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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 25 June 2020

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 4 June).

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

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Dairy Industry: Covid-19

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the dairy industry during the covid-19 outbreak. [903794]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): The Government have had to take some unprecedented steps to control the coronavirus, and it is the case that parts of the dairy industry were affected by the closure of the hospitality sector earlier in March. We have introduced specific measures to support the industry, including a dairy response fund, which opened for applications on 18 June. Payments will begin from 6 July. We have also relaxed elements of competition law, and we are supporting an industry-led promotional campaign.

Simon Baynes: Would my right hon. Friend be able to work with the Welsh Government to secure greater milk processing capacity in order to add value back to Welsh dairy farmers, particularly in my constituency of Clwyd South, which has been hit hard by the demise of Tomlinson's Dairies and by bovine TB, so that all farmers can get a fair price for their world-beating Welsh milk?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Government do indeed work with the devolved Administrations to improve outcomes for our dairy farmers. Indeed, just yesterday, jointly with the devolved Administration, we launched a consultation seeking views from dairy farmers and processors on new regulations to secure transparency and fairness in dairy contracts. As he points out, there are also circumstances where grant funding can be made available to support investment in processing capacity, and that can help add value to the milk produced by our farmers.

Dual Tariff Proposals: British Food Standards

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): What steps he is taking to protect British food standards under dual tariff proposals. [903795]

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): What steps he is taking to protect British food standards under dual tariff proposals. [903807]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): Like all Conservative Members, I am proud to have stood on a manifesto commitment that, in all our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards. The Secretary of State for International Trade and I are working together to deliver that commitment.

Grahame Morris [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for that response, but will he restate that he is still willing to stand by his party's manifesto commitment to put that into law to prevent food from being imported into the United Kingdom that is produced in ways that would be illegal under current legislation? I am thinking particularly about chlorinated chicken.

George Eustice: Retained European law brings across a prohibition on treatments such as chlorine washes on chicken and, indeed, hormone treatments on beef. The Government have made it clear that those have been brought across and remain in place. We also stand by our manifesto commitment, which was to protect our food standards and animal welfare standards in trade agreements, but we did not ever say that we would legislate in the Agriculture Bill to do that.

Abena Oppong-Asare: Can the Secretary of State explain exactly how a dual tariff would prevent British consumers from having to accept imported food produced by causing animals unnecessary suffering, and how he will support British farmers striving to produce a high standard of food?

George Eustice: The hon. Lady makes reference to media speculation. I am sure hon. Members will understand that I cannot give a running commentary on our discussions on a future trade agreement or comment on such media speculation, but I will say that there are many ways, through a trade deal, that a country can agree with another country how to protect food standards—both food safety and animal welfare.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The public do not want our British farmers to be undercut by food produced to lower standards abroad. Research by Which? published today shows that eight out of 10 people are worried that trade deals will risk our high animal welfare standards. With the National Farmers Union petition now on 1 million names, it is clear that Ministers are on the wrong side of the argument here, so does the Environment Secretary need any more help convincing the International Trade Secretary to put the Conservative manifesto promise into law?

George Eustice: The International Trade Secretary and I are both absolutely committed to delivering our manifesto commitments, but we also have a manifesto commitment to expand the number of free trade agreements that we have, and it is also the case that the UK farming industry has offensive interests, particularly in dairy and in meat such as pork, lamb and beef, in other countries, particularly Asian markets. We want to expand

the number of free trade agreements that we have to create opportunities for our industry but also to protect our standards, and that is exactly what we will do.

Luke Pollard: I think we all know that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ministerial team are part of the eight out of 10 who are worried about animal welfare in trade agreements, but may I press the Secretary of State on a slightly different issue related to food standards—the outbreaks of covid-19 in food processing plants across the United Kingdom? This is serious. Any outbreak needs to be contained. Food standards matter, and standards for the people who work in those plants also matter. What assessment has the Environment Secretary made of whether meat processing plants and food factories are especially at risk, and what assessment has he made of the low level of statutory sick pay that forces many people to work in those plants instead of staying at home because they simply would not earn enough money to pay their bills if they did so?

George Eustice: I pay tribute to all those working in our food sector, including in manufacturing, who have worked very hard to keep food on our plates during these difficult times. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We have heard now of three outbreaks linked to meat plants. They have been picked up through the testing and tracing approach that has been adopted and we are reviewing the guidance. We suspect that these outbreaks might have been linked either to canteens or, potentially, to car-sharing arrangements in those plants. We will be revising guidance to ensure that businesses have the approach that they need to prevent further outbreaks in future.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The EU is clear that tariffs to counteract its green box subsidies will not be acceptable. Will the Secretary of State undertake to ensure that domestic food producers are not disadvantaged by matching those green box subsidies for farmers here?

George Eustice: As part of our agreement to leave the European Union, we have been working for a couple of years now jointly with the European Union on splitting the World Trade Organisation schedule, including what is called the aggregate market support boxes—the so-called green boxes and amber boxes—and the UK will have an appropriate share of that green box support in the WTO.

