. Given the Government guidance that we should avoid using public transport wherever possible, what reassurance can the Minister give the bus operators, and those vulnerable people who rely so heavily on buses, that routes can be operated safely and financially viably to maintain services?

**Grant Shapps:** My hon. Friend is right to point that out. I want to be completely straight with him and with the House: there is a basic dilemma. We have a situation where, probably for the first time ever, I, a Transport Secretary, am encouraging people not to use public transport, which rubs against the bus operators’ need to have income. That is why, at or soon after the beginning of this crisis, I announced a multimillion-pound deal as a bus support grant, to ensure that my hon. Friend’s and other hon. Members’ local services could continue. As he knows, we are very keen indeed on buses—as is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. That is why we have a very large, multibillion-pound fund for buses, particularly to look after left-behind communities during this Parliament.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD) [V]: I welcome the Government’s intention to encourage walking and cycling, and I recognise the need to minimise the use of public transport during the covid crisis. However, the experience of countries easing lockdowns has shown that there is a substantial increase in car use. What measures are the Government taking to minimise a spike in car use, and what extra freedoms will the Secretary of State give to local authorities so that they can make their own decisions and offer more opportunities for walking and cycling?

**Grant Shapps:** The hon. Member is absolutely right. On the one hand, we are saying, “Look, use a car if you can to avoid public transport”—but that is why I put so much emphasis on this £2 billion fund to promote cycling and walking. We will expand pavements. We will create new thoroughfares for buses and cycles only, and we will do those things quickly and urgently with guidance that I have already issued to local authorities. In addition, we ask them to use their thinking to create long-term benefits from this. To add to that, I have included things such as new voucher schemes to allow people to get their bikes repaired—to pull them out of the shed or garage, or from the side of the house, and start riding them. All these things come together in what is the biggest single boost to cycling and walking made by any British Government at any time.

**Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. However, many Londoners who need to get to work will still need to use the tube and the suburban rail network. What discussions has he had with the Mayor of London and Network Rail about how quickly the London transport system can be returned to full working, so that we can achieve the most social distancing possible, and has he talked to the Mayor about the possibility of introducing temperature scanning at London termini?

**Grant Shapps:** Ridership on TfL has increased—yesterday, it was up by 8%. I spoke to and communicated with the Mayor and his deputy Mayor over the weekend. I am encouraging them—and working very closely with TfL—to boost those services just as quickly as they can, and there is more to do there. It is worth reiterating that even if those services ran at 100% of pre-covid levels, we would still be able to take—perhaps on TfL—only 15% of usual commuter levels, so it is important that everybody looks for alternative means of transport. In addition, I should tell the House that I am working closely—again with TfL, but also with transport across the country—on marshalling plans using TfL staff, Network Rail staff and the British Transport police, who have already been out in significant numbers, to help instruct and direct passengers where the system is getting full. Most of all, we require the co-operation of Londoners and commuters across the country not to overload the system at this time.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I am afraid that we are down to the last two Members now, and I have added a bit of time on because one question was way too long.

**Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op) [V]:** Many of my constituents in Vauxhall work for BA. They are hard-working staff who have given years of service to the airline, including my constituent, Stephen, who has worked for BA for 31 years. He mentioned to me in an email that he despairs at the thought of losing everything from 15 June—the possibility of losing not just his home and his job, but everything. My constituent is concerned that BA has in the region of £10 billion cash reserves. That is very worrying and I share my constituent's concerns. It is unacceptable that staff are being laid off. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the resilience of airlines and their finances?

**Grant Shapps:** This goes right to the point I was making earlier: it is very important that our response to this achieves the right balance between taxpayer involvement and protecting the workforces while recognising that there is likely to be a change in aviation—certainly in

the short and medium term, but we hope not in the long term. We must ensure that the shareholders and businesses are doing their bit. To answer the question directly, I have almost daily dealings on this, looking at what everyone is doing. I have daily situation reports and very frequent conversations with the sector and individuals, as does my aviation Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), and we will continue to do so to protect constituents who have worked hard for British Airways and other companies over the years, and to make sure that a support package is in place for them.

**Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con) [V]:** What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to support open-access train operators during the current crisis, and will he take all available action to ensure that these essential providers of transport and the competition on our railways survive the current pandemic?

**Grant Shapps:** I am keen as mustard on the open-access trains. They are a very good idea. They provide some good competition and tend to have the highest satisfaction levels. The two primary ones have been Hull Trains and Grand Central. Hull Trains has been mothballed for the time being. I have to say that both of them have large train operating companies behind them. We do look to the train operating companies to be clear about what they want to do going forward—I think that, in the case of Hull Trains, it is FirstGroup. They are, of course, currently furloughing staff and we look forward to continuing conversations with them. It is a very important and unique part of our transport system to have that challenge in place.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I am grateful to the Secretary of State. That concludes proceedings on the statement. While the changeover is taking place, may I remind all Members that there is a real need, when asking questions in statements or urgent questions, to make those questions as concise as possible, because a large number of Members were not able to ask the Secretary of State a question.

## Covid-19

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That this House has considered covid-19—(*James Morris.*)

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. I am now introducing a time limit of four minutes. I advise hon. Members who are speaking virtually to please have a timing device visible because they will be cut off after four minutes, and I shall be very strict about that.

3.26 pm

**Andy Carter** (Warrington South) (Con) [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate this afternoon. May I associate myself with the comments made by the Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), at the opening of this debate yesterday? This virus has tested every part of our society, but it has also shown that, when united in a national effort, the British people are a powerful force. It is thanks to the massive collective effort to protect the NHS that we have avoided an uncontrollable and catastrophic epidemic, which could have overwhelmed our health services. That said, I want to offer my sympathies to the families of the 101 people who have sadly passed away in Warrington as a result of covid-19.

On International Nurses Day, may I pay tribute to those community nurses at the Bridgewater Trust in Warrington, who have worked so hard to support people in their own homes, and to the nurses and doctors at Warrington Hospital for the work that they have done throughout this period? It fills me with great pride to see the hospital make headline news for its pioneering work around black boxes. Let me remind Members of what these are: black boxes are normally used for sleep apnoea and doctors have modified them in such a way that they can treat covid-19 patients who are struggling to breathe. That has meant that there has been less need for the more intrusive and invasive ventilators, which has, in turn, led to a far quicker recovery rate, and this has been reflected in the data. Indeed, Warrington's performance is one of the best in the north-west, and I know that clinicians from all over the world are now looking at this work.

As much as any of this news can be positive, it has been encouraging to see a hospital trust managing these challenging times so well. There are no problems with the availability of ICU beds and, to date, there has even been no significant issue with personal protective equipment. That is mainly due to the great collaboration that has taken place across a number of hospitals in the region to share stocks where necessary. From the conversations that I have had, I am really confident that this challenge is being well managed by the trust team.

I also want to thank those people working in care homes for their tireless efforts, and Warrington Borough Council staff. I pay tribute to locally co-ordinated volunteer groups in the villages across our constituency. I have been so impressed by the outstanding community spirit that has enabled armies of volunteers to deliver food and medicine to self-isolating, vulnerable and elderly members of the community. We even saw a new community radio station launched by volunteers in the village of Lymm to keep everyone in touch.

I welcome the Government's gradual easing of the restrictions. Getting out of lockdown was always going to be much more difficult than getting into it. The past few weeks have been really tough for the small businesses here in Warrington that make up the majority of employment in my constituency. I have been heartened by their support for the measures the Government have taken to protect employees and the self-employed. I congratulate the Chancellor on his determined efforts, with a welcome extension and increased flexibility of the job retention scheme announced earlier today. If I have one anxiety, it relates to support for owners of small businesses who have taken professional advice and structured their companies to pay themselves through dividends, and those on short-term PAYE contracts.

Local economies are strengthened when we have strong local media—newspapers, commercial radio stations and news websites where advertisers can promote local business and journalists can deliver reliable local news. I therefore encourage the Government to continue to support this important sector as the economy bounces back.

As one constituent wrote to me by email last night, the next few weeks are about personal responsibility, with each one of us taking small, sensible steps to inch our cities, towns and villages back to a new normal, all within the broad guidelines that the Government have now set out.

3.31 pm

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: I speak today as an MP from one of the areas outside London that has been hardest hit by covid-19. Tragically, 246 people in Salford died due to covid-19 in the first two months—a death rate of 95 per 100,000 of our residents. Our thoughts are with their families and the families of everyone who has died due to the pandemic. At the start of—[*Inaudible.*]

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. We have a problem. Can we please try audio-only to see if that is an improvement?

**Barbara Keeley:** Do you want me to start again, Mr Deputy Speaker?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** No, there is still an audio problem. Let us go to Theresa May and come back to Barbara Keeley.

3.32 pm

**Mrs Theresa May** (Maidenhead) (Con) [V]: First, I pay tribute to all those in the NHS, in care homes and in other settings for working so hard to save lives. But I also pay tribute to all those other workers—the people in local authorities and the emergency services, and others, as well as volunteers, including those in communities across my Maidenhead constituency, who are ensuring that the country can keep going.

Let me say to Ministers that having been there, I do not envy the Government the difficult decisions they have to take. There are no risk-free answers. It is not about eliminating risk, because that is not possible; it is about managing and mitigating risk. It is right that science should underpin decisions, but the science can only take us so far, because essential data is lacking.

[Mrs Theresa May]

We do not know how many people have had covid-19 in the UK. Although the Office for National Statistics survey is building a better picture, the scientists are still making estimates and debating consensus. The Government are putting an emphasis on R—the rate of infection—but that varies across areas, across different parts of the UK, and across different settings. So there are no absolutes, and both scientists and Ministers have to exercise judgment.

As I say, it is not possible to eliminate risk, but in assessing the risk to be managed and mitigated, it is necessary to assess other risks to lives and livelihoods from covid-19. While the number of people dying from covid-19 has been falling, we see lives being lost prematurely not from covid but because people have not been going to hospital and treatments have been postponed that could impact their prognosis in future. And that is without thinking about all those whose mental health will be affected by this lockdown, increased domestic abuse, and the impact of loneliness. So dealing with covid has unintended consequences.

Protecting the NHS for the future, and protecting our public services for the future, means ensuring that we have an economy that can provide the taxes that pays for them.

Without that, as *The Sun* commented this morning, many more lives will be lost. As well as listening to the science, the Government need to apply common sense and, as I said earlier, judgment. To do that, I hope that alongside assessing the science and assessing the rate of infection, the Government are also looking closely every day and assessing the wider impact of the lockdown on lives and livelihoods.

This is about judgment. As we pull away from lockdown and as we take those steps to return to a more normal life, we need to ensure that we are being driven not just by an absolute science, which is not there, but by an assessment of the wider impact of covid on people's lives and their livelihoods. I trust the Government are making those assessments, because it is only by making those assessments that we can ensure not only that we restore our economy to a normality that will supply taxes for our NHS and public services, but that people are able to return to a more normal life.

3.36 pm

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab) [V]: Last week, I held a roundtable with small businesses, facilitated by the Federation of Small Businesses. A number of issues arose.

On nurseries, Miss Houghton, who owns Highmeadows nursery in Bolton, has not been able to access the £10,000 rates relief because the rates on her business premises are too high, although it is in fact a small business. Nurseries cannot access the £25,000 grant that is available for those in the retail and leisure sector. They cannot furlough their employees, as the Government have said that as they receive state funding, they must use that money. The Early Years Alliance says that one in four nurseries will go out of business in the foreseeable future, which is a real shame. We rely on key workers to be able to go out to work and we need to ensure that their children are safe and being looked after. Wales has given nurseries 100% rates relief, and I believe we should have that in England as well.

Another issue that arose was for those who rent serviced offices. They are not able to get the rates assistance that other people that are in their own physical building can. That is particularly unfair for small businesses and new start-ups, which often use serviced offices.

Sole-person limited companies are another issue. Many are self-employed people who put money into their business, and pay themselves through dividends. Under the scheme for the self-employed, the income that they receive through dividends cannot be counted so they are not able to take advantage of the security available to self-employed people. Will the Government reconsider and allow dividends received through their companies as salary?

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe) wrote to the Chancellor about the Asian wedding and hospitality industry, which is worth about £3 billion. It has its own unique challenges, because Asian weddings tend to be very big. To date, it seems that many of those businesses have not been able to get any assistance from the Government's aid programmes. I ask the Chancellor and the Prime Minister—anybody who is listening today—to please ensure that the hospitality industry is funded, and in particular the Asian wedding industry.

I have received emails from people who work as freelancers for the BBC on the pay-as-you-earn system. They are not being furloughed and they cannot get self-employed benefits either, because they are not self-employed. They are caught between the two. Will the Government look at that issue again and ensure that they are properly looked after?

Recently, the Government have said that where the person who owns a premises is claiming rate relief, but the small businesses that operate within that large premises are not, local authorities should perhaps use some of their surpluses to pay and to help those people, but no guidance has been issued. It would be great to have guidance on that as soon as possible.

Many people have fallen into a trap and are not able to be helped by the various Government schemes, so will the Chancellor or the Business Secretary join in a roundtable discussion with my constituents, in order to hear from small businesses and people who are working but who have now lost their income—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. We have to leave it there.

3.40 pm

**Sir Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I wish to make a few quick points. First, I wish to welcome the Chancellor's statement today, because this is an area where a lot of us have been pushing him to give some security to businesses as they go forward. The idea of the furloughing scheme going on and, we hope, reducing as it does, as businesses go back to work, is an important one. However, we must bear in mind that there is a huge cost to it, at some £13 billion every month. He is right to say that he is prepared to extend the scheme, but we must be careful that we do not end up spending so much money that it makes it difficult for the economy to thrive.

I also wish to raise with the Government a few areas where I have concerns. The work they have done so far has been remarkable, and they have rightly received the

full support of people in this House and, I believe, in the country at large, but I wish briefly to raise some issues with them. They say they have been guided by the science, but a number of people have concerns that this is not just about the science alone; there needs to be a much broader sense of where we are—the balance between the economy and covid. Some of the language has been loose on that, with the idea that it has been a choice—this is a false choice—between saving lives and saving the economy. Both are about saving lives; the point is when one becomes so big that we need to deal with it. I think we are at that moment now, and have been for a little while, in terms of the economy.

My concern is that we seem to have been wedded in the early days to the Imperial College model, which has had some quite significant criticisms and a poor record in the past of forecasting in these areas. I am glad that the Government have now widened this out. I note that Sweden ran the figures on the Imperial model and found that it was wrong by about 15 times, overestimating the number of deaths as against what they had witnessed—the same applies in respect of what Edinburgh University and others had managed to do. I am therefore concerned that there is a deal of pressure on that, but I am also glad the Government have moved on from there.

Another point to make is about testing, where the Government have had to shoulder a lot of difficulty and blame, but quite a lot of that should also be targeted, in due course, at Public Health England. The big mistake they made early on was the decision not just on having more testing, which they should have done from day one, but the decision not to include all the private laboratories. They should have done that straight away; even though they were building their own and getting their own, we should have maximised and gone out to the private laboratories, which would have helped enormously.

The other thing I do not understand at the moment is that at the beginning of lockdown we did not close the airports but now we are looking to make coming into the airports more difficult as we come out of lockdown. It is a puzzle why it was not right at the beginning but it is now right as we try to open the economy. I am particularly concerned about that.