Zoos: Covid-19

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): What steps he is taking to support zoos during the covid-19 outbreak. [903796]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): The Government have introduced a £14 million zoos fund for licensed zoos in England. Outdoor areas of zoos and safari parks have already been allowed to reopen, subject to appropriate social distancing measures being in place. The indoor areas of zoos and aquariums will be permitted to open from 4 July. An announcement on further support for the zoos is expected imminently.

Lee Anderson: Unfortunately, the best chances of survival for some animals is in captivity. For centuries, we have taken away the natural home of animals and we should all accept responsibility for that. Keeping zoos and wildlife parks open is something that I wholeheartedly support, and I am grateful that financial support has been made available. We owe it to these animals to ensure that they survive and continue to be a part of this planet, so can my hon. Friend please assure me that Government will do all they can to ensure that not one animal in our zoos and parks is put to sleep due to financial constraints caused by this pandemic?

Rebecca Pow: We are a nation of animal lovers. I know that you, Mr Speaker, are a very big animal lover, as am I and as is my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson). The objective of the zoo support fund, which, by the way, is open until 19 July, is to address avoidable animal suffering in zoos, including, in the worst cases, preventing unplanned euthanasia. My Department continues to engage weekly with zoos to keep on top of what is happening.

Trade Negotiations: North of England Small-scale Farming

8. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What steps he is taking to protect small-scale farming in the north of England in trade negotiations. [903798]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): We are clear that any future trade agreements must work for both our farmers and consumers. This week, DEFRA and the Department for International Trade have jointly announced a package of measures to help food and drink businesses grow their trade overseas. The package is aimed in particular at small businesses, which make up 97% of the food and drink industry. This will benefit businesses across the UK, including those in the north of England. We will always stand up for British farming and we will use our negotiations to make new opportunities for our businesses large and small.

Chi Onwurah: As lockdown eases, many of my constituents are once again enjoying the glorious Northumbrian and County Durham landscapes. That depends on farmers small in scale but with really high production standards, whether for the cattle they graze on the town moor, or the sheep on the Cheviots, or the grain sold through local co-operatives such as Tynegrain. Why will the Minister not commit to writing into law that we do not import food with lower standards than those that our farmers already meet, so that they are not undercut by the American agro-industrial complex?

Victoria Prentis: The Secretary of State has already answered that in some detail. As my right hon. Friend set out, a range of measures are available to protect the hon. Lady's farmers, including existing regulations. We have great transparency in this House and with the general public in our trade negotiations. There is a great deal of scrutiny of exactly how those negotiations are taking place, and they will be put before the House again before they are signed. We also have a further range of measures—we will be consulting in detail on labelling before the end of the year—which are all designed to protect her farmers.

Animal Welfare Standards

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): What steps he is taking to promote high animal welfare standards. [903800]

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What steps he is taking to promote high animal welfare standards. [903804]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): This Government are committed to the highest standards of animal welfare. Our manifesto made it clear that we will bring in new laws on animal sentience, end excessively long journeys for farm animals and ban the keeping of primates as pets. We have introduced one of the world's toughest ivory bans and will be supporting the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill.

Felicity Buchan: I was disappointed that, because of coronavirus, the Second Reading of the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill was delayed. Will my hon. Friend assure me that it will be heard in the House at the earliest opportunity?

Victoria Prentis: We all shared my hon. Friend's disappointment, and I am pleased to be able to reassure her that the Bill is due to have its Second Reading on 23 October.

Stephen Metcalfe [V]: Our constituents expect us to uphold animal welfare and high food standards. Does my hon. Friend therefore agree that maintaining the UK's high food standards and excellent animal welfare record is, among other things, in the Government's interest, as that is what customers at home and abroad expect and demand from UK producers?

Victoria Prentis: I absolutely agree with hon. Friend on that. The Government are proud of the high animal health and welfare and environmental standards that underpin our high-quality produce. The UK's growing reputation for quality food and drink, with high standards of food safety, animal welfare and sustainability, serves as a great platform from which to expand our exports.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): The Minister has been hearing a strong message from the House this morning about animal cruelty, because, sadly, the lockdown has seen an increase in it, with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reporting 47,000 incidents—the *Daily Mail* calculates that that is one case every two minutes. As we have heard, the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill has been constantly delayed. The Bill has cross-party support. The Government are supposed to be supporting it and they are supposed to be running this place, so will the Minister guarantee that Finn's law will be on the statute book by the end of the year and available to the courts?

Victoria Prentis: As I said a moment ago, 23 October is the date available for Second Reading. I have supported the Bill from the beginning and I am pleased it will be moving forward just as quickly as we can do it.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Food insecurity is a great issue, especially with the covid virus. Evidence we are taking in the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs shows that a lot of people are in need of good food. I congratulate the Secretary of State on the system of getting food straight from the farms to those who most need it, but can he extend it even more? I ask because after the pandemic and before the economy recovers properly people are going to need more and more food.

George Eustice: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The Government have made available £16 million to partners such as FareShare to ensure that we can get food to thousands of food charities across the country to support those in need. In addition, we have been looking at other ways in which we can support those who are financially vulnerable at this difficult time.

Countryside Stewardship: Water Quality

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of increasing the number of areas that benefit from the countryside stewardship water quality priority areas scheme. [903802]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): Countryside stewardship is designed to maximise environmental improvements and value for money for the taxpayers. Water quality actions are focused on areas posing the highest risk of water pollution from agriculture, for example, in catchments draining into specifically protected sites of biodiversity. We will look to review these focus areas in the transition period and, importantly, how we reward farmers for delivering public goods, such as water quality, through our new environmental land management scheme.

Mr Holden: As we move from the single farm payment to support for farmers to protect the environment, these water quality protection areas are one of the schemes that my local farmers in the Wear valley are particularly interested in looking at. May I therefore urge the Minister to include us in any review that is taking place?

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I know that this is an area he is particularly interested in, as he has spoken to me about it before. Management practices that farmers introduce on their land can bring multiple benefits to the environment, including to water quality. I will pass on the invite to the Secretary of State, whom I believe he has asked to visit. He may have to make do with me or indeed with the farming Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis). We both have children at Durham University, so perhaps we could come together.

Mr Speaker: A trip, in your own bubble.

Waste: Reuse and Recycling

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce, reuse and recycle waste produced in the UK. [903803]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): Our resources and waste strategy, published in December 2018, sets out ambitious plans for how we will minimise waste, promote resource efficiency and move towards a more circular economy where we will reduce waste, reuse and recycle much more than we do now. It combines short and long-term actions and gives a clear long-term policy direction in line with our 25-year environment plan.

Elliot Colburn: As the Minister knows, the waste hierarchy calls for a reduction in the amount of waste we produce as the best way to tackle waste in this country, followed closely by reusing and recycling that waste. Can she update me on the measures that her Department is taking to reduce the amount of waste produced in this country as part of our green recovery from covid, and will she consider Carshalton and Wallington as a pilot area for any new schemes, such as a deposit return scheme?

Rebecca Pow: My hon. Friend is always representing his constituency and pushing for new things, and rightly so. The combined effect of the measures set out in the resources and waste strategy and the Environment Bill will be to minimise the amount of waste that reaches the lower levels of the waste hierarchy, including disposal to landfill. We remain committed to eliminating all avoidable plastic by the end of 2042. We have already committed in our manifesto to introducing a deposit return scheme. Unfortunately, we cannot consider the pilot in his area, but I thank him for his support. We look forward to it being introduced, and the second consultation will be under way next year.

British Food Producers

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): What steps he is taking to promote British food producers. [903805]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): We are promoting British food and drink producers at home and abroad. Just this week, we announced a package of trade and investment measures to help food and drink businesses grow their overseas trade, which includes reinforcing DEFRA's Food is GREAT campaign and promoting 50 food and drink export champions. We are also supporting domestic campaigns such as the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board and Dairy UK's £1 million promotional campaign for milk.

Andy Carter: As the Secretary of State will know, Cheshire is not just renowned for its crumbly cheese. Our new potatoes are on the menu at the world's finest restaurants, and our salt is being used by chefs all over the world to add flavour to fine food. We also have some of the finest farmers' markets selling food prepared locally to my constituents in Warrington. What plans does my right hon. Friend have to support farmers and food producers in my constituency to navigate the challenging set of market conditions created by covid-19?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes an important point. His part of Cheshire is famous for its food, particularly its cheese, but also salt and new potatoes.

Many parts of our country are renowned for their high-quality local produce, and we want to support farmers to promote that and add value.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: May I push the Secretary of State on this? Does he agree that the future of British agriculture and the British food industry has to be based on quality and shorter supply chains as we come out of this pandemic? Will he join me in calling for an investigation into what is happening in our meat processing plants? Some of them look rather strange. In the four that I have looked at, many of the workers are reluctant to take a test because they would lose money and be isolated. That is a real problem. Could he look into it?

George Eustice: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this country has built a proud record based on the quality of our food and food provenance in particular, and we will maintain that. On the specific point that he raises about outbreaks of coronavirus at three meat plants, we are looking at that and have been investigating the causes of it. We suspect, as I said earlier, that it is linked either to shared transport or canteen areas, and new guidance will be issued to those meat plants.

UK Farms: Productivity

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase the productivity of UK farms. [903806]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): The Agriculture Bill will allow us to introduce ambitious new schemes in England based on the principle of public money for public goods, so that we can reward farmers who protect our environment, improve animal welfare and produce high-quality food in a sustainable way. The Bill will also help farmers to stay competitive.