I just want to say to the Government that for four weeks I have been arguing that they need to open the economy and be talking to the public to bring them with them and give them a sense of what is coming. The paper produced yesterday and the statements that have been made at last are the right indication. I am with the Government: people should use their common sense. There are going to be areas and times when we cannot always meet that argument and that deal about social distancing. I want to ask one question: why does every other country have a lesser distance than we do? That makes a big difference on things such as public transport. Ours is the only country that has a 2-metre rule—Germany's rule is 1.5 metres, some countries use 1 metre and the World Health Organisation says that 1 metre is enough. Such an approach would help enormously with public transport—on the tube and so on—where there is a great problem. I urge the Government to get on with opening the economy and with giving people the opportunity to get back to their livelihoods. We should trust them, with their common sense, to be able to implement these sets of guidance and to make sure they do the right thing as they go back to work.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** We will now try to go back to Barbara Keeley—*[Interruption.]* Oh, we have video as well. We will try video and audio, and see if that works.

3.44 pm

**Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I speak today as an MP for one of the areas outside London that has been hardest hit by covid-19. *[Inaudible]*—with their families and the families of everyone who has died due to the pandemic. At the start of this crisis, the Government said they would do whatever it takes to defeat covid-19. *[Inaudible]*—council took them at their word and has done a fantastic job in supporting vulnerable people, our care system and our local businesses, but now the Government seem to be backtracking and expecting councils to foot not just the bill, but the crisis response. Across—*[Inaudible.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but that has not worked. Can we move on to Neil Gray?

3.45 pm

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) [V]:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I start by paying tribute to all those who are working on the frontline in the battle against this virus. In my area of Airdrie and Shotts, they are the fantastic staff of NHS Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire Council and other key workers who have been doing the essential work to keep us all safe and well, and also the many wonderful community groups that are doing what they can to help others. I pass on my condolences to all those in Airdrie and Shotts who have lost friends and family to covid-19.

Some of the issues I wish to discuss today have emerged since the lockdown. The first is the impact on people. The UK Government schemes to support individuals, businesses and the self-employed have left millions behind. Millions have had to apply for universal credit, with some who will be encountering the social security system for the first time and who will be facing hardship. The self-employed scheme falls way short and needs to be looked at again. Basing it on profit rather than turnover is a basic flaw in the experience of my constituents.

The furlough scheme needs an independent arbiter for employers unwilling to furlough. Those who had only just started a new job before the lockdown are still being neglected; a contract of employment should have been enough to qualify. There is also a need for the UK Government to provide certainty that they will phase the end of the furlough scheme to ensure there are no redundancies. Where is the help for company directors who take their wages via dividends? This is how so many small family businesses in Airdrie and Shotts derive their income, and it has gone.

The impact the lockdown is having on people's mental health—for some because they have lost their livelihoods, for others because they have lost social contact or because they already had underlying problems—needs much greater attention. The Scottish Government have looked at this, and are increasing funding, but it is a long-term issue that is going to need greater attention.

Staying on the topic of welfare, sadly, the mixed messages of last week and the reckless unpreparedness of the Prime Minister's announcement the other night—

[Neil Gray]

basically, it was to get back to work—have put at risk the relative success of the lockdown in starting to get the virus under control and therefore put lives across the UK at risk. The lockdown has not ended, and the message is still crystal clear in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: stay home, protect the NHS, save lives. However, some people have already been in touch with me to ask if the Prime Minister's statement means they can do this, that or the other. For how many more has the Prime Minister's easing of the lockdown and change in message meant a licence to take more risks?

The Prime Minister did all of this without consulting the devolved Governments or, apparently, the Cabinet. This is not a time for making it up as you go along. A crisis like this needs clear, consistent messaging and support packages that ensure that nobody faces hardship. In another world before this lockdown, the Prime Minister promised that nobody would be punished for doing the right thing. Tell that to the millions of people who have been forced on to universal credit or the families in Airdrie and Shotts who are part of the reported 47% increase at the Airdrie food bank.

The UK Government need to do much more listening before doing their talking, and that will be as important in the long term as it is now. Society is going to change, and some changes are already happening. Some are positive and others negative, but there will be opportunities to harness change to deliver a more prosperous society with greater wellbeing. Areas such as the environment, waste and recycling, social security, employment and industry will need radical change and investment. That is for the future, but we need to start thinking now about the good society we want to see emerge. It cannot be what we left behind before the lockdown.

The focus right now has to be on containing and ending the health crisis, but there will be opportunities to make things better when that is resolved. I just worry, after this last week of chaotic and irresponsible mixed messages and anonymous briefings from Downing Street, that it will take longer than it should for us to get to that point.

3.49 pm

**Sarah Atherton** (Wrexham) (Con) [V]: First, I would like to relay messages of thanks to the Treasury from a plethora of businesses in my constituency of Wrexham. Without the Government's generous package of support, we would now be facing business closures and job losses. I would also like to put on record how the people of Wrexham have stepped up to support one another during this crisis. Small cottage industries, community interest groups and neighbour groups have sprung into action to check on the vulnerable people, keep morale high, and deliver food parcels and prescriptions. Wrexham, you have answered the call and I am proud to serve you.

Wrexham sits on the border with England. Life for us involves weaving between England and Wales, and we look to the UK Government for advice during this national crisis. However, here in Wales, under a devolved Welsh Labour Government, we have seen disjointed plans; delays in the delivery of shielding letters, the 111 service and shopping delivery slots; confusion over public health data collection; and, latterly, the abolition of targets against which successes or failures can be measured. Testing and analysis have been chaotic, which has

had a particular impact on our care homes. The organisation of volunteering on a national level was also slow to get off the mark, with the Welsh Government taking weeks to decide to delegate the co-ordination of volunteering to statutory agencies or charities.

As a former nurse, I joined the covid-19 temporary register to support NHS Wales nurses on the frontline. After two months of waiting, I have now started "back to the floor", and have been overwhelmed by the resilience, spirit and determination of the hospital staff at Wrexham Maelor Hospital. Tonight at 8.30 pm, we will be asked to shine a light through our windows to show support for our nurses—our ladies with lamps. I encourage everyone to do so, and to show our appreciation on this International Nurses Day.

The UK Government have confronted this virus as one United Kingdom. Our Prime Minister has set out a road map to rebuild the United Kingdom for a world with coronavirus. It is a plan that will give the United Kingdom hope. However, the virus has spread at different rates across the country. Therefore, parts of the UK are beginning to move at slightly different speeds. It is this progression of the virus and its consequences that has now caused us, who live on the border with England, some practical challenges. Should people drive the few miles over the border to go to work if that work is not possible from home? Should they drive a few miles over the border to drop their children off at school when schools in Wales are closed? Are our neighbours in England aware that they cannot drive the few miles here to enjoy our countryside for their recreation without risking a fine? This is why a one nation approach to monitoring and managing the R number is vital.

I hope that the trial of the UK Government's contact tracing app is successful. When it is available, it is essential that the Welsh Government waste no time in deploying this app across Wales—the same app as in England. To design their own will only cause further delay. However, if this route is taken, I request that the Welsh app at least communicates with its English counterpart; otherwise, it will not serve us who live in a border constituency, nor will it benefit the national monitoring of this pandemic. The UK Government have introduced a cautious and measured recovery plan—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. Sorry, but the four minutes are up. We now move on to Jamie Stone.

3.53 pm

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) [V]: Greetings from the far north of Scotland. I want to talk about tourism in the highlands.

Visitors and tourists from the UK and overseas are always very welcome in this most beautiful part of the UK, and our hospitality and tourism industry is critical to the local economy. It is an industry that is sustainable in the long term, and which, most importantly, provides local jobs for local people. As long as we have a high-quality tourism product, by which I mean landscape, culture, top-quality food and drink—that sort of thing—we can attract tourists to come back again and again to a truly special part of the world. But we are in the midst of the current pandemic. People leaving home and moving about simply increases the risk of the disease being spread. Many in the highlands and many of my constituents



are concerned that visitors will look at the map of where the virus is most common and think, “Oh well, the highlands looks pretty free. Let’s go there.” The trouble is that in the highlands, health services are at best limited. The NHS staff and care workers are doing a fantastic job, but they work with limited resources and that is why we have taken the lockdown rules so seriously in the highlands. That is why we have taken every precaution to look after one another and that is why we continue to “stay home, save lives and save the NHS”.

The health and safety of my constituents is my greatest concern during this difficult period, so I say this to potential visitors. In normal times you would be really, really welcome, but right now please stay in your usual homes, wherever they may be. Please, please wait until the medical advice says that the risk of you spreading the virus to my constituents has gone. Surely those who truly care for the highlands and highland people will respect the need to prioritise our health and safety.

Despite our strong feelings about the need to keep safe, we in the highlands also know that the longer the pandemic goes on, the more long-term damage our local businesses will suffer. The absence of visitors paying money to our tourism businesses possibly for weeks and months could actually cause many businesses to go under. It is a vicious circle. For every business that goes under during the pandemic, the highlands becomes all the poorer in what we can offer visitors when it is safe for them to return. It is worse than that, however, because unlike many other enterprises tourism businesses are seasonal. The money taken in during the tourism season has to be sufficient to see that businesses have enough in the bank to get through what we call the dark cold months in the highlands. That is why I suggest that the present pandemic is so particularly dangerous for those tourism businesses. Even if the pandemic were to end in a few months, much of the tourism season would have gone. That is why I support the proposal from my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) for the UK Government to introduce a 12-month financial support package to secure the survival of the tourism industry until summer 2021.

To conclude, my plea is to both the UK and the Scottish Governments. Those tourism businesses are doing all they can just now. For instance, selling vouchers that can be used at a later date when travel is absolutely safe is a seriously good idea, one which we should all wholeheartedly endorse and support. But I believe that both the Scottish Government and the UK Government owe it to those tourism businesses to go a specially tailored extra mile for them right now. Otherwise, they will go under and we will have a disaster on our hands. I believe that all of us really owe the tourism businesses that hand of help—nothing less than that.

3.57 pm

**Sara Britcliffe** (Hyndburn) (Con) [V]: I, too, would like to thank all for the hard work to get us to this point, particularly those in Hyndburn and Haslingden. I welcome the document released by the Government that sets out the strategy to return to a normality for people, while maintaining that the overriding priority remains to save lives and move with caution.

I, and many others, still have concerns about the minority who are still flouting the social distancing measures, while so many have sacrificed seeing their

loved ones. That is why I welcome the news that the Government are examining more stringent enforcement measures for non-compliance. We also need an assurance that the supply chain for PPE is consistent and efficient, and that testing is readily available for those who need it and results are returned in the timeframe specified. There has been a momentous effort, but as the Prime Minister said, there remains much more to do.

Many communities and areas went into this fight less resilient and less able to take the economic and social hit needed to win, with disadvantaged communities the worst affected. That is all the more reason why the levelling up agenda is now more important than ever, so that we in the north can bounce back from the hardships that will follow. That is not out of a need for charity, however. We here in east Lancashire are ready and able to play our part when it is right to do so. With the right investment and incentives, we can play a leading role in the recovery. We have already shown that in the role we played in the response. I am proud to say that I worked closely with my council in Hyndburn to make sure business grants were issued swiftly, which resulted in Hyndburn being placed in the top three of over 300 councils.

That was a huge joint effort by all, but let us go further here in east Lancashire. Some very credible figures make a compelling case for investing in green and sustainable infrastructure as a way of boosting the economy as we come out the other side of this crisis. Where better to start than in the heart of east Lancashire, where we have some of the finest manufacturers and businesses that the UK has to offer?

To put it simply, I would like to see our engineers and plumbers out there installing insulation and new boiler technology, and working on new technology for cars, solar farms and wind power. I want to see northern advanced manufacturers, who have done so much in the field of aerospace, turn their attention to next-generation sustainable technologies and infrastructure. They just need the boost, and then we can let those amazing entrepreneurs do the rest. That will increase employment and put money back in the pockets of our local residents. Help us to help you. Let us level up as promised and let the north lead.

In order to do that, we have to beat the virus. As we enter the next phases of the Government’s plan, individual responsibility to do the right thing will become ever more important. It is on each and every one of us to be alert to the threat that is still posed and to make sensible and responsible decisions. Please, let us consider Hyndburn and Haslingden, and east Lancashire, as part of the process of this country’s recovery from covid-19.

4.1 pm

**Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD) [V]: I start by saying an enormous thank you to everyone in my constituency. The community spirit has been extraordinary. We were told to socially distance, but I always thought the phrase should be “physically distance”. In some ways, we are now closer than ever socially, and I do not want to lose that.

As we emerge, there will be elements that we do not want to lose—communities connecting more; less air pollution; the return of wildlife; the fact that every single person who is homeless has a bed for the night if they want it; more time to engage in creativity, and more time with family—but it has not been the same for

[Layla Moran]

everyone. Although some call covid the great leveller, I would argue that it has been more of a common backdrop, against which the stains in our social fabric have become even more obvious.

We are all in this together, yet the lifeboats have not been evenly spread. Someone is twice as likely to die from the virus if they live in a deprived area where housing is more overcrowded and it is harder to have any personal space. Deprived children struggle to access education because they do not have broadband or a device, and they are falling behind. That is secondary, of course, to whether they are eating or even safe. People from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities go to work knowing that they are more at risk than others.

This has been a time of reflection. As we look in the mirror, we must ask ourselves whether we are comfortable with what we see. Do we want to go back to how it was, or do we want to negotiate a new social contract that nurtures individuals and respects nature? The time is coming to make a decision, and I sincerely hope that we choose to seize the opportunity that we have been afforded.

Before that, however, we have the small matter of easing out of the current state of lockdown and the confusion of the Government's most recent announcement—and it has been confusing.

My inbox was inundated last night by constituents asking questions about their jobs. Do they have to go in or not? Will it be safe? And schools are much of the focus. Given the age groups that the Government are allowing to go back—they include nursery age children, who cannot socially distance at all, but not secondary schools, where studies show that the disadvantage gap is likely to be widening—it is clear that the Government are prioritising the economy over learning. No doubt many parents will be pleased at the prospect of some peace and quiet to enable them to get on with work, but not all. Opinion is mixed.

After reading the Government's guidance carefully last night, I remain very sceptical about how this will work in practice. The economy is one thing, but what about safety? I am especially concerned about the lack of scientific evidence presented alongside the plans to reassure us that it is safe for children to mix in this way. Are we sure that they will not spread the disease? How do we know? Some heads are saying that they will not open because they do not feel that it is safe. And what of the teachers? Chris Whitty has said that we need a "proper debate" about teachers' safety as schools reopen. I believe that it is irresponsible not to have had that debate before Sunday's announcement. I am therefore immensely grateful to the Speaker for granting us the opportunity to question the Secretary of State for Education tomorrow in an urgent question on this matter, and I will save the rest for then.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I suspend the House until 4.20 pm.

4.5 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

4.20 pm

*On resuming—*

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con) [V]: What a good job the Prime Minister is doing. He is showing superb leadership in the most terrible of times, but the Government cannot win. So many of my constituents are emailing me to say that the Government have eased the lockdown too much, and an equal number are saying that they have not eased it enough. The Opposition used to say that they wanted a grown-up conversation about the future, but when the Government provide just that, the Opposition scream, "It's too confusing!" It seems that the Opposition are facing both ways at the same time.