Jerome Mayhew: Despite spending £3.4 billion each year under the common agricultural policy and subsidies for our farmers, the productivity growth rate has not significantly increased since the 1990s. This is in stark contrast with unsupported sectors such as egg production, where in 2019 alone productivity increased by 3.8%. Does my hon. Friend agree that the removal of the damping blanket of the CAP, as well as increased competition, will drive productivity growth throughout farming, allowing Government support for farming to focus on public money for public goods?

Victoria Prentis: I absolutely agree that moving away from the CAP provides the opportunity for a more prosperous, competitive and self-reliant industry. We will support UK farms to focus on their business modelling and to improve efficiency, which may well, in turn, reduce their environmental footprint.

UK Fishing Industry: Covid-19

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the UK fishing industry during the covid-19 outbreak. [903808]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): We understand that this is a challenging time for the fishing industry and we have taken steps to support the sector. In April, we launched a £10 million financial assistance package for England's fishing and aquaculture businesses, which included a £1 million grant scheme to support the sale of fish locally. The sector is also able to benefit from the wider financial support measures available for businesses. In addition, the Sea For Yourself campaign has encouraged people to eat more fish.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. The process of determining which businesses received funding through the domestic seafood supply scheme has been criticised as being unfair. While one project in the Lowestoft area was successful, two good applications were not. What assistance will be available to these and other businesses to enable the East Anglian fishing industry to meet the infrastructure and other costs in preparation for the end of the transition period?

Victoria Prentis: I cannot discuss the individual cases, but I can say that applications were reviewed by a panel of experts, including several representatives from the catching and processing sectors. The judging panel awarded funding to projects that best met the criteria, especially those that could deliver benefits to a range of fishing businesses.

Plastic Waste Increase: Covid-19

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): What estimate his Department has made of the increase in plastic waste as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [903809]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): DEFRA continues to monitor the impact of covid-19 on material flows. We have made no specific estimate of the impact of the outbreak on levels of plastic waste. However, we remain committed to eliminating the scourge of avoidable plastic waste by 2042, as demonstrated by our plans to ban single-use plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds, which we discussed in this very Chamber just a week ago. We continue to monitor recycling rates for plastic packaging and we have committed to introduce a deposit return scheme for drinks containers to incentivise people to recycle more plastic.

John Spellar: May I suggest that the Department actually needs to get on and make some plans for this? We are talking about not avoidable but unavoidable plastic waste, because the covid-19 crisis has clearly necessitated the use and disposal of massive quantities of disposable personal protective equipment, much of it plastic, and new mitigation measures for the catering and hospitality industry will generate another wave. We all accept that this is necessary to protect health and get Britain back to work, but what is the Department going to do now to deal with this volume of waste, much of it plastic?

Rebecca Pow: I thank the right hon. Gentleman, who raises some good points. This Government are absolutely committed to getting rid of plastic waste, as our resources and waste strategy shows, and as measures in the Environment Bill will demonstrate by bringing forward the deposit return scheme and extended producer

responsibility. We need to get all businesses to think about what happens to the plastic products they make at the beginning and where they end up, with a view to greatly reduced quantities going to landfill. He raises a good point about PPE. Many companies are rethinking all this, and lots are now starting to have reusable face coverings and to make their own. There is a very useful guide to that on the Government website.

Vulnerable People: Food Supplies

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to maintain food supplies for vulnerable people during the covid-19 outbreak. [903811]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): We have mobilised an unprecedented package of support for our most vulnerable people, including over 3 million food boxes and priority supermarket delivery slots. An additional £63 million has been confirmed by the Government to be distributed to English local authorities to help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials. The Government are also providing £16 million to food support through charities, including FareShare and WRAP.

Richard Burgon [V]: The current pressure on food banks is absolutely immense, and we know that income is at the heart of food poverty, so will the Government take the urgent social security measures needed now to get people the financial support they need, so they can get food on their plates and on their children's plates, by ending the five-week wait for universal credit and abolishing that punitive two-child limit?

Victoria Prentis: The Government have introduced a package of support of over £6.5 billion to help families on benefits to cope with the financial impact of covid.

I would like to use this opportunity, if I may, to pay tribute to the taskforce, which I have led for the last few months, on feeding the vulnerable. We have worked very closely with colleagues across government—in the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Education and other Departments—as well as, of course, with an excellent team from the supermarkets and volunteers. I am pleased to say that, in so far as we have been able, we have ensured that everybody who needs it has access to food.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: We are now having to go to topicals—sorry about that.

Topical Questions

[903844] **Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): The coronavirus has created many challenges for our country, and the response of our key workers throughout the epidemic has been quite extraordinary. As we take the next steps closer to normality, I would like to take this opportunity to record our thanks to all those working in the food

supply chain for the phenomenal way they have responded. From farmers to food manufacturers, and from the delivery drivers to all those working in food retail, their response has been truly phenomenal.

Paul Bristow: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. The agricultural land around Peterborough is some of the best land in the country. With that in mind, could he let us know how he plans to increase UK food and drink exports to emerging markets such as the Gulf?

George Eustice: This week, we announced new measures on exports, with export champions to lead the way in opening new markets and to get more of our fantastic food and produce in those overseas markets. I have in recent years attended exhibitions such as Gulfood in the Gulf, where there are indeed many opportunities, particularly for our lamb sector.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): Last November, after the devastating floods, the Prime Minister committed to holding a summit to improve flood defences in the north of England. Can I ask the Secretary of State why, six months on, this summit has not taken place? Can he set a date, and can he confirm that the Prime Minister will honour his commitment and be in attendance?

George Eustice: The reason that we have not yet had that summit is quite simple: it is that the coronavirus outbreak has taken up quite a lot of our time and obviously made it very difficult to physically travel to areas. I think it would be better to have a summit such as that physically in the location, rather than it being yet another Zoom meeting. However, I can give the hon. Lady a guarantee that that summit will indeed take place. I gave that commitment and it will happen.

[903846] **Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con):** The green belt is rightly described as the green lungs around our towns and cities, and it is rightly cherished by residents across the country, including myself. Can my right hon. Friend advise what cross-government working has been taking place to promote our manifesto commitment to protect and enhance the green belt, including areas such as Elton reservoir and Simister in my constituency?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): I thank my hon. Friend for that. Of course, people have valued all these green spaces in this lockdown period; that has been more clear than ever. Our manifesto commitment says that, through the Environment Bill, we will set a new domestic framework for environmental governance, and this will enable us to work with developers, landowners and managers to create and restore wildlife-rich habitats, with wildlife thriving everywhere. We will have biodiversity net gain through that environment plan, and we will have local nature recovery strategies and a whole new area called nature recovery networks. All this will help to look after our precious green space.

[903845] **Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]:** Animal welfare charities are witnessing a sharp increase in need and this is expected to rise, while hundreds of charity staff in the sector are being made redundant. Some charities are struggling to cover their core costs, animal feed and vet bills. When will the

Secretary of State bring forward his strategy and the necessary funding to support these vital animal welfare charities?

George Eustice: We are aware that animal welfare charities have suffered from a fall in donations and have had to close during the coronavirus epidemic. There was an application that was considered as part of a charities fund, but we will continue to work with those groups to identify the support that they need.

[903847] **Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con):** Many people across Stockton South, including me, enjoy a cheeky Nando's or a finger-lickin' good KFC, but we are concerned about the prospect of chlorinated chicken. Can the Minister guarantee that chlorinated chicken will not be on the menu in our trade negotiations and that we will remain a world leader on food and animal welfare standards?

George Eustice: As I explained earlier, in any trade negotiation it will be for the UK to determine what goes into the so-called sanitary and phytosanitary chapter, which addresses these issues. As I also pointed out, there is currently a prohibition on the sale of any poultry treated with a chlorine wash.

[903848] **Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab):** Some 75,000 people work in meat processing in this country. Meat processing plants have been linked to the spread of the virus in many countries, and we have had convincing evidence from Professor Wood at Cambridge and Professor Semple at Liverpool on the risks at these plants. What measures specific to food processing plants has the Minister put in place?

George Eustice: Very early in this crisis, we worked with Public Health England on guidance for these plants. It included, in some cases, spacing out staff on the production line to maintain a distance of 2 metres, and, where that was not possible, ensuring that things were arranged so that staff were facing away from one another. It also involved increased hygiene, new measures on canteens and guidance on car-share arrangements. As I have said, as a result of the three outbreaks that have occurred, we are reviewing those matters.

[903849] **Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con):** I return to the topic covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers), although I am less of a finger-licker than he is. Many of my constituents in Warrington South have written to me on their concerns about maintaining high food standards in future trade arrangements, many of them driven by misinformation from the Opposition. Does my right hon. Friend agree that sticking with the UK's high food and animal welfare standards is, among other things, in this Government's interest, because that is what customers in this country expect and demand from UK food producers?

George Eustice: We in this country have built a very sophisticated and valuable market based on the safety of our food, the standards of our food and our high animal welfare standards. We have committed in our manifesto to maintaining those.

[903852] **Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Perhaps I could dwell on this finger-licking topic that has come up so frequently. Is not the simple truth that because so much of our food consumption goes through the food services sector—in the likes of prisons, hospitals, schools and the chains of restaurants on our high street—with a great proportion of it, the consumer will never know? That is the great fear. The US does not want labelling or descriptors, so those consumers will never know what they are consuming.

George Eustice: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Food labelling can improve transparency, particularly in the retail sector, but of course there are limitations in that around 50% of food goes into the food services sector. That is why we will be addressing these matters in our trade agreements.

[903857] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: Overuse of antibiotics in animal farming has been identified as contributing to bacterial resistance. With American cattle receiving 13 times the amount of antibiotics that UK herds receive, how does the Minister plan to guard against importing resistant bacteria in US beef?