But that does not excuse how badly the Government communicated their message this weekend. The television presentation by the Prime Minister was plain wrong. Too many of the Prime Minister's special advisers and aides think they are running a presidential Government, where the Prime Minister goes on television and announces all sorts of Executive orders without any reference to Parliament. Many of them have clearly been watching too many episodes of "The West Wing". They just do not understand how government works in this country.

Let me run through some of the reasons why Sunday's television address was wrong. First, the Speaker had warned the Government twice not to do it. He made it clear that the Government should announce new policy in the Chamber of the House of Commons first. The Government decided to disobey the Speaker's wishes. That is not how our parliamentary democracy works.

Secondly, the Government clearly breached the ministerial code. On page 23, under the section "Ministers and Parliament", it says in bold type:

"When Parliament is in session, the most important announcements of Government policy should be made in the first instance, in Parliament."

Clearly the Prime Minister's television address breached the ministerial code.

Thirdly, every Member of Parliament knows in detail the concerns and issues raised by the coronavirus pandemic because we have hundreds and hundreds of emails, letters and phone calls from worried and concerned constituents. MPs would have been in the best position to constructively question the Prime Minister when the change in policy was announced.

Fourthly, the fine details of the change in policy, which has now been published in a 51-page document, should have been published at the same time as any change in Government policy. That would have enabled people to understand the exact detail of the changes, but it was not published, and therefore uncertainty and confusion reigned.

Fifthly, with parliamentary scrutiny of Government policy severely hampered by the hybrid nature of proceedings, the Government should have gone out of their way to give the utmost opportunity for Parliament to scrutinise changes to the most important issue facing the country.

What should have happened was that a statement should have been made in the House of Commons first. The Prime Minister should have been questioned by MPs. The Command Paper with the details should have been published at the same time, and there should have been absolutely no media briefing in advance. That would have given the best launch to the changes to Government policy.

I would like the Minister who winds up the debate to confirm that what happened on Sunday was a mistake and that in future, all new Government policy will be announced in Parliament first. In conclusion, spin and presentation do not make good government. It is Parliament that makes good government.

4.24 pm

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) [V]: I do not always agree with the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), but what he said about the need for the Government to show proper respect to Parliament and to this House is correct, and I hope that it will be heard on the Treasury Bench.

I welcome the announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of his intention to extend the furlough scheme. For businesses in the Northern Isles that will provide welcome clarity, which is very much needed. It will also allow us time to work out how we can build sufficient flexibility into the scheme in order to see a glide path coming out of it. However, my welcome for the announcement is very much tempered by my regret that so much of the provision that remains for self-employed people is wholly inadequate. We still have no answer for those small business people who rely on dividend income rather than a salary for their income. Although it would be complicated, surely it is not beyond the wit of man if the political will were there.

The Government are allowing too many self-employed people to be left behind. Here in the Northern Isles we particularly see that in the visitor economy, which is crucial to us. The assistance for bed and breakfast operators, or operators of self-catering accommodation, leaves too many people without the assistance they need. As my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) said earlier, the seasonal nature of our provision means that a support scheme that finishes at the end of August, or September or whenever it will be, simply will not be adequate in parts of the country such as ours. Those parts of the country that have seasonal tourism require a 12-month programme, or else the tourism industry that will be left to be resurrected at the end of this process will be that much weaker, and the rebuilding and recovery that much more difficult.

We all know that at some point we will need some sort of inquiry into this. I do not suggest that now is the moment to start that—obviously, the important thing at present is to deal with the job in hand—but we should be thinking about how the inquiry will be done. Without prejudging the outcome, it is pretty clear that when we look back at this time, we will realise that the response to this pandemic has been at its strongest when all four Governments of the United Kingdom have been able to work together. I commend them all for embarking on a four-nations approach right from the start, although we saw the first divergence from that this weekend, with the Prime Minister changing his messaging away from staying at home, to being alert. That is an intrinsically problematic message. It lacks clarity, but worse than that, it also lacks credibility with the population as a whole. I hope that as we go ahead, the four Governments of this country will see that not as an opportunity to score points against each other, but as a warning about the need to keep a unified message. Only with that unified message can we

possibly hope to bring all four parts of this United Kingdom successfully through to the other side of this outbreak.

4.28 pm

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: I speak as an MP for one of the areas outside London that have been hit hardest by covid-19. Tragically, we know that 246 people in Salford died due to the disease in the first two months—a death rate of 95 per 100,000 of our residents. Our thoughts are with their families, and the families of everyone who has died due to the pandemic.

At the start of this crisis the Government said that they would do whatever it takes to defeat covid-19. Local authorities such as Salford City Council took them at their word, and have done a fantastic job in supporting vulnerable people, our care system, and local businesses. The Government now seem to be backtracking and expecting councils to foot the bill for the crisis response. Across Greater Manchester, Government support for local authorities is already £400 million lower than the costs our councils have incurred, with Salford Council spending £33 million extra in the first six months of the year.

Can the Minister confirm that Government Ministers meant what they said and that all additional costs incurred by councils will be covered by Government funding? Will the Government look carefully at the suggestion from our Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham about English regional representation at Cobra meetings?

On the sustainability of local businesses, I have heard from businesses across my constituency that are not eligible for the funding support that they need—from private limited companies to veterinary businesses, from dentists through to the Veterans Garage, which operates in a shared space to provide vital support for veterans.

Given that none of the businesses that I have highlighted are eligible for any support apart from loans, what reassurances can the Minister give them about their situation? Ministers also need to look again at the need for support for self-employed people in the creative industries. I have been contacted by many constituents working at MediaCityUK in Salford Quays, who are not eligible for support.

The Prime Minister's announcement on Sunday, and the guidance published since, have led to confusion about what is and is not allowed. Many of my constituents now fear that they will be forced back to work before it is safe for them. I have heard from one constituent whose son has been told to report back for work this week, despite the fact that he lives with his mother and she has been told to shield. The son has been on furlough but was asked to go back to work yesterday, even before the covid-19 secure guidance had been published.

Will the Minister confirm that businesses will be required to put the necessary protections in place and that no staff will be expected to go back to work until they can be sure it is safe to do so? Will the advice on shielding cover the issue of how that can work when another family member has to go out to work, increasing the risk?

Finally, I want to talk about family support. The Prime Minister set out a plan for getting people back to work, but the only concession for family contact was

[Barbara Keeley]

allowing one person to meet one member of another household outside, while maintaining social distancing. I was contacted after the Prime Minister's speech by a new mother who had given birth to her baby during lockdown. None of her family or friends has been able to meet her baby or support her, and she is now feeling exceptionally isolated.

My constituents are being directed back to work, where social distancing is advised but is not even guaranteed. Why is it acceptable for someone to meet large numbers of people at work, but not get the support they need with a new baby from family members? Can the Minister clarify when we will see updated guidance for that new mother and when she will be allowed to meet family members to get the support that she needs with her baby?

4.31 pm

**Jane Hunt** (Loughborough) (Con) [V]: The people of the United Kingdom have done a great job in looking after our communities and our country during this difficult time. They have, in very large part, followed the rules on social distancing, which has enabled us to get to the stage where we can start to look at easing the lockdown and turn our focus towards economic recovery.

It is immensely sad that people have died during this outbreak, and my heart goes out to everyone who has lost a family member or friend to this dreadful disease. We should not forget a single life taken early, and we owe it to those people and our hard-working NHS and care workers not to allow the virus to rise up again.

In a Zoom meeting the other day, the CBI discussed the need to focus now on renewal and the idea of rapid recovery. The Bank of England monetary policy committee has also recently predicted a V-shaped economic recovery. That is something that we must strive to achieve, as it is only by ensuring that our industries are thriving that we will be able to maintain and create the jobs that people need to support their families and get ahead in life.

Unfortunately, it is inevitable that some businesses will not survive, and we must ensure that those that do can grow and take on those who now find themselves unemployed. Undoubtedly, the action that the Government have taken over the past decade to restore the health of the public finances has meant that we have been in a much better position to support businesses and their employees over the course of the first phase. I particularly thank the Chancellor, Her Majesty's Treasury and HMRC, who have been working tirelessly to ensure that businesses and individuals have access to vital funding, which I know has been a lifeline for many.

The work of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, through local councils, has also been exemplary, with grants to support many of our small businesses, so that we can start up their operations once again with vigour. In the new discretionary grants, I would ask that small businesses in multi-tenancy buildings, and dentists, are also included in the scheme.

As a country, we have learned some notable lessons over the past couple of months, which need to be taken forward.

Many small businesses have been adapting their business models to meet the needs of the current climate and produce the goods and services in highest demand.

These businesses will need to be agile again coming out of the lockdown, to capitalise on their strengths and meet the needs of the markets in the new normal.

The hard work and dedication of those businesses should not be forgotten: businesses such as JRE Precision in Loughborough, which made the decision early on to start making ventilator parts to ensure that the NHS has the equipment it needs to save so many lives; Tarmac, based at Mountsorrel Quarry, which donated PPE to our frontline workers; and shops such as Bradley's in Quorn, whose hard work providing essentials for the local community should be rewarded for many years to come with patronage from local residents.

If we are to achieve a rapid recovery, we need to implement the right policies to ensure that all sectors can mobilise and ramp up activity as soon as possible, from farmers, who are the very backbone of our nation, to universities, which drive innovation and provide young people with the skills needed to support the economy tomorrow, and our largest home-grown businesses, which provide people with opportunities and generate huge amounts of revenue for the Exchequer. This is the best case scenario for our country, and I would ask that the Government continue the fantastic work they have done to date and do all they can to provide a route for rapid recovery.

4.35 pm

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP) [V]: It is a great privilege not only to follow the hon. Member for Loughborough (Jane Hunt), but to participate in this debate. I wish to add my support to the comments of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) about the opportunities that are there and the importance of approaching this pandemic and our country's response as one nation, recognising of course that our devolved areas will have distinct differences, but that they should operate within this United Kingdom, drawing on the bonds and support we can give one another.

It is also important during this general debate to praise the enormous warmth and enthusiastic support that members of my local community in east Belfast have been offering their neighbours, from the network centre in the East Belfast Community Development Agency, through the BT16 covid-19 community response team and the Ballymack centre, where they are making meals every day, to those in Connswater community centre. It has been heartwarming and encouraging to see just how many people within our community are prepared to step up and support one another.

Can I also, given the day that's in it and the statement from the Chancellor, recognise the importance of extending the job retention scheme? My colleagues and I, particularly those with airports in our constituencies, have been concerned about the cliff edge proposed for the end of June. Belfast City airport is in my constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, and you will recall that a fortnight before this pandemic really took hold Flybe went into administration, representing 80% of all the passengers who travel through our local airport and 67% of all routes. As we approach the end of the job retention scheme and that cliff edge in June, there is huge concern, even though it has been extended, that the aviation and tourism sectors will struggle to recover from this pandemic. Although the extension is welcome, I hope that there

will be further and sustained engagement not only for tourism and aviation but for all the associated sectors in the aerospace industry.

I am particularly concerned, even though there has been an extension of four months today, that we have yet to hear from British Airways that it is prepared to delay its redundancy plans, for example. The plan is not only to make 12,500 employees redundant, irrespective of Government support, but to cruelly assault the terms and conditions of those workers who will be retained after the pandemic. That is totally wrong.

I want to make mention of the self-employed income support scheme and highlight my concern that those who have accessed the portal thus far have found that their Northern Ireland driving licence is not sufficient to satisfy the ID requirements. Nor is an Irish passport, even though many residents of Northern Ireland are perfectly entitled to hold one under the terms of the Good Friday/Belfast agreement. I hope that that will be challenged and changed by HMRC in the days to come.

May I raise my concern about health sector capacity? It has been noted that in Northern Ireland there has been a 40% increase in non-covid-19-related deaths compared with this time last year. It is important that we have capacity within our health service, but it cannot be at the cost of healthcare in other sectors or for other individuals. There are huge strides being made not only to protect our community but to do what is best for it in the light of the pressures we face. The resolve needs to continue, and I know that the Government will work with all the devolved Administrations in ensuring that we fight the pandemic and that we, as a country, succeed.

4.40 pm

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con) [V]: The plan that the Prime Minister set out yesterday shows the difficult choices involved in creating a pathway on which we can continue to suppress the virus while easing some of the restrictions. I will focus my remarks in three areas. First, I pay tribute to the key workers in North West Norfolk, and particularly those in the NHS and care sector. Two weeks ago, I joined staff at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn to pay respects to their friend and colleague Chrissie Emerson, who sadly died from coronavirus. The dedication that the staff show every day deserves to be recognised with capital investment to modernise this acute hospital as part of the health infrastructure programme. I look forward to working with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the proposals put forward. As well as mortality figures, the QEH publishes data on patients who have recovered and been discharged. Such figures could helpfully be published nationally.

A quarter of the care homes in my constituency have now reported outbreaks. While that is below the national average, there is no room for complacency. It is vital that care homes have access to testing and PPE to protect residents and staff.

Secondly, the bold package of support for businesses and individuals has been rightly welcomed across west Norfolk. My area relies on tourism, and the measures taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor—grants and bounce-back loans in particular—have so far been the difference between businesses surviving and not. However, the lockdown has come a time when pubs like the Crown Inn, restaurants, hotels and attractions in

Hunstanton and across the coast should be bustling. As the plan sets July as the earliest date at which hospitality businesses could start to reopen, those firms need help. I am therefore pleased that the Chancellor today extended the furlough scheme and introduced a more flexible approach, including part-time working. He has also responded to calls that I and many other Members made for new funding for local authorities to assist businesses that did not qualify for the earlier schemes. As well as that grant support, insurance premiums, holidays and other steps would help firms to be ready for the day when we can safely welcome visitors again.

On that, Norfolk police has done a great job of enforcing the current social distancing rules, in difficult circumstances. I share the concerns that travel changes in the plan may make the police's job harder and see people flocking to the coast. Everyone must act responsibly and follow the rules. If there is a repeat of the overcrowding at the coast that occurred before lockdown, stricter measures must follow. Please, let us use common sense, stay local, only make reasonable journeys and not overcrowd the coast.

Finally, the response to the crisis from voluntary groups, including on rough sleeping, has been incredible. When I worked in the Cabinet Office, the advice was that it would take years to end rough sleeping, yet in the space of a few weeks there has been a fall of over 90%. That is thanks to the great work of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, with local authorities, charities and hotel chains. It is now crucial that we seize the opportunity to move people into long-term accommodation rather than see them return to the streets. According to Purfleet Trust, a charity in my constituency, that means long-term funding and a focus on prevention.

We have a road map to ease restrictions in a measured and controlled way. Everyone who has followed the rules so far has helped us get this point. Now we must continue to stay alert, and together we will come through this.

4.43 pm

**Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP) [V]: I begin with an observation. There had been a consistent approach across the four nations, but, at a time when clarity is critical, we find ourselves in a situation where three of the four nations of the UK are still trying to be clear, consistent and cautious in their approach to tackling and beating the coronavirus pandemic; it is a great pity that the Prime Minister muddied the waters so badly over the weekend. While it is absolutely the Prime Minister's right to change from a very clear "Stay at home" message to the imprecise "Stay alert" message for England, it is irresponsible to spread the change in the media as if it applied collectively across the entire UK without even consulting the Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish Governments. This is a public health matter that is rightly being considered by the devolved Administrations on the basis of scientific evidence. It seems that the UK Government's idea of a four nations approach is less about working respectfully together and more about "Do as we say." The advice in Scotland remains clear. For the avoidance of any doubt, I will reiterate it here: stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives.

[Owen Thompson]

While the pandemic has undoubtedly brought challenges, it has also brought out the best in our communities. From fundraising to helping neighbours to the willingness of our communities to help, it has been incredible, nowhere more so than in my own Midlothian constituency, with resilience groups in Bonnyrigg and Lasswade, Dalkeith and Woodburn, Danderhall, Eskbank and Newbattle, Gorebridge, Howgate, Loanhead, Newtongrange, Penicuik, Roslin and Bilston, Rosewell and the Tynewater area. I make particular mention of the Mayfield and Easthouses community resilience team, which has so far delivered more than 3,550 hot meals to elderly and vulnerable members of our community. There will undoubtedly be other amazing examples of help and support, and Midlothian Council's #KindnessMidlothian campaign is certainly well-named to reflect that.

I also for the most part welcome the Treasury's response to this pandemic, although there are many areas that still need to be addressed. I welcome the business support that has been put in place by the Chancellor and his efforts so far to resolve problems that have emerged with the schemes, but a lot more urgently needs to be done to help those still left behind. I have many constituents who have yet to receive any support and who had a viable business but cannot get a loan to see them through. The business interruption loan scheme is too cumbersome, and too many banks are still failing to lend. While the bounce-back scheme tackles some of those issues for smaller businesses, the reports that I have heard suggest that it remains far from a streamlined process, and there are only five accredited lenders compared with 50 for the interruption loan scheme. There is also still the issue of support for the self-employed, particularly those who left a good job to run their own business.

I welcome the extension of the furlough scheme announced by the Chancellor earlier today and the suggested flexibility. I am keen to see the detail of that much more clearly. As we move forward, we need to ensure that protection remains in place for those who need it. At the end of the day, I argue that the best and most flexible support that could be put in place would be for the Government to introduce a universal basic income and genuinely ensure that nobody is missed through these tough times.

Protecting people's lives while they are protecting their livelihoods is a complex matter. One size does not fit all and a degree of flexibility to suit differing circumstances is needed from Government—flexible support and flexibility over strategy in the different parts of these isles. I welcome the more cautious approach from the Scottish Government in easing lockdown. I advise the UK Government to take a similar approach. I appreciate that they would choose not to, but they must respect the devolved settlement and not undermine the clarity of the message we have here in Scotland.

4.48 pm

**Dr Neil Hudson** (Penrith and The Border) (Con) [V]: The covid-19 pandemic has affected all our lives in so many ways. First, I offer my condolences and prayers to all those who have lost loved ones during this crisis. I pay tribute to all those on the frontline in our NHS and the care sector who have been working tirelessly to look after people and to keep us safe. I also thank the key

workers who have kept society going, be that in looking after children, supporting our food supply lines or working in our vital public services.

I thank all those who have come together in Cumbria to support our local communities: our local resilience forums, local volunteer groups, emergency groups, churches and the like. It has been so heartening how people have rolled up their sleeves and are looking out for their neighbour and providing much-needed help and support, especially to the vulnerable at this time.

I very much welcome the unprecedented support measures that the Government have put in place during this crisis, which have provided the lifeline and bridge to allow jobs and businesses to be there on the other side. I also thank the Government for listening to feedback from me and other colleagues and adapting the support schemes so that more people can be included.

In my constituency of Penrith and The Border, key changes that have helped our tourism sector include the expansion of business grants to bed and breakfasts. I am also so grateful to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for responding to our calls for a dairy hardship fund. I hope that the Government can further and widen the support to include directors of companies who have paid themselves a salary through dividends, to expand the flexibility of the furlough scheme—I very much welcome the Chancellor's announcements today—and to widen the business grants and rates relief strategies. That will really help vital businesses such as vets and dentists.

As a vet, I pay tribute to the profession of which I am a proud member. Vets, nurses and their allied staff have stepped up in this crisis to provide necessary care for our animals and support for our food supply chains. In addition, the veterinary sector has transferred much-needed medical equipment, such as ventilators, into the NHS, and veterinary staff have stepped up in large numbers to volunteer in the NHS and in their communities.

As we are now looking ahead to the transition phase, it is important that support is in place and is targeted at businesses that may be slower to recover, such as those in the tourism and hospitality sectors, which are so important for Cumbria. [*Inaudible*].

The covid pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the importance of food production and security, and the critical areas of health and social care. Newton Rigg College in Penrith has over 1,000 learners and 130 staff, and provides education in vital areas such as agriculture, land-based studies, and health and social care. The college is now the subject of a local provision needs analysis by the Further Education Commissioner's office, creating uncertainty over its future. It is critical that the Government work with local stakeholders to try to secure a viable and sustainable future for this important institution. Now more than ever, we must look after colleges such as Newton Rigg that play such a big role in supporting our vital farming industry and providing important career options for our local communities. Covid-19 can and will be overcome, but we must make sure that our communities, businesses and institutions are supported to be there for the long term.

4.52 pm

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP) [V]: I start by sharing my huge gratitude to all the key workers in East Renfrewshire, who are doing such important

work, and to the brilliant volunteers supporting our local community at this difficult time. I also pass on my condolences to those in East Renfrewshire who have lost loved ones.

For the UK Government to be described as “reckless” by the British Safety Council in the midst of a pandemic should make even this Prime Minister pause. It was a disappointment that he did not share his planning or consult—not just with the devolved Administrations, but with local authorities, trade unions, employer representatives, and even, reportedly, his own Cabinet. After he set his announcement for Sunday to allow people to get going with the measures on Monday, it emerged that no preparation had been done with regard to transport, childcare and many other issues. Confusion reigned, even among the Ministers set out to do the morning media rounds. Most announcements applied only to England—although you would struggle to tell—but many in the Prime Minister’s party are demanding that all four nations march towards the cliff edge in lockstep. The response from Scotland is firm: no chance.

Is it really time to stop protecting the NHS? If not, why is that disappearing from the heart of the campaign in England? And why was the “Stay Alert” slogan launched with green imagery? It is not difficult to see the signal that that is designed to send. As the Prime Minister prevaricates and blusters, it is clear that he is trying to nudge the population into an ill-considered move. Telling people to deal with the pandemic by staying alert is an abrogation of responsibility. A crisis of this magnitude demands leadership; thank goodness for Nicola Sturgeon and her fellow First Ministers.

But there is no going back to the same old, same old—even if we wanted to. The Prime Minister’s enthusiastic but vague encouragement for people in England to hop in their cars and get back to work is neither sensible nor realistic. It displays a lack of connection to the reality of people’s lives, never mind their working lives. The Prime Minister needs to remedy that as a matter of urgency if he has any interest in workers’ safety and wellbeing.

I applaud the UK Government for bringing in the furlough scheme but, as ever, the devil is in the less publicised detail. There will be disquiet at the impact on jobs of the employer contribution that the Chancellor announced today that he is looking for. I and other colleagues have been calling for flexibility in furloughing, and the Chancellor said today that there can be flexibility from August; we need to see partial furloughing before that. The Scottish Chamber of Commerce asks that flexibility takes account of a company’s ability to contribute, which will differ depending on location and sector. I hope that the Chancellor will take that on board.

Despite the recognition of the vulnerability of pregnant women at the start of this crisis, it took until yesterday for half a sentence of guidance to be produced. Women have had to take sick leave or annual leave because the UK Government failed to listen when the issue was highlighted to them. If we are to achieve an orderly end to lockdown when the time is right, listening will be vital, and fair, safe, flexible work will be key. The Government should focus on not only sustaining jobs but enhancing fairness and employment rights as we look ahead. They must properly examine how a universal basic income could underpin a sustainable and fair recovery, which will be so important in the months and years ahead.

4.56 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to see you looking resplendent in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I wish to take the opportunity to thank all my constituents, who have done the most amazing job rallying around and looking after each other—that is what makes my part of the East Sussex coast so special. I also wish to recognise and thank the Government for the support that they have given and the lead they have taken in these difficult times.

As MPs from all parties will be aware, we face day-to-day challenges. For the past few weeks, my daily challenge has been to try to get our Bexhill testing centre plugged into the central link. We have a frustrating situation whereby we have a testing centre, but it is not plugged in. If anyone from Deloitte is following proceedings, I ask them to plug our local centre into the national link so that local people can use their local testing centre.

In my few remaining minutes I wish to focus on the Transport Committee’s inquiry on coronavirus and the implications for the transport sector. We have been looking at the aviation sector, which is clearly on its knees right now and needs our assistance. I note the Government support and welcome it, but recent days have seen us looking towards quarantine. My question to the Government is why now? If it is required from a health perspective, why was it not introduced at the start of lockdown? If it is required now, what help will there be for the aviation sector so that it can pick up? It is important not just for jobs and travel, but for our imports and exports. Some 40% of all imports arrive in the belly of airliners arriving at Heathrow, and it is important that we support them.

The aviation sector itself needs to do more to support its staff. Yesterday, the chief executive of British Airways’ parent group, Willie Walsh, appeared before the Select Committee. Almost a third of BA staff are facing redundancy, and those who remain have been told that their terms and conditions will be lowered and altered. Some of those terms and conditions have nothing to do with costs—for example, they may relate to grievance procedures. It feels as if BA is using this as an opportunity to undertake long-held reforms of terms and conditions. I asked the chief executive whether he would be willing to allow those employees to share the proceeds of growth if things return back to normal times, but he refused to give that assurance. Thousands of BA staff have contacted me and other members of the Select Committee. They are clearly the best of employees—they care about their carrier and they care about each other—and I hope that BA will use the welcome extension of furlough to put the redundancy plans back in the hold, where they deserve to be.

I also want to talk briefly about Gatwick, my local airport. It is—or has been—the busiest single runway airport, handling 46 million passengers each year. It is an important national asset, and I really hope that it will survive.

The next Committee session for us will be on buses and trains. We are very concerned about the worker situation. There are 9.9 coronavirus deaths per 100,000 UK males, yet in the bus sector the figure is 26.4 deaths. Clearly, more needs to be done to protect those workers. I support the measures that the Government have brought in today regarding passengers using their own PPE,

[*Huw Merriman*]

although I note that, in France, PPE is being handed out on a more professional basis by workers. In Germany, the transport system is back operating as normal because it recognises that social-distancing just does not work in practice. As we move out of lockdown, I hope that we can be more flexible so that we protect our economy and our transport sector.

5 pm

**Steven Bonnar** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP) [V]: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to take part in this general debate on covid-19 and to be a voice for the people of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill in these unprecedented times. This pandemic has presented completely new challenges for us all, demanding responses that have no precedent, but that is by no means an excuse for the response of this UK Government.

This is not the first time that these nations have been faced with a crisis. Indeed, just last week, images of world war two were again broadcast into our homes. It was a time when our nations fought bravely together and when strong leadership provided the ultimate protection against our enemy threats. Today, we face a new fight and a new enemy, but there is no protection in the leadership of this Prime Minister. Where we looked for leadership, calmness, and direction, we found stand-ins, mixed messages and confusion. Covid-19 is no more a natural disaster than a famine; both are highly politicised events. We can waste time blaming the outbreak of disease on global agribusiness, but it will be an insult to the intelligence of the people of these nations if we do not recognise that the true failure in preparation lies at the very heart of the UK Government. For years, this Government have tried to fool us into thinking that their austerity-driven attack on our vital public services has been a societal necessity. Yet the current crisis has magnified the absurdities of these complacent assumptions. Will they now admit that austerity has always been an entirely political decision from which we are all now suffering: hence, the failure to implement immediate isolation and contact tracing for all those entering our borders; hence, the fatal delay in implementing lockdown; hence, the vast shortages of PPE in our hospitals and care homes; hence, the failure to meet revised testing target after revised testing target; and hence, the thousands upon thousands of lonely, untimely deaths that could and should have been prevented?

Despite those vast failings, a vague optimism has been added to proceedings: a vague optimism that people can go back to work but only if their work is open; a vague optimism that we can travel as far as we desire for exercise, but as long as public transport is not involved; and a vague optimism that we can meet with another outwith our household, but only if we do not plan to meet up with them beforehand. This vague optimism has become the epitome of the UK Government's message. It is a strange pretence that everything is suddenly normalised: that witnessing the news of hundreds of deaths on our TV screens every evening is just to be accepted and that we can continue with life as we did in the past. A de facto muddling-through has emerged in this UK Government, one that is concentrating on maximising market power rather than on prioritising public health. It is quite disgraceful.

My constituents, like many others up and down these countries, are bearing the brunt of this confusion. No one should be forced to risk their health or the health of their loved ones in order to maintain their employment, and yet that is the very dilemma that my constituents are facing after this Prime Minister, on Sunday night, chose, as he always does, to prioritise one-nation Conservatism over a four-nation approach.

Let me finish by saying this, Madam Deputy Speaker: our death toll is nothing short of catastrophic. Our daily counts have far surpassed that of our neighbouring countries and somehow there is a determination to cloak this in the illusion of a Great Britain; a mythology built on inflated pride and lowered expectations. It is not this Government who are great—far from it—but the people of these nations who make it so. It is the health and social care workers, our security officers, our emergency responders, our till operators, our delivery drivers, and our teachers. It is to them that I give my thanks and appreciation. Those people are the backbone of our society and only when this UK Government begin to prioritise human life over economic prosperity will this country have something to be optimistic about.

5.4 pm

**Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con) [V]: In addition to placing on record my gratitude to everyone in the NHS and on the frontline, I would like to pay tribute to the many of my constituents who have gone above and beyond. From the community hub set up by Buckinghamshire Council to the support network on Facebook for the town of Buckingham, St Laurence's church in Winslow delivering meals to the most vulnerable, and the Haddenham Scrub Hub sewing garments for the NHS and care staff, every corner of my constituency is playing a part.

In particular, I would like to highlight two schemes: the incredible Risborough Basket, set up by Councillor Matt Walsh and the team at Princes Risborough Town Council, which delivers orders from local shops and has its own fruit and veg service for isolating households; and Bernie the Bus, set up by Councillors Paul Irwin and Ashley Waite, which collects food bank donations from people's driveways. It blasts out music, bringing a note of cheer as it passes through the villages, and on the days I volunteered with it in Quainton, Ashendon, Wescott, Marsh Gibbon, Grendon Underwood, Oakley and Brill, I was blown away by the generosity that so many people showed through their donations. Once we are through this crisis, I hope we can capture the very best of the great British spirit shown by these community heroes, and ensure that we can strengthen our country's strong record of voluntary service for the long term.

I have also been proud of the many businesses that have adapted, including farm shops doing deliveries and pubs doing takeaways, and even the drive-through beer service at the Chiltern Brewery. So many businesses have done their very best, and I encourage everyone to "shop local" to support them. One business, sadly, has completely failed to follow the guidance. HS2 Ltd's contractors have worked throughout the crisis, not social distancing and causing great alarm in villages such as Steeple Claydon. Contractors have been refusing to follow the rules on staying on site, instead using local shops and making residents fearful of the virus being spread. The chief executive of HS2 Ltd gave me many



assurances on this the Transport Committee, but the gap between promises and reality continues to be wide. I am hopeful that the HS2 Minister can use the evidence I am sending him to hold HS2 Ltd fully to account.