George Eustice: There has been a global effort to tackle antimicrobial resistance and, in particular, to reduce the use of antibiotics in agriculture, especially the critically important antibiotics. The UK is a leader in that and has adopted farm husbandry that has made it possible to reduce the use of antibiotics. We have also worked with international partners, including the United States, to assist them to achieve the same.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Church Services: Covid-19

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): When the Church Commissioners plan to reopen churches for services as the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased. [903754]

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): When the Church Commissioners plan to reopen churches for services as the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased. [903761]

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What representations the Church Commissioners have made to the Government on enabling public worship to resume in churches. [903764]

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What the timeframe is for the resumption of church services as the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased. [903778]

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): When the Church Commissioners plan to reopen cathedrals and churches for worship; and if he will make a statement. [903779]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): The last three months have been the first time in more than 800 years that England has gone without public worship and the sacraments, so there is real joy that we can meet again, socially distanced, from 4 July. I can give an assurance that the personal safety of clergy who are shielding should be prioritised and they can continue to do their duties remotely.

Dame Cheryl Gillan [V]: The self-sacrifice of so many people during the extreme lockdown period will have saved many lives, but one of the great sacrifices for many people will have been the inability to attend church physically and to have had to cancel weddings, baptisms and other deeply significant ceremonies. I understand my hon. Friend had to cancel his own daughter's wedding last Saturday, and I wish her and her fiancé all the best. Will he now confirm that their wedding, as well as many others, can now go ahead in safety in church with 30 guests, and when does he expect the number of guests to be increased to reflect the capacity of the church being used and the new 1 metre-plus rule?

Andrew Selous: I thank my right hon. Friend for her kind good wishes, which are greatly appreciated. As she said, weddings can now take place from 4 July, but only with a maximum of 30 people. This is a huge relief to many couples throughout the country. For church services, there is no maximum number within a place of worship as long as the premises comply with covid-secure guidelines.

Felicity Buchan: Given the country's need for more housing, including more social housing, are the Church Commissioners able to take into account social and community outcomes in their land development decisions, and not just maximising financial profit?

Andrew Selous: I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and I can tell her that the Church of England pensions board already supports the social housing market through investments in social housing bonds. The commissioners also make provision for social and affordable housing on housing developments as per local planning requirements, while being required, like all charities, to obtain best value reasonably obtainable in the market when disposing of assets. But I am keen to explore whether the Church Commissioners are able to play any further role in solving the nation's housing crisis. The Archbishop of Canterbury's housing commission, which the Bishop of Kensington co-chairs, is looking separately at wider housing policy, and I am engaging closely with that work.

Sir Desmond Swayne: I used to enjoy a hymn sandwich before this interdict, but I have broken the habit. How is my hon. Friend going to lure us back if we are not allowed to sing? May I suggest, as a minimum, shorter services, even shorter sermons, some comfortable words from the Book of Common Prayer and an end to prating prelates?

Mr Speaker: Well, Andrew Selous, sing to that one.

Andrew Selous: That is a challenge indeed, Mr Speaker, but what I would say to my right hon. Friend is that I hope he has taken part in some of the uplifting online

worship and services that have been available to him during the lockdown, and I would add that the warmth of the welcome, the opportunity for fellowship and the chance to grow in faith through prayer, worship and the revelation of God's word will prove an irresistible temptation to my right hon. Friend to return.

John Lamont: I very much welcome that services can resume in places of worship in England and that private prayer is allowed in other nations of the United Kingdom, but what discussions have there been with Churches to ensure that people are encouraged to go back to church and are reassured that it is safe to do so?

Andrew Selous: The Church is delighted to be able to throw open its doors again, so that we can gather again for public worship and weddings in the way that we have not been able to do over the past three months. We will make sure that people are safe. I know that clergy and church wardens are taking their responsibilities very seriously to make sure that people are safe when they come, and we are really looking forward to seeing them back again in all our churches.

Mr Speaker: We are now heading to the shadows of the spires of Lichfield cathedral with one Michael Fabricant.

Michael Fabricant [V]: Thank you, Mr Speaker: from where I am sitting now Lichfield cathedral is just about 100 yards behind me.

Lichfield has a great choral tradition; we have a choral school and the services are very good. It is open for two hours a day at the moment for private prayer, but when does my hon. Friend anticipate that we will be able to go to evensong and enjoy the wonderful choir that sings there?