On business support, the speed with which the Government put in place financial support and security for people's jobs, including today's extension of the job retention scheme, has been incredible. That was no small or easy task. With an economy as diverse and dynamic as ours, however, it was inevitable that not every eventuality would be covered, and I am grateful to the Government for listening and adding support throughout the crisis. An example is the additional £10,000 grants announced for the hardest-hit dairy farmers, which I and other colleagues argued for.

However, a couple of pieces of the jigsaw need to be put in place if we are to complete the picture. Many owner-directors of small businesses—the backbone of our economy—who perfectly legitimately pay themselves through dividends are becoming increasingly desperate. They are facing uncertain futures. I accept that there is no easy solution, but for those who continue to be unable to trade, support needs to be made available. Secondly, many suppliers to the events and hospitality sector do not have the support that the companies they serve have received, despite their inability to trade being the same. I am hopeful that councils will use their new discretionary grants to support them, along with other firms that have contacted me, such as coach companies, kennels and hauliers. With those two calls heard, I commend the Government for their continuing strong response to this crisis.

5.8 pm

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to take part in this debate today, as I look out of the window at this beautiful day in Edinburgh. Although the past few months have been tough and we have come through much, the people of this city and my constituency know that it will take every ounce of our energy to preserve what it is that makes Edinburgh such a wonderful place. Traffic at our airport is now almost negligible, the Royal Highland Show, which contributes £65 million to our economy, has been cancelled, and that shining gem in Scotland's cultural calendar, the Edinburgh Festival, will not bring the world to our city this August. Across Edinburgh, myriad small, medium-sized and international companies are concerned for their future—a future of challenges for which they are not responsible.

For us here in Edinburgh West, as in most constituencies up and down the country, perhaps the biggest task is looking after the thousands of people concerned about their health, their jobs and their financial future. We calculated yesterday that during this period of lockdown we have dealt with around 1,000 pieces of individual casework, every one a personal emergency.

Much of this crisis has been managed by the UK Government, but also directly, here in Edinburgh, by the Scottish Government. The issues that they face are exactly the same; but in tackling them I would appeal to both our Governments to work together. Much has been said this week about mixed messages, uncertainty, a lack of clarity about what the UK Government were saying about lifting lockdown. Imagine what that is like for the people of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland,

with advice that is often contradictory—not just different: completely contradictory. Can I go out? Can I go to work? Which Government do I listen to? Which advice do I follow? Which guidelines are appropriate if I am out walking my dog? That is ridiculous. It is also not good enough for my constituents, or for any other constituent in any other part of the devolved nations. And for those organisations and companies that I mentioned earlier, any uncertainty is a potential recipe for disaster. In Scotland, our businesses have now had more than eight years of debate about our future. Will our economy be in an independent Scotland? Will our economy be in the UK? Will we be part of the European Union or not? All the uncertainty they have had to deal with seems small now in comparison to the emergency that is Covid-19.

I would ask both our Governments to work together, so that our airports and our airlines, which are so vital to our economy, are able to build a strategy in which they know that they will be speaking to not just the devolved authority but the UK authority and wider authorities, so that companies like Diageo, based here in Edinburgh West, know which framework they are falling into, and the people of Edinburgh West, Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom have a clear pathway out of this crisis—a clear, united pathway, with their Governments walking in lockstep for everyone's future.

5.12 pm

**Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con) [V]: It is nice to have the chance to put on record my thanks to constituents in Bosworth and the key workers. A couple of weeks ago, I wrote to the GPs, the pharmacies, indeed the police, the schools, the care homes, to congratulate them on the work they are doing, and continue to do. I am most grateful for all that they do.

It is fair to say that the virus reaches all areas of our lives, and in turn all areas of Government, and that brings pain—pain with the loss of businesses, pain with the loss of jobs, but, most importantly, pain with the loss of lives. However, out of crisis comes opportunity, and there are some positives. I would like the Government to take those forward. I envisage that in the form of a time-limited department called the “department of virus legacy”.

At the end of April, I wrote to the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister, because I think it is so important, as we have heard in these debates, to encapsulate and draw on all the positive aspects that have come out of this crisis. We have had a revolution overnight, rather than the usual evolution. In my sector as a GP, literally overnight everyone has begun teleconferencing. That is something that the industry has tried to do for over a decade, and has not been able to achieve—and just like that, it has happened.

Pharmacies are now all digital, with electronic prescribing. In my role on the Health and Social Care Committee, I asked all the witnesses we have had what positive aspects had come out of this. Those in cancer care talked about how they were able to bring 10 teams into one hospital to deal with a patient, and maternity talked about the fact that they have actually had more contact because they can do remote teleconferencing. It is the same with mental health. There are positives out there, and that is just in the sector that I come from.

[Dr Luke Evans]

More widely, we have looked at remote working. We have looked at the societal benefits of now knowing your neighbour, caring for your neighbour and caring for your community. These are absolutely critical things, which we need to embed into our society. To do that, I urge the Government to consider establishing such a department.

Legacy planning, as we found in the Olympics, is absolutely critical. Now more than ever we have the time-limited opportunity to enshrine, post virus, the positive changes in the fabric of our policies and, in turn, our Government and society. To the Minister listening I say, "I hope you will take this on board when you hold discussions with the rest of Government."

5.15 pm

**Apsana Begum** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab) [V]: I would like to begin by saying that nothing is more important than people's lives, health and safety—nothing. Every death from covid-19 is a death too many. Every person or family suffering hardship right now is a person or family too many. No one is expendable.

Protecting people is the first and utmost duty of any Government, and the primary function of our economy should be to serve the interests of our communities. This is why so many of us are simply appalled by the Government's statement on lifting coronavirus restrictions. Workers' lives are being put at risk by the call for them to be pressured to return to work. It has further demonstrated that we have a callous, cold Government who have chosen to put big business above the welfare of the country—and above the people of my constituency, Poplar and Limehouse, who are already forced to endure the highest rate of child poverty in the entire country.

New local figures today show that Tower Hamlets residents of Asian background are twice as likely to be showing signs of covid-19, yet shockingly this is not news per se, but confirmation of what had already become increasingly clear. Many of us have been raising concerns about the disproportionate effect of covid-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic people for weeks and weeks now—right since the onset of this crisis. The Government finally announced that they were launching a review of the impact of covid-19 on BAME communities, but what has actually happened since—what actual steps have been taken? I am forced to continue to say it again and again: urgent, immediate and robust steps must be taken to address the unequal health and economic impacts of covid-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic groups—not tomorrow but today.

On top of this, we are seeing how the hostile environment has resulted in many migrants being left destitute and at greater risk of infection. Undocumented migrants, particularly in my constituency, are contacting me daily in despair, calling for an amnesty and support in order to survive.

I pay tribute to those delivering public and essential services, and especially to our NHS staff on the frontline, but it is clear that our public services as a whole are ill-prepared for dealing with this large-scale health risk because of spending cuts on a scale not seen for generations. Today, as we celebrate International Nurses Day, the Government should honour nurses with the pay rise they so desperately need. They should take urgent action to ensure the safety of public safety workers, particularly

those in the NHS and care staff, and those from BAME backgrounds—because what do our tributes and gestures actually mean to those literally dying on the frontline?

Sadly, at least 65 education staff have died with coronavirus, of whom 43 were women and 22 were men, as of 20 April. How can the Government not see that schools must not be reopened until it is safe to do so? There has never been a more important time to either join or become active in a trade union when trade unions are forced to step in to take action against bosses who put their members' health at risk. The unions will have our full and unwavering support. This includes supporting the National Education Union's call for the Government to rethink their risky and dangerous approach.

It is truly shocking how the Government have dragged their heels every step of the way regarding the greatest health crisis of our generation. We have had to push for PPE, push for testing, and push for daily updates on covid-19 deaths so that older people are not airbrushed out of the death toll. Despite securing promises around testing and tracing, particularly in relation to the horror and tragedy of those in care homes, there is still much more to be done. Yet not only are the continued delays and lack of urgency incomprehensible, but there is talk about things going back to normal. The UK has suffered the second-highest number of recorded coronavirus deaths in the world and the fourth-highest number of recorded new cases in the world. Official figures confirm that the number of UK deaths during the coronavirus pandemic over and above normal levels has exceeded 50,000. Fifty thousand people have died—50,000 deaths. Now is clearly not the time to ease the lockdown, and I fear for us all if the Government continue with this risky and reckless disregard for people's lives, wellbeing and safety.

5.19 pm

**Lee Rowley** (North East Derbyshire) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Like so many Members who have spoken in the Chamber and by video link, I want to start by paying tribute to all the work that has been done in my constituency over the last few difficult months. In particular, I want to put on record my thanks to everybody at Chesterfield Royal Hospital who has dealt so brilliantly with such a challenging time, to the healthcare workers in the community, to the people working in our GP surgeries across the towns and villages of North East Derbyshire, to the pharmacists who have been in touch and are working hard, and to everybody working in our care homes and social care settings across north Derbyshire. My thanks go out to all those who are working so hard at this incredibly difficult time.

And it goes beyond that. I also want to thank the people working in our jobcentres in Chesterfield and Staveley, those who are helping in our schools to allow the sons and daughters of key workers to continue, and our local councils. Derbyshire County Council has been ensuring that the people who need to shield—of whom there are 1 million across the country—by staying out of the community for their own safety get the medicines and food that they need. North East Derbyshire District Council has done some wonderful work over the last few weeks, contacting those who are self-isolating to make sure that they get the support and help they need and to check up on people where necessary. I am incredibly grateful for all the work that has been done.

The little acts of kindness are particularly important, and I want to mention a few that have come through my inbox in the last few days alone—the PPE that is being created by Dronfield Henry Fanshawe School and St Mary's at the moment; the pupils of New Whittington Community Primary School who have done a video to say thank you to their teachers; Mrs Shelagh Cheetham and her friends, who have made thousands of pieces of PPE for local hospitals and healthcare settings; and James Cutts from Wingerworth, who goes on his daily run around the village not in normal running wear but in a Batman or Superman suit, to cheer up local children when he goes past their windows. I am grateful for all that they are doing, and I hope that they continue.

In the time I have left, I want to spend a few moments looking at the broader challenge that we face. Members have raised many different questions today. Some are fair questions. Some, in my view, are unfair questions, but I understand why they are being asked. A series of broader truths has come forward over the past few weeks. We live in unprecedented times. There is no absolute certainty in decisions, and fundamentally, it reminds us all of the frailty of humanity. We think that we control our environment. Actually, our environment controls us. However brilliant our science, however able our politics and however fantastic our communities, ultimately, decisions are sometimes beyond us.

We have done so much over the past couple of months to get on top of this virus, and I am confident that we will do more in the coming days, weeks and months. This is the first pandemic in a century that we have had to deal with, and it is the first pandemic in a globalised world. We are seeking to do something that has never been done in the history of humanity: to turn back the tide of a pandemic and stop it overwhelming us. We have made huge progress, and I am grateful to everybody for the work they have done. Together, we will continue to do that work, and together, we will get through this, to a better world at the end.

5.24 pm

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to be beaming into the Chamber this afternoon. Like every other MP, I want to pay tribute to my community in Richmond Park and the way that they have stepped up to the challenge of coronavirus. On International Nurses Day, I want to talk in particular about the nurses at Kingston Hospital and those nurses and midwives who are taking time out from their training at the hospital to serve on the frontline. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for everything that you are doing.

I also want to take this opportunity to highlight our transport sector and, in particular, the extraordinary contribution that our transport workers have made throughout this crisis. They have kept our buses and trains moving to get our frontline workers to their places of work, and they have had to face the same dangers. I pay tribute to the 29 Transport for London workers who have died during this crisis, including 23 bus drivers, and I know that the whole House will join me in paying tribute to Belly Mujinga, a ticket checker at Victoria station who died after contracting coronavirus from a traveller who spat at her.

We are asking a huge amount of our transport workers. We are now asking them to keep us safe as we return to work. We can all appreciate how enormously difficult it will be to maintain social distancing on public transport,

and I acknowledge the efforts of all those who will be charged with keeping us safe. With the support of MPs from across the House, I wrote to both the Secretary of State for Transport and the Mayor of London last week to call for PPE for transport workers to protect them as they go about their essential work. When we think of the families of those who have already died, we know that this is the very least we can do.

The Government need to think now about the future of our transport network. We have the opportunity that we have been waiting for to drive through real change to achieve a greener transport network and to meet the challenge of climate change. The massive drop of cars on our roads has led to massively increased air quality, and I know that this is a benefit that my constituents and those elsewhere will want to maintain. It was extremely encouraging to hear from the Secretary of State for Transport about his support and game-changing investment in cycling and walking solutions, not just for our cities, but for communities elsewhere. It is beyond time that the Government threw their support behind active travel for all the environmental, financial, mental, social and physical benefits that it offers to every traveller. It will be not just a crucial part of getting people back to work, but part of a long-term solution for our cities and towns as we adjust to the challenge of the climate emergency, because as long as we understand that we need to avoid public transport, our bus and train companies will continue to see a catastrophic loss of revenue. The Government need to start thinking now about how public transport networks can be maintained so that they are ready to support our workforce as they make a full return to work, as we all hope one day to do.

We also need to think long term about essential economic infrastructure and how we move freight around our country and internationally. Hauliers and the aviation industry are also facing disaster. They make an essential contribution to our critical supply lines, such as food and medicine, and we need to think long term about how we support those supply lines. I have been calling on the Government to address this; if they feel that it is necessary to support those industries with a Government bail-out, this is the opportunity we have been waiting for to force the pace on meeting the challenge of climate change and to ask those industries to really start embedding greener forms of fuel and movement into their industries.

5.26 pm

**James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this most important debate. Covid-19 is a devastating enemy and it is right that parliamentary time should be given to debating its causes and effects. Given that so many people remain on the frontline, I wish to pay my own tribute to key workers right across the UK and beyond who continue to serve others. I also wish to pay my respects to the families and friends of those who have been so gravely affected.

In my constituency, I have been proud to witness the superb provision of life support to those in isolation. Within Wokingham borough, the hub at St Crispin's leisure centre has been a beacon of community spirit, and I have been privileged to deliver food to families who cannot venture out. Well done to everyone at Wokingham citizens advice bureau, Link and all the volunteers, who have done so much. In Bracknell, many others have come together to support the organisations

[James Sunderland]

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest and involve Community Services. I say thank you to them and to both Wokingham Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Council for underwriting this vital provision, and for their fiscal responsibility.

As for central Government, there has been a commendable and entirely conditions-based approach to the pandemic. The word “unprecedented” is often overplayed, but it is quite true that there is no policy precedent for covid-19 and the Government have rightly needed to feel their way on medical and scientific advice. Now is not the time for media hysteria, nor for political point scoring. Indeed, the time for a public inquiry will come and the benefit of hindsight is a powerful weapon, but it is time for an incremental approach to easing the lockdown, based upon common sense. As I stated yesterday, it is not down to the UK Government to regulate every aspect of people’s lives, nor is it for the media to seek definitive clarity on every permutation of what we can and cannot do. It is in fact for us as individuals to follow the guidelines, maintain social distancing, respect others and hence prevent further loss of life.

In the short time I have left, I urge the Government to think carefully about further mitigation in key areas. First, the decision to impose 14 days of quarantine upon entry to the UK by air will have a devastating effect on individuals, businesses, our global ambitions and the airline industry, particularly in constituencies such as mine that are closely to major airports. At a time when we need the economy to start breathing again, we must consider whether testing before or immediately after arrival will suffice, and ensure that we do not disincentivise air travel. Getting our children back into schools and our staff back into work is also essential. For our country to pay for our public services and enviable support measures, we need to re-stimulate the wealth creation that comes from a vibrant economy. Although many in the Cabinet are conflicted, it is our duty to keep people safe, while we also ease lockdown, and I believe that social distancing remains the key. If people are given the personal responsibility to ensure that the virus does not spread, we will all be able to carry on with our lives as before.

Lastly, formalised testing arrangements need to be rolled out more widely into care homes. Councils need to know whether they will be reimbursed in full for the expenditure incurred as a result of covid-19. We must find a reliable antibody test, and of course money can be no object in our exhaustive hunt for a vaccine.

5.31 pm

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD) [V]: I wish to put on record my warmest thanks to all our doctors, nurses and care workers here in Bath, to the police and emergency services, key workers and council workers, and to everybody else who has helped us keep going during lockdown.

The covid pandemic has forced us all to change our lives in ways we would not have imagined only a few months ago. In all the hardship and tragedy of this time, one of the brightest points has been the improvement in our air quality, because many fewer cars are on the road. As we have adjusted to lockdown, many people have commented that they have thought about the benefits of talking a walk or going for a bike ride, because it is much more relaxing and there is more time

to reflect. Walking and cycling contribute greatly to our wellbeing. We have talked at length about social distancing measures and the space we need to give each other when we are socially distancing. In this country, safety has always been a barrier to cycling, but now, as our towns and cities are less congested, cycling has become a much safer option. Of course, we want to restart the economy as soon as it is safe to do so, but when we do we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to look at our streets with fresh eyes. We need to think about what did and did not work before lockdown, and at what we want to achieve as we put in place the conditions for a new normal.

For decades we have been overdependent on cars, and that must change. I have also spoken before about the need to tackle emissions from surface transport. We have been having these discussions in my city of Bath, which has suffered from severe air pollution, for many months now. As we slowly emerge from lockdown, we need to look at ways to avoid a dramatic resurgence in car use, particularly as many people may be nervous about using public transport. Other countries are already looking at ways to rebalance the priority given to cars over cyclists and pedestrians in urban areas, through segregated cycle lanes, speed reduction zones or new and widened pavements. I welcome the Transport Secretary’s new guidance to local authorities. Early action will be crucial, in order to embed changes in behaviour. This is a great moment for change, and we must ensure that our economic recovery is focused on the need to get to net zero.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I now call the shadow Secretary of State to wind up for the Opposition and ask that he speaks for no more than eight minutes.

5.34 pm

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to you for that, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have heard many fine speeches over two days, and I hope Members will forgive me for not being able to mention them all. Throughout this outbreak, our paramount concern has been to save lives and minimise harm. That means suppressing the virus, not managing its spread. We are tracking towards one of the worst death tallies in the world, with more than 40,000 deaths, every one a tragedy, and this House cannot ignore the disproportionate impact the virus is having on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities—a thorough inquiry is a necessity. Today’s debate is not an inquest. No doubt there will have to be, in the future, a full and proper public inquiry, with access to an abundance of material and data. However, the Government must understand the concern, grief and anguish of our constituents who have lost loved ones or suffered great harm.

Ministers should expect searching questions. For example, did we enter lockdown too late? Ministers tell us they were following the science, but a SAGE paper from February on social distancing concedes:

“It is a political decision to consider whether it is preferable to enact stricter measures at first...or to start with fewer measures”. As the Chair of the Health Committee, the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), said yesterday, “Ministers have to take responsibility for their decisions.”—[*Official Report*, 11 May 2020; Vol. 676, c. 59.]

This virus exploits ambivalence. It demands clear public health messaging. Points about confused messaging have been made eloquently throughout the debate, but fundamentally the point is that nobody should be asked to go to work or send their children to school without its being safe to do so, and many do not believe that the Prime Minister's instructions on Sunday evening yet meet that test. The Government must work with the TUC to ensure that strict safety measures are in place. No worker should be forced to put their health at risk. I hope the Minister can tell the House what the impact of asking people to go back to work will be on the R0.

The lockdown has been a powerful tool to bring down transmission, and easing lockdown too soon risks a dangerous second wave, with unacceptable further loss of life, so we support its continuation. But lockdown has a cost. It has an economic cost, certainly. It has a detrimental cost for children who spend months out of school; UNICEF has warned that children are not the face of this pandemic but risk being among its biggest victims. It also has a cost for health. We talk about protecting the NHS, but the extra surge capacity in the NHS has been built on the back of 2 million operations cancelled, cancer treatment delayed, unquantifiable mental health problems left to fester, and falling A&E attendance. There will indeed be long-term mortality and morbidity as a consequence of this lockdown. Ministers need to fund the NHS for that growing burden of unmet clinical need.

However, we cannot leave the lockdown safely unless thorough public health measures are in place. We need case finding, testing, tracing and isolation, which have been vital to the success of nations such as South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Testing and surveillance are crucial to properly understanding prevalence and the estimates of the R0.

The former Business Secretary, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), put it well yesterday when he said:

"A lack of testing has caused a lack of data, which has meant that too many of our policy decisions have been taken with a self-imposed blindfold."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 2020; Vol. 676, c. 84.]

I agree. We were doing tracing in February, and then we abandoned it on 12 March. It took until 29 April for adverts to start appearing to recruit tracing call centre staff, a service that is to be handed over to the private sector. I do not believe that that tracing should be done by Serco. Instead, we must use the expertise in local public health services, our environmental health officers and our strength in primary care, and GPs should routinely be sent the test results of their patients.

Given the levels of significant asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission, we need a proper targeted testing strategy too. All healthcare workers must be screened regularly. A study by Imperial suggested that that would reduce transmission in healthcare settings by up to a third. Because Office for National Statistics data show higher mortality in more deprived areas, with those in lower-paid occupations at greater risk, inequalities in accessing testing must be stamped out, and people must be provided with the means to self-isolate. That should include making use of hotel rooms and providing decent, more generous statutory sick pay if people cannot isolate at home.

We need to take other public health measures too. We support the quarantining of arrivals for 14 days at airports, but why did the Government not implement

that earlier, and why is there still a lag in enforcing it? I am sure I am not the only Member struck by the curious irony that a party that promised to take back control of borders has conspicuously failed hitherto to enforce any border restrictions at a time of a devastating global pandemic.

We need to minimise outbreaks in vulnerable settings. Exercise Cygnus warned about the risks in care homes. The Government document published yesterday proclaimed that

"the Government will continue to bolster the UK's social care sector".

Today we learned of 8,312 tragic deaths in care homes. Why did Government official guidance until 12 March say:

"It remains very unlikely that people receiving care in a care home or the community will become infected"?

Why were patients discharged from hospital and transferred into the hands of social care without a test? And why still today, when we know that all staff and residents should be tested, are the Government promising to deliver that testing only by 6 June, a month away? This is not swift action. In many ways it looks like utter negligence.

Today is International Nurses Day and many will light a candle or shine a light from their windows at 8.30 pm to thank and pay tribute to every nurse. We will remember them and every health and care worker who has made the ultimate sacrifice to this horrific disease. Our NHS staff and care staff, many of whom are exhausted and fearing burn-out, need more than Thursday evening clapping. They need our full support, safe staffing ratios, PPE and decent fair pay. They have been asked to give so much. They too often get so little in return. We hope that they are recognised for their true worth at the end of all this.

5.40 pm

**The Minister for Patient Safety, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (Ms Nadine Dorries) [V]:** Coronavirus presents the most serious public health emergency that our nation has faced for a generation. I thank Members for the many contributions made in this debate, which have shown vividly the impact that the pandemic has had on our constituents and our country as a whole. Today, on the international day of the nurse and as a former nurse myself, I echo the sentiments of Members and express my gratitude for the crucial work and commitment to duty shown by our nurses everywhere in all that they are doing to care for others at this important time.

With regard to the devolved Administrations, we have taken a four-nation approach and have worked closely with those Administrations every step of the way, but, as the Prime Minister set out, part of that four-nation approach will be acknowledging that the virus may be spreading at different speeds in different parts of the UK. I assure the House that at all times we will be guided by the science, which the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) has himself just mentioned.

On the science, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) queried the 2-metre distancing rule. Modelling data supports the view that large droplets expelled during breathing and talking, which are the main droplets associated with respiratory viruses, in the main drop to the ground within a 2-metre radius of a person.

[Ms Nadine Dorries]

The distribution of droplets is influenced by a very large number of factors, including humidity, temperature, ventilation, velocity, size and composition of the droplets. There is general agreement that large droplets are unlikely to spread beyond 2 metres.

Members have raised the benefits for the green economy and our environment and the increase in wildlife and cleaner air. As people return to work, we have encouraged flexible working. We have asked people to work from home if they can, and to get to work by foot or by bicycle, which is a greener way to travel.

Several hon. Members have raised the impact of coronavirus on BAME communities. It is critical that we find out which groups are most at risk so that we can take the right steps to protect them and minimise that risk. We have commissioned Public Health England to better understand the different factors that may influence the impact of the virus on these communities.

We have also heard widespread support from across the House for our care sector. We have overhauled the way PPE is delivered to the care sector, ensured that residents and staff are tested, and supported local authorities with £3.2 billion of additional funding to help frontline care services.

Another common theme during this debate was the supply of PPE. It is important to recognise that there have been real challenges in this area, given the sudden and high global demand for those products and the need to establish new supply chains from scratch. Despite that, since the beginning of the pandemic, we have still managed to deliver more than 1.2 billion items of PPE. We are continuing to source more PPE through our new Make strategy, which is headed by Lord Deighton.

We also heard several contributions about testing. The Government's ultimate goal remains that anyone who needs a test should be able to access one and we will continue to expand our capacity until that is achieved. As our capacity has continued to increase, we are now able to test all essential workers and those who are unable to work from home, and everyone over 65 and members of their households, if they have symptoms. We are also ramping up testing for NHS staff and patients and social care staff and care home residents, both with and without symptoms.

Some have suggested that Public Health England should have involved private testing companies earlier. Unlike some countries, we did not enter this crisis with a major private diagnostics manufacturing industry to call on. However, over a very short period of time we have seen our life science companies and pharmaceutical giants step up. Working with our world-leading but smaller diagnostic companies, they have built an impressive British diagnostic industry at scale.

Some Members asked about the transparency of scientific advice. At all times during this pandemic, we have been consistently guided by the scientific advice. All advice put to the Government by SAGE has been published online, and the membership has also been published online.

Members asked about returning to school and pay for key workers. I note that that will be covered in a debate tomorrow. However, there are ongoing discussions on the issue of schooling. We will be setting out detailed guidance on that shortly. Regarding pay for key workers,

we are incredibly proud of our social care workers and are determined to do everything we can to show them that they are valued. The national minimum wage and living wage apply across social care, and we expect local authorities to work with providers to determine a fair rate of pay.

The healthcare situation regarding non-coronavirus patients has been raised. Thanks to the efforts of NHS staff and the success of social distancing, the NHS has not been overwhelmed. We have been able to start the reopening of several important NHS services, for example fertility services. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage anyone who needs urgent care to seek help as they normally would do. If you experience chest pain, feel a lump or have any health worry whatever, please come forward and seek help.

Members paid tribute to the NHS workers who lost their lives. Nothing can replace the loss of a loved one, but we want to do everything we can to support families who are dealing with this grief. We have recognised the sacrifice that health and care workers are making by setting up a life assurance scheme for NHS and social care frontline colleagues who contract coronavirus during the course of their work.

Members rightly stressed the need to avoid a second peak of cases. The Prime Minister reiterated that we will not make major changes to the lockdown rules until we are confident that we can avoid a significant second peak of infections.

Members raised the issue of support for the charity sector. Last month, the Chancellor announced that charities would receive a £750 million package of additional Government support.

Every single Government Department is engaged in tackling coronavirus. As the Minister with responsibility for mental health, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all mental health trusts. The Government recognised the mental health impact of covid-19 very early in the pandemic and the support has been there for those affected, including the rapid establishment of 24-hour open access telephone lines for those in need of urgent support, and, in addition to that, a confidential helpline to support the health and wellbeing of frontline workers who have also been affected. The NHS is there for everyone and continues to provide the very best care for all.

This has been an important debate that starkly confirms the impact of coronavirus on all our lives. I am grateful for all the points raised today. I can assure the House that the Government are committed to defeating this invisible killer once and for all.

**Mr Speaker:** Before I put the Question, I remind hon. Members that the Question is to be decided by a remote Division in accordance with my provisional determination announced earlier. There is therefore no need for me to collect the voices or for Members present in the Chamber to shout Aye or No. The Clerk will initiate the Division on the MemberHub and Members will be invited to record their votes using the remote voting system. Hon. Members will have 15 minutes to record their votes.

*Question put.*

*The House proceeded to a remote Division.*

**Mr Speaker:** The remote voting period has now finished. I will announce the result of the Division shortly.

We will now proceed to the next business.

## Hybrid Proceedings (Extension of Temporary Orders)

**Mr Speaker:** I have not selected the amendment.

I call the Leader of the House, who is asked to speak for no more than five minutes.

6.6 pm

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

That the Orders of 21 April (Hybrid scrutiny proceedings (Temporary Orders)) and 22 April (Hybrid substantive proceedings (Temporary Orders) and Remote voting (Temporary Orders)) shall have effect until 20 May 2020.

The motion extends the decisions of the House on 21 and 22 April to allow the continuation of remote participation in proceedings of the House and remote voting until the Whitsun recess on 20 May. I shall not dwell on the detail of those motions, but rather use my time to explain, briefly, the reason for their extension.

The current arrangements have allowed scrutiny of the Government to continue and, remarkably, remote voting to be carried out for the first time today. The motion allows the House to agree to a short extension to the current arrangements. The Government have been consistent in saying that the arrangements are temporary. As yesterday's Command Paper set out, it is only right that Parliament has set a national example of how businesses can continue in these circumstances. We have done so admirably, thanks to the patience and commitment of both staff and Members, and will continue to do so until the Whitsun recess, but it is clear that soon Parliament must set an example for how we move back, gradually, to being a fully functioning country again. Our constituents would expect nothing less.

Although we must move in step with public health guidance, it is vital that when we are asking other people to work and to go to their places of work if they cannot do so from home, we should not be the ones who are exempt from that. Indeed, we should be leading by example. It is my expectation that I will not have to renew the temporary Standing Orders again. I am grateful to the House for developing the temporary procedures, and for the immense amount of work by staff here to make the arrangements work. However, it is my belief that this House cannot be as effective in carrying out its constitutional duties without Members being present. Debates are inevitably stilted; they lack interventions. I cannot think of any previous occasion when I have spoken for so long without receiving any interventions. I begin to fear that I am boring the House, and I can think of no greater sin.

**Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** No, I am not allowed to give way under the current arrangements.

Debates are inevitably stilted and time is restricted by the understandable limits of the technology—although the people operating the technology have done a truly fantastic job in getting us to where we are. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I know that the feeling is shared across the House. All these factors restrict our ability to conduct effective scrutiny and to pass the volume of legislation

required by the Government. I therefore think it essential that we move back to physical ways of working as quickly as possible.