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Cathedrals such as Lichfield are at the centre of the amazing choral tradition that we have in this country. Sadly, I have to tell him that singing and chanting are not allowed even at a distance, due to the additional risk of infection, and woodwind and brass instruments should not be used, but that still leaves many other instruments. His constituents can return for public worship from 4 July and I know that Lichfield cathedral will be making them very welcome when they return.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

House of Commons Apprenticeship Programme

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) [V]: Given the Prime Minister's announcement that there will be an apprenticeship guarantee, and the significant decline in apprenticeships during the coronavirus crisis, building on the work that Mr Speaker is already doing in increasing the apprenticeship programme in the House of Commons, will the Commission double that programme, offer every new recruit to the House an apprenticeship and ensure that as many young people as possible can do apprenticeships in the House? [903756]

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his long-term interest in the issue of apprenticeships in the House of Commons. I reassure him we are doing absolutely everything to remain committed to providing an effective and inclusive scheme in the House. We are always looking for ways to increase and improve our scheme and we will do what the right hon. Gentleman suggests, in line with the apprenticeship guarantee, as announced by the Prime Minister. We are close to halfway through our current scheme, and in the past 12 months, seven apprentices have passed their endpoint assessment. We were set to meet our obligations of 2.3% of public sector employees for new apprenticeships, if it was not for the coronavirus pandemic. We will do everything possible to meet our obligations to young apprenticeships and we will do more than we need to do in this House.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners was asked—

Church Services: Live Streaming

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): What assessment the commissioners have made of the effect of live streaming church services on the number of people taking part in church services. [903759]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that more people have been taking part in church services during lockdown than ever before. The national weekly service of the Church has been viewed more than 5.2 million times, with 21.5 million related social media posts, and a third of the people watching Archbishop Justin Welby's Easter day service were under the age of 34.

Greg Smith: Parishes in the Winslow benefice in my constituency are seeing 400 to 500 people take part in virtual services each Sunday and about 100 each day in midday-ish prayer. Given the extraordinary number of people who have either connected with the Church for the first time or reconnected with it virtually, what plans do the Church Commissioners have to set aside funds to continue this excellent work?

Andrew Selous: I am delighted to learn about the increase in church attendance in my hon. Friend and neighbour's constituency. It is not unusual. The Church made a significant investment in a new digital communications team in 2016 and we will continue to make sure that we provide a good digital offering. The experience of my hon. Friend in Winslow has been widely shared by churches across the country. Some 1,600 people are currently attending an online alpha course at one of our churches, and 3.3 million people have now watched the UK blessing worship video on YouTube, put together by Gas Street Church in Birmingham.

Smaller and Rural Churches: Covid-19

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): What assessment the commissioners have made of the ability of (a) smaller and (b) rural churches to re-open safely as the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased. [903760]

Andrew Selous: Church House staff and the House of Bishops are doing everything they can to assist parish churches to open safely. The guidance published by the Church is applicable for small and rural churches as well as for larger and urban churches.

Rosie Duffield: It is obviously fantastic to see Canterbury cathedral open for private prayer, but rural and smaller village communities often use their churches as a lifeline, particularly those who have been shielding. I want to reassure them that it is going to be safe for them to return to church soon.

Andrew Selous: I can give the hon. Lady that reassurance. I know from my own village church how seriously the vicar and the church wardens are taking their responsibilities to make sure that the return will be safe, with hand sanitiser, removing the kneelers, keeping prayer books covered up and so on, as well as making sure that people sit at an appropriate distance. I am sure that the rural churches will be back in action shortly in the hon. Lady's constituency.

Support for Family Life: Covid-19

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): What steps the Church of England has taken to support family life during the covid-19 lockdown. [903763]

Andrew Selous: In the diocese of Oxford, which covers Beaconsfield, churches have opened food banks and community larders and supported vulnerable people who are socially isolating as well as asylum seekers and key workers. In addition, nationally, the new marriage and pre-marriage courses have been available online throughout lockdown so that any local church can forward them to couples wanting to invest in their relationship.

Joy Morrissey: What better way to celebrate couples than getting married, but, sadly, in beautiful Beaconsfield countless couples have had to cancel their church wedding. I welcome the news of 30 people being able to gather at a wedding, but what has the Church of England done to work with Government and to lobby them to increase the numbers for gatherings and weddings? Could we increase those numbers for this summer?

Andrew Selous: I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and she is right to say that a maximum of 30 people will be allowed at weddings from 4 July. That 30 includes the minister and the couple, and there should be social distancing of 1 metre-plus between individuals, households and support bubbles. The figure of 30 is what the Government have advised for now, and they obviously continue to listen to the science, but the couples I have spoken to are just so pleased to be able to get married. Perhaps a bigger party—perhaps a celebration of the renewal of vows—could take place next year.

Covid-19: Financial Effect on Churches

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What assessment the commissioners have made of the financial effect of the covid-19 outbreak on churches. [903766]

Andrew Selous: Lockdown has meant that income from hall lettings, events and parochial fees has stopped completely in many cases. Donations of gift aid have also been adversely affected, so the Church is hugely grateful to those who are able to support it through the planned giving scheme. That regular, committed giving has become more important than ever to the mission and ministry of the Church.