I understand that some Members have concerns about how long we keep these measures in place, and that is why it is so important that we agree to only a short extension. It is essential that we move back to physical proceedings as soon as practicable in order that this House can do what it does best: the cut and thrust of debate and the flexibility to hold the Government to account and to legislate on behalf of the people of the United Kingdom.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Leader of the House, who is asked to speak for no more than 5 minutes.

6.10 pm

**Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab) [V]:** May I thank the Leader of the House for setting out the Government's position? The motion before the House today will mean that the temporary orders of 21 and 22 April have effect until 20 May, which is until we rise for the Whitsun recess. The hybrid scrutiny proceedings, the questions, statements and urgent questions, the substantive proceedings which apply to legislation and the remote voting, which was tested earlier, will continue to operate for what is effectively a week and a day.

The hybrid proceedings in the House seem to have progressed. I know that right hon. and hon. Members are becoming expert at talking to themselves, effectively. As the Leader said earlier, there are no interventions. We have had a vote, and I want to place on record my thanks to the Procedure Committee, which published its report on 8 May. It has informed the process, and I will pick out a couple of points it made. It was satisfied with the "robustness and security" of the system and the safeguards in place to allow you, Mr Speaker, to intervene where you felt there was cause for concern. In all the practice sessions, I have voted successfully. I voted, was informed that I had voted, and received a text to that effect.

These are temporary orders. We want to be here in Parliament, but we want to make sure that everyone is safe. Many Members are finding it frustrating that they cannot ask supplementary questions or even intervene, and there is no scope for debate. The essence of parliamentary debate is the fact that we are listening to each other and can take part in those debates. Similarly without Back-Bench debates and Adjournment debates, we find it difficult to raise issues on behalf of our constituents, but the orders are only until 20 May.

In any event, it should not take a crisis such as this pandemic to make sure that we reform ourselves, and I hope some of the new procedures that have been brought into effect might be carried over. I place on record the remarkable feat that has been undertaken by the Clerks, the staff of the House, the broadcasting unit and the digital services all working together. If they were producing a car, that car would have gone from zero to 100 mph in about five seconds. It has been absolutely amazing. Mr Speaker, you have ensured that that has all progressed. The Opposition are grateful to all those people. It showed that Parliament could continue and safely, so Her Majesty's Opposition support the motion.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Karen Bradley, Chair of the Procedure Committee, who is asked to speak for no more than three minutes.

6.13 pm

**Karen Bradley** (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): This is my first contribution under the hybrid proceedings. It was a shock to me not to be bobbing up and down to catch your eye, Mr Speaker, but of course we do not do that any more, because we have equality of treatment between people in the Chamber and those who are contributing virtually.

I put on record a thank you to everybody who has been involved in allowing Parliament to restart, Members to contribute from wherever we are in the country and all Members to be part of proceedings. I know what a mammoth task it has been to develop the proceedings that we have and to allow people to be able to contribute virtually, as well as physically in the Chamber. I thank you, Mr Speaker, in particular for the work that you have done leading on that very important matter.

There is no doubt that the situation we are in today is sub-optimal, given the lack of interventions and spontaneity and the restrictions on the period for which the House can sit. These are not issues anyone wishes for; there are technical reasons why we cannot sit for more than two hours at a time and need breaks to allow the technology to be reset. We have to agree, however, that given that it was from a standing start, what we have brought into place has been remarkably successful, albeit we all agree that it is not as effective as the physical presence of Members in Westminster who can do the jobs that they were elected to do here in Parliament.

It is also important to make the point that these will be decisions for the House. These are decisions that the House will make, and it will be for Members to decide what they want to see happen in the future. I welcome the fact that the orders are being renewed, and I want to remind Members that the Procedure Committee is holding an inquiry at the moment and would welcome contributions from Members, particularly in light of the announcement from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House about the intention not to renew the orders after 20 May. It will be very important that we hear from Members. I also know, Mr Speaker, that in any event you and the teams in the House service are looking to improve how we manage this, including the fact that we have gone from a 30-minute break to a 15-minute break and are looking to have longer for scrutiny.

The Procedure Committee supports the renewal of the motions today and we look forward to looking further at the work that is going on and to hearing from Members.

6.16 pm

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP) [V]: I begin by acknowledging the efforts of our staff in digital services and elsewhere. They have worked tirelessly—*[Inaudible.]* But let us not pretend that these things are ideal, or that we have made the fullest use of the technology available to us.

As I have said before—*[Inaudible]*—this gives Parliament the opportunity for Members to join remotely, if they can. The entire enterprise is centred on a meeting in the House of Commons Chamber, which means that whether we like it or not there is a division between those who are present and those who are not. This creates two classes of Members and it disadvantages those who join remotely. This is, of course, compounded by the fact

that the final link in the digital chain is a domestic broadband connection that often fails, leaving Members unable to participate fully or at all. The way around this would be to take proceedings wholly online and to have a virtual meeting, as has happened in many other legislatures, including the national Parliament in Scotland. This creates a level playing field with everyone getting the same access, so I cannot understand why there is such resistance even to trying it on a pilot basis while we have the technology in situ.

The fact that things are not working as well as they might should provide an impetus for improvement, innovation and development. Sadly, though, there are some who experience *schadenfreude* at the imperfections of the current system. Their conclusion is to abandon it altogether. The constant insistence that these measures are only temporary and the hankering after getting back to how things used to be undermine the efforts of those who are trying to live in the 21st century.

I, too, hope that the public health emergency is temporary, but I want to see what part of these necessary arrangements can be used to improve our procedures in the long term. One of these is the process of voting. It seems that we have now perfected the technology to allow Members to vote in a manner that is safe, simple and secure, yet there are those who insist that we must be allowed to vote in the way that they always have, by queuing in a Lobby corridor and manually being counted by a Clerk. They want to do this no matter if it puts themselves, their colleagues and their staff at unnecessary risk. They think they are defending the right to vote, but in fact they are making a fetish out of a 19th century tradition rather than a democratic principle.

I say let us look at this through the other end of the telescope. If electronic voting works, why can it not be available to Members even when the emergency is over? Providing they sign in to the Estate, why not vote from their offices? Why not group votes together at the end of a session, making it quicker so that MPs have more time to discuss their constituents' concerns rather than idling in corridors?

We should also change how we hold the Government to account. Today, our business comprises two statements, one urgent question and one debate, but all about the same thing. This is the way things used to be: different Departments doing different things, a multitude of concerns and each with their allotted slot. But everything has now changed. Now there is only one issue. All Departments are focused on the pandemic. Everything we do and say from now is conditioned by that reality, and it is time that we had a more ambitious approach to reforming how we discuss these things.

Finally, I note that we are being asked to agree to this extension for one week, and I see later on the Order Paper that the Government intend to go ahead with the Whitsun recess. I ask the Government to consider the wisdom of this and how it will look to the public. If Ministers are encouraging people to go back to work, is this really the best time for MPs to have a holiday?

**Mr Speaker:** I remind Members that we have a lot of staff here who have been working under a lot of pressure, and that we should take them into consideration when we make statements.

*Debate interrupted.*



## Remote Division: Covid-19

**Mr Speaker:** I can now announce the result of the remote Division that has just taken place.

*Question,* That this House has considered Covid-19.

*The House divided:* Ayes 363, Noes 248.

### Division No. 41]

#### AYES

Adams, Nigel  
Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Ahmad Khan, Imran  
Aiken, Nickie  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Amess, Sir David  
Anderson, Lee  
Anderson, Stuart  
Andrew, Stuart  
Ansell, Caroline  
Argar, Edward  
Atherton, Sarah  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Gareth  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Badenoch, Kemi  
Bailey, Shaun  
Baillie, Siobhan  
Baker, Duncan  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, rh Steve  
Baron, Mr John  
Baynes, Simon  
Bell, Aaron  
Benton, Scott  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, rh Jake  
Bhatti, Saqib  
Blackman, Bob  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Braverman, rh Suella  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Bristow, Paul  
Britcliffe, Sara  
Brokenshire, rh James  
Browne, Anthony  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buchan, Felicity  
Buckland, rh Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Butler, Rob  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Carter, Andy  
Cartlidge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Cates, Miriam  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chamberlain, Wendy

Chishti, Rehman  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, Mr Simon  
Clarke, Theo  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Clarkson, Chris  
Cleverly, rh James  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
Colburn, Elliot  
Collins, Damian  
Cooper, Daisy  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Coutinho, Claire  
Crosbie, Virginia  
Crouch, Tracey  
Daly, James  
Davey, rh Sir Edward  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Dr James  
Davies, Mims  
Davies, Philip  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Davison, Dehenna  
Dinenage, Caroline  
Dines, Miss Sarah  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
Donelan, Michelle  
Double, Steve  
Dowden, rh Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duddridge, James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Dunne, rh Philip  
Eastwood, Mark  
Edwards, Ruth  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias  
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
Eustice, rh George  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Everitt, Ben  
Fabricant, Michael  
Farris, Laura  
Farron, Tim  
Farry, Stephen  
Fell, Simon  
Fletcher, Katherine  
Fletcher, Mark  
Fletcher, Nick  
Ford, Vicky  
Foster, Kevin

Fox, rh Dr Liam  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
Fuller, Richard  
Fysh, Mr Marcus  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Garnier, Mark  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gibson, Peter  
Gideon, Jo  
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl  
Girvan, Paul  
Glen, John  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Gray, James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Griffiths, Kate  
Grundy, James  
Gullis, Jonathan  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heaton-Harris, Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Higginbotham, Antony  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Holden, Mr Richard  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Holmes, Paul  
Howell, John  
Howell, Paul  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, rh Jeremy  
Hunt, Tom  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
Jardine, Christine  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Jenrick, rh Robert  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnston, David  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Fay  
Jones, Mr Marcus

Jupp, Simon  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Kearns, Alicia  
Keegan, Gillian  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian  
Kruger, Danny  
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi  
Lamont, John  
Largan, Robert  
Latham, Mrs Pauline  
Leadsom, rh Andrea  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Levy, Ian  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lewis, rh Brandon  
Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Lockhart, Carla  
Loder, Chris  
Logan, Mark  
Longhi, Marco  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Mackrory, Cherilyn  
Maclean, Rachel  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, Kit  
Mangnall, Anthony  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Mayhew, Jerome  
Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Jason  
McCartney, Karl  
McPartland, Stephen  
McVey, rh Esther  
Mercer, Johnny  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalfe, Stephen  
Millar, Robin  
Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
Milling, rh Amanda  
Mills, Nigel  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Damien  
Moore, Robbie  
Moran, Layla  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morrisey, Joy  
Morton, Wendy  
Mullan, Dr Kieran  
Mumby-Croft, Holly  
Mundell, rh David  
Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew  
Neill, Sir Robert  
Nici, Lia  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
Norman, rh Jesse  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Olney, Sarah  
Opperman, Guy  
Paisley, Ian

Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, rh Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Roberts, Rob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Sambrook, Gary  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Scully, Paul  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, rh Mark  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, Andrew

Stevenson, Jane  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stride, rh Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, rh Rishi  
 Sunderland, James  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Trott, Laura  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallis, Dr Jamie  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

#### NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
 Amesbury, Mike  
 Anderson, Fleur  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Ashworth, Jonathan  
 Bardell, Hannah  
 Barker, Paula  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Begum, Apsana  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Black, Mhairi  
 Blackford, rh Ian  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blomfield, Paul

Bonnar, Steven  
 Brabin, Tracy  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Brock, Deidre  
 Brown, Alan  
 Brown, Ms Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Callaghan, Amy  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Carden, Dan  
 Champion, Sarah

Chapman, Douglas  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Clark, Feryal  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Cowan, Ronnie  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Daby, Janet  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 Day, Martyn  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Debbonaire, Thangam  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Doogan, Dave  
 Dorans, Allan  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fellows, Marion  
 Ferrier, Margaret  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flynn, Stephen  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Foy, Mary Kelly  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Glendon, Mary  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanvey, Neale  
 Hardy, Emma  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hill, Mike  
 Hillier, Meg

Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Sir George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, Dame Diana  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lake, Ben  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Linden, David  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 MacAskill, Kenny  
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorris, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Mr Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Murray, James  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Nicolson, John  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Oppong-Asare, Abena  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Owatemi, Taiwo

Owen, Sarah (*Proxy vote cast by Kate Osamor*)  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Alyn  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Sobel, Alex

Spellar, rh John  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Richard  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Webbe, Claudia  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Whitley, Mick  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Winter, Beth  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

## Hybrid Proceedings (Extension of Temporary Orders)

*Debate resumed.*

*Question again proposed,*

That the Orders of 21 April (Hybrid scrutiny proceedings (Temporary Orders)) and 22 April (Hybrid substantive proceedings (Temporary Orders) and Remote voting (Temporary Orders)) shall have effect until 20 May 2020.

**Mr Speaker:** The time limit for speeches is three minutes. I advise hon. Members who are speaking virtually to have a timing device visible.

6.21 pm

**Sir Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): Along with others, I pay tribute to your efforts, Mr Speaker, and to those of the House staff and the Procedure Committee, in bringing in these temporary virtual arrangements and putting into place the practical measures here in the House of Commons to improve safety for those who are present in person.

The virtual proceedings have served a purpose during the most acute stage of the crisis, but as the nation gradually returns towards normal life, as the Leader of the House rightly said, it is important that this place moves back towards normality at least at the same pace. The amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg), which was not selected for technical reasons, sought to bring in hybrid voting mechanisms, and I thought that it was also an important recognition that we ought to be able to return gradually. Not only is this about the leadership that this House owes to the country; it is also, as has been said by both the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House, about the quality of scrutiny and the effectiveness of Parliament. So much of what we do here depends on personal contact—however socially distant—and on the ability of Ministers to sense the strength of feeling.

I strongly endorse the comments of the Leader of the House. I very much welcome his commitment to bringing this temporary measure to an end on 20 May. He may not know this, but I can tell him that that is my birthday. I am profoundly grateful for this early gift that he has promised me, and look forward to supporting it.

6.23 pm

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): May I place on record my thanks to you, Mr Speaker, and to all the staff across the House Commission and the Clerks for all the work that they have done? I have been intrinsically involved as a member of the Procedure Committee and as an Opposition Whip, so I have an inner knowledge of the scale of the work that has taken place, and am truly grateful for it.

It has already been made clear by my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House that we are in favour of extending the motion. I am just confused by the announcement of the Leader of the House. May I ask when he planned to consult the Procedure Committee about not extending the motion? It would have at least been courteous, and up to now he has been extremely courteous in consulting the Committee. Would he approach the Chair of the Committee to ensure that we have perhaps a private discussion with him to understand his rationale?

[Chris Elmore]

What equality impact assessment has the Leader of the House done regarding Members being able to come back to the House, given that they may have childcare or caring responsibilities? Right across the UK, we have seen people struggling to go back to work following the Prime Minister's announcement—in England, I stress, but not in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland—because they do not have childcare provision.

What assessment has been made of Members' health in order that they are able to come back into the Chamber? We cannot simply suggest that we can return on 1 June and that nothing changes. This Chamber is set up for 50 Members of Parliament. How does the Leader of the House propose to manage—in consultation with you, Mr Speaker—to ensure that the Chamber is usable for 641 voting Members? Is he suggesting that the Public Health England advice is going to change for the management of the Chamber? He did not make that clear.

May I also ask the Leader of the House what discussions he has had through the usual channels, or generally with the smaller parties, to explain his rationale for this announcement? It seems that we have jumped from having a procedure that is working—I accept that it is not pleasing everybody and that it is stifling some of the debate, but it is allowing for some scrutiny—to now saying that the House will return in June, when there has been no announcement about such a lifting of restrictions across all the nations of the UK. The Prime Minister, despite ignoring advice from the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Governments, said that he would respect the advice given from those nations.

Are Members from those nations expected not to come to the House? I speak as a Welsh Member who has checked to make sure that I can come here, but the advice in Scotland could well be different. What will happen with travel arrangements for Northern Irish Members? In the earlier transport statement we heard from Members about the pressures on air travel. With great respect to the Leader of the House—I genuinely mean that, because he has been truly courteous to the Committee in recent weeks—I ask him to explain in more detail how, with literally two weeks to go, the practical management of the Chamber, including in the Lobby and indeed where we are now, will work.

6.25 pm

**Sir Charles Walker** (Broxbourne) (Con): As Chair of the Administration Committee, I have the great pleasure of working closely with you, Mr Speaker, and the wonderful members of the House staff who made this hybrid Parliament a reality. They are to be congratulated and celebrated for their efforts. This is a technically brilliant fix. However, when it comes to holding the Government to account—and the Opposition—it is absolutely hopeless. We need to be in this place, eyeballing Government Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition and shadow Ministers and holding them to account. When we are not in this Chamber, we need to be discussing and transacting our constituents' business in the Division Lobby, the corridors and around the Estate. This is where Parliament should be.

I am afraid that we are in danger of bringing ourselves into disrepute. I sat through part of the last debate and saw a co-ordinated and, yes, legitimate attack from our

colleagues north of the border on the Prime Minister because he had asked people to return to work. I point out to those colleagues north of the border that, whether they like the Prime Minister or not, and whether they respect him or not, he is not asking anyone to do something he is not doing himself. Whether or not they approve of what he is doing or what he says, day in and day out he is going into work to lead the country. He did that day in and day out except when he was ill.

It does show a lack of self-awareness to sit in your front room and attack the leader of this country for having the temerity to ask that people go back to work. We all have absolute heroes in our constituencies, working at the Co-Op, at Sainsbury's, at Tesco, in our hospitals, driving our trains, policing our streets and clearing our rubbish. What right do we have to ask them—and teachers—to go back to work if we are sitting in the comfort of our own home, not leading from the front but directing operations from behind? At the end of the day, our constituents—not all of them, but most of them—will expect us to be here, promoting not ourselves or our own agenda but their agenda. There is an economic tsunami heading towards this country and the rest of western Europe. We need to be here day in, day out, in person—physically—protecting and promoting the interests of the people we represent.

6.28 pm

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) [V]: To pick up the point about our constituents' expectations, I suggest that the constituents we all represent will expect us to order our business in a way that allows us all to contribute on an equal footing. That is the essence of how Parliament is supposed to function, and it must surely have a bearing on how we order our business going ahead.

I too add my thanks to those members of staff and others who have worked so hard to make these virtual proceedings technically possible, while I recognise their temporary nature and limitations. I hope, though, that we will see this as an opportunity to learn lessons and see what might be possible for the future, to show that as a Parliament we are able to accommodate those with caring responsibilities, who are on parental leave or who are suffering from illness, and to allow them to continue to represent their constituents as they would want to but for those limitations.

None of us knows what the future will hold over the next few weeks. If there is to be any suggestion of a renewal of these provisions, I make this plea to the Leader of the House: there should be proper and better consultation with the small parties than there was ahead of the implementation of these procedures. The smaller parties have been able to have a voice through them, but principally as a result of your good offices, Mr Speaker, and for that I place on the record my appreciation and that of my colleagues.

Let us not pretend that this has been an exercise in holding the Government to account in the way that we might normally have expected—and that is principally because of the attitude of the Government themselves. That is exemplified when we consider the Prime Minister's statement to the nation on Sunday. That should have been made first here to this House; there would have been every opportunity to address the nation after that.

But the biggest limitation and my real concern is the range of business that the House is able to deal with. There are no Westminster Hall debates and the Backbench Business Committee is not functioning, but still the world continues to evolve. Israel is considering the annexation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories; we have very little opportunity to have a say on that. In Hong Kong, China is walking ever further from the joint declaration. These are all matters of great importance; whatever we do after the recess, this House must be allowed to have our voice in respect of all of them.

6.31 pm

**Mr William Wragg** (Hazel Grove) (Con): I do not take personally at all the fact that my amendment was not selected for debate; I appreciate that I might well need to choose a better modal verb if I am to resubmit it for any future motion.

A rumour is going around that I have been somewhat grumpy over these proceedings. I try my best to cheer people as I go around this place, but sometimes I fail, given the challenges I meet from some Members at least. However, I fully acknowledge the hard work and effort that has gone on—the Herculean effort—to ensure that at least some form of scrutiny and good work can continue in this House. That said, I am afraid that a virtual Parliament is, in comparison with normal times, virtually nothing. We should not be blinded by the technology as an end in itself.

I have made many a poor speech in this Chamber. Perhaps the one I am giving briefly this afternoon will rank among the worst, but at least it has been elevated by the surroundings in which we find ourselves, rather than being part of a series of disjointed monologues given in front of bad curtains. That is the image of Parliament being created today.

It is necessary for us to lead by example and return to our place of work. Many of our constituents are also anxious to do so, even with adaptations in their workplaces. I think of my father, a Hotpoint engineer, who has spent his time going around houses fixing washing machines, getting on with it quietly. It is a nonsense to assume that we can conduct our affairs sat in our living rooms. It is an insult to the public.

I know that certain procedural matters may be inconvenient to deal with at the moment, given these temporary Standing Orders, and I am not necessarily going to test them to their limits this afternoon, Mr Speaker, and leave you in an invidious position. I welcome what the Leader of the House has said. We must return at the pace—indeed, ahead of it, perhaps—that we expect of the rest of the country. But let us not delude ourselves into thinking that these provisions have in any way allowed us to scrutinise Government enough. Think about who welcomed them: those who wish to diminish the Westminster Parliament, as we have seen from some contributions so far, and, just perhaps, Ministers who quite enjoy a lack of scrutiny.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Leader of the House to wind up the debate for the Government and request that his speech is no longer than two minutes.

6.34 pm

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I am grateful for the support that this motion has, and grateful to the shadow Leader of the House and the Chairman of the Procedure Committee

for all they have done in helping us to ensure that this has worked. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) made slightly the wrong point, because he said that we should be entirely virtual, and it became harder and harder to hear him as he said so. That is one of the reasons we need to come back, because the last bit of private wire may be the bit that cuts people off in their prime, and therefore being back would be advantageous.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) made some important points. I am always happy to speak to the Procedure Committee and have a discussion on how we look to do this. I will make one really important point, which is that there is a fundamental, absolute right of Members to attend this House. It dates back to 1340, and it is improper for anybody to molest any Member coming to this House. Regardless of any rules that there may be, the right to attend this House is a constitutional principle of which we should remind all Members. If we are back physically after the Whitsun recess, there should be no question of any Member being stopped from coming by any authority outside Parliament.

Our coming back will be based on advice from Public Health England and will maintain social distancing. Mr Speaker is working on how we will have Divisions under these circumstances, but I agree with those Members who have said that we have to lead by example. The rest of the country is being asked to go back to work where it cannot do so from home. That is clearly a position that we are in, and we must be alongside the whole of the rest of the country, as long as it is safe so to do.

**Mr Speaker:** I announced to the House earlier this afternoon my provisional determination that a remote Division would not take place on this motion. I am aware of some opposition to the motion, but I am not satisfied that the demand is sufficient to warrant a remote Division today. I say that bearing in mind that the House will return to this matter next week. My determination that the Question will be decided without a remote Division is final. I will collect voices in the usual way, but the voices will not and cannot trigger a remote Division. Reliance on the voices alone will not be considered with the principle of parity of participation. That is made clear in the new guidance issued to Members today, in which Members are asked to make submissions to my office in advance on whether it is necessary to hold a Division on the Question designated for remote Division.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Business without Debate

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS)

*Ordered,*

That—

(1) the Resolution of the House of 16 January 2020 (Business of the House (Private Members' Bills)), as amended by the Orders of the House of 25 March and 22 April 2020 (Business of the House (Private Members' Bills)), is further amended as follows:

- (a) leave out “15 May 2020,”; and
- (b) leave out “and 5 March 2021” and insert “, 5 March 2021 and 12 March 2021”.

(2) the Orders for Second Reading of Bills on each of the days listed under Day 1 in the table below are read and discharged;

(3) each such Bill is ordered to be read a second time on the corresponding day listed under Day 2 in the table; and

(4) those Bills are set down to be read a second time on the appropriate Day 2 in the order in which they were set down to be read a second time on the corresponding Day 1.

Day 1	Day 2
15 May 2020	12 June 2020
12 June 2020	26 June 2020
26 June 2020	10 July 2020
10 July 2020	11 September 2020
11 September 2020	16 October 2020
16 October 2020	30 October 2020
30 October 2020	27 November 2020
27 November 2020	15 January 2021
15 January 2021	29 January 2021
29 January 2021	5 February 2021
5 February 2021	5 March 2021
5 March 2021	12 March 2021

—(*Stuart Andrew.*)

### COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

*Ordered,*

That Kate Green be discharged from the Committee of Privileges and Chris Bryant be added.—(*Stuart Andrew.*)

### ADJOURNMENT (WHITSUN)

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),*

That this House, at its rising on Wednesday 20 May, do adjourn until Tuesday 2 June.—(*Stuart Andrew.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### ADJOURNMENT

6.38 pm

*House adjourned without Question put (Order A(5), 22 April).*

# Written Statements

Tuesday 12 May 2020

## TREASURY

### Covid-19: Job Retention Scheme

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak):** The Government's economic plan is one of the most comprehensive in the world.

We have provided:

- Billions of pounds of grants and loans for businesses
- Tens of billions of pounds of deferred taxes
- Income protection for millions of the self-employed
- And a strengthened safety net to protect millions of the most vulnerable people.

These schemes speak to my and this Conservative Government's values. We believe in the dignity of work. And we are doing everything we can to protect people currently unable to work.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out our plan for the next phase of the public health response. Today I can confirm the next stage of our jobs retention scheme.

The scheme has been a world-leading economic intervention, supporting livelihoods and protecting futures. Some 7.5 million jobs have been furloughed—jobs we could have lost if we had not acted. Nearly a million businesses who could have closed shop for good. And as we reopen the economy we will need to support people back to work. We will do so in a measured way.

I can announce the job retention scheme will be extended, for four months, until the end of October. By that point, we will have provided eight months of support to British people and businesses.

Until the end of July, there will be no changes whatsoever. From August to October the scheme will continue, for all sectors and regions of the UK, but with greater flexibility to support the transition back to work. Employers currently using the scheme will be able to bring furloughed employees back part time. And to change their incentives, we will ask employers to start sharing, with Government, the costs of paying people's salaries.

Full details will follow by the end of May, but I want to assure people today of one thing that will not change: workers will, through the combined efforts of Government and employers, continue to receive the same overall level of support as they do now, at 80% of their current salary, up to £2,500. I am extending this scheme because I will not give up on the people who rely on it.

[HCWS229]

### IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak):** The Government have today augmented the UK's 2010 agreement to lend to the International Monetary Fund's poverty reduction and growth trust by a total of 2 billion

special drawing rights (approximately £2.2 billion) to support economic recovery and response to covid-19 in the most vulnerable countries. This takes the total UK agreement to up to 4 billion special drawing rights (approximately £4.4 billion). A copy of the agreement will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses in due course.

[HCWS228]

## DEFENCE

### Service Complaints Ombudsman's Annual Report 2019

**The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer):** I am pleased to lay before Parliament today the service complaints ombudsman's annual report for 2019 on the fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of the service complaints system.

This report is published by Nicola Williams—her last as ombudsman—and covers the fourth year of operation of the reformed service complaints system and the work of her office in 2019.

The findings of the report and the new recommendations made will now be considered fully by the Ministry of Defence, and a formal response to the ombudsman will follow once that work is complete.

[HCWS230]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Donation to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab):** It is the normal practice when a Government Department proposes to make a gift of a value exceeding £300,000, for the Department concerned to present to the House of Commons a minute giving particulars of the gift and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from making the gift until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on 27 January 2020 made a formal joint announcement of a donation by the UK Government of £1 million to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. This donation reflects HMG's strong commitment to Holocaust remembrance in this the 75th anniversary year of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The donation will be funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government at a cost of £500,000 each. This is a gift donation with no preconditions attached. There is however a precedent for this donation. In 2011 the then Foreign Secretary and then Communities Secretary announced a £2.15 million donation to the foundation over three years. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was founded in 2009 and collects funding for the preservation and maintenance of the grounds and remnants of the former Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II Birkenau

concentration camps, which are supervised by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim, Poland. The proposed donation has a symbolic value; moreover, preserving Auschwitz-Birkenau contributes to the continuation of Holocaust education. Several thousand UK citizens visit Auschwitz-Birkenau each year and it provides a lasting memorial to the dangers of antisemitism, extremism and racism in general.

The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of 14 parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which this minute was laid before the House of Commons, a Member signifies an objection by giving notice of a parliamentary question or a motion relating to the minute, or by otherwise raising the matter in the House, final approval of the gift will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

[HCWS227]

## TRANSPORT

### A38 Derby Junctions Development Consent Order

#### **The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):**

This statement concerns the application for the A38 Derby Junctions Development Consent Order made by Highways England under the Planning Act 2008, which had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 23 April 2019.

Under section 98(1) of the Planning Act 2008 the Examining Authority appointed to examine the application must complete its examination within six months. Under section 98(4) the Examining Authority must submit its recommendation report to the Secretary of State within three months of its completion of the examination.

The examination began on 8 October 2019 and was due to close on 8 April 2020. The recommendation report would need to be sent to the Secretary of State on or before 8 July 2020.

Under section 107(1) of the Act, following receipt of the Examining Authority's recommendation report, the Secretary of State must decide whether to grant development consent. A decision in this case would therefore be made on or before 8 October 2020.

Sub-sections 98(4) and 107(3) of the Act give the relevant Secretary of State power to set new deadlines in respect of the above which are later than the statutory maxima. For this application, the relevant Secretary of State is the Secretary of State for Transport. In exercising this power, the Secretary of State for Transport must, among other things, make a statement to Parliament announcing the new deadlines.

The deadline for the completion of the examination is to be extended to 8 September 2020 (an extension of five months) to enable examination hearings postponed in the light of Government advice concerning coronavirus (COVID-19) to be rescheduled and held in a virtual forum. Consequently, the deadline for the Examining Authority to submit its recommendation report to the Secretary of State for Transport is amended to 8 December 2020 and the deadline for the Secretary of State for Transport to take his decision is amended to 8 March 2021.

The decision to extend an examination under the Planning Act 2008 regime is not taken lightly and reflects the exceptional public health circumstances the country finds itself in.

The decision to set a new deadline is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant development consent.

[HCWS226]



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