Mike Kane: The Catholic diocese of Shrewsbury, which covers my constituency, has told me that income is down by a third since lockdown—a loss heading towards £700,000. In the long term, this will have an impact on building maintenance. Have the Government considered an enhanced gift aid scheme to help our faith communities to mitigate the damage?

Andrew Selous: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and he is absolutely right to draw attention to this. I will certainly raise the issue with the Government on his behalf and that of the diocese that has brought it to his attention. I am grateful to him.

PARLIAMENTARY WORKS SPONSOR BODY

The right hon. Member for East Hampshire, representing the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body, was asked—

Restoration and Renewal: Decant of Parliament

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): When the Sponsor Body plans to commence the decant of Parliament in advance of the restoration and renewal programme. [903768]

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire): On current plans, decant would be in the mid-2020s and the proposed approach to the works and the schedule would be put to both Houses for agreement before that. While the restoration work continues to be vital, we are currently reviewing the approach, and we of course welcome the views of the hon. Gentleman and all colleagues.

Ian Paisley: Is it not the case that these plans have now effectively been mothballed and scrapped, and that Parliament is not going to proceed with the full refurbishment as originally planned? If that is the case, what measures will be put in place to maintain this wonderful historic building and keep it safe from fire and damage?

Damian Hinds: The hon. Gentleman is quite right about the risks from fire, flood and falling masonry. He was of course a distinguished member of the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, and those works remain vital. We all have in mind the need for the uninterrupted effectiveness of Parliament in scrutinising the Government and in working on behalf of our constituents, but we also know that we must do that while providing the good value for money that is rightly demanded by our constituents, and that is what is at the heart of the current review.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners was asked—

Transition Pathway Initiative

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the effectiveness of the transition pathway initiative managed by the Church of England pension fund trustees. [903771]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): The Church is proud of its role in developing the transition pathway initiative, which enables asset owners to identify which companies are implementing strategies in line with the Paris climate agreement. It is supported by investors, with over \$20 trillion of assets under management, so it is now possible to distinguish between the high-carbon companies that are transitioning and those that are not.

Barry Gardiner: I am very grateful for that answer, and congratulate the Church's pension trustees on their innovation and vision. The TPI has worked with major

global companies to reduce their emissions and has established a framework for pension funds to move towards net zero emissions. Can the hon. Gentleman tell me whether our own parliamentary pension fund is able to sign up to the initiative, and what more the Church could do to encourage other pension funds to join that \$20 trillion of assets?

Andrew Selous: Each set of pension trustees has its own responsibilities, but I note that the Pensions Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), has said it is important that all pension fund trustees understand the risks and opportunities posed to their investments by climate change. I am always delighted when others follow where the Church leads.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I will briefly suspend the House.

10.25 am

Sitting suspended.

Universal Credit: Court of Appeal Judgment

10.31 am

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if she will make a statement on her Department's response to the decision of the Court of Appeal of 22 June 2020 in the case *Johnson, Woods, Barrett and Stewart v. the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions*.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): I can today confirm my Department's intention not to appeal against the judgment of the Court of Appeal of 22 June 2020 in the case of *Johnson, Woods, Barrett and Stewart v. the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions*. The judgment relates to an appeal made in January 2019 by the Department against the High Court decision.

As we told the court, identifying claimants is hard; it is a difficult issue. To date, we are aware of around 1,000 claimants who have disputed their earnings and fall within the relevant cohort. We are looking at how we can further identify people in this group. I stress that many people affected by two salary payments will not suffer a financial loss, as their universal credit award will increase in the following month to balance the reduction. However, we do recognise the budgeting issues that may have been caused, and we are now assessing the remedial options. That is not straightforward—it is not the simple click of a switch—particularly at a time when the Department is focused on meeting the challenges of unprecedented demand for its services.

I hope Members will appreciate that as the judgment was passed down on Monday, it would be remiss not to afford more consideration before we press on, particularly when the Court has not called for immediate action. We will now begin the process of carefully considering possible solutions, and we will keep the House updated as progress is made. There are, however, immediate actions that can be taken. We are already working closely with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to work with employers on how to report their employees' earnings correctly. HMRC has issued updated guidance for employers which, if followed correctly, will further reduce the small numbers affected.

Stephen Timms: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question.

If a universal credit claimant is in work and is paid monthly, but those monthly payments do not align precisely with universal credit months—for example, if the claimant works for the NHS and gets paid on the last day of every month—that claimant will, from time to time, be paid twice in a single universal credit month. The universal credit computer system treats that claimant as if they had had a 100% pay rise; their benefit is cut, quite likely to zero; they have to reapply for the benefit; and their income is severely disrupted.

One of those involved in this case says that she was more financially stable out of work than in work. Another turned down an NHS job for which she was expertly qualified because she knew that universal credit would wreck her finances. Surely, nobody will dispute the view of the Appeal Court that the policy is “irrational”.

I am grateful that the Minister has accepted the inevitable and is not going to be paying out for even more expensive lawyers to appeal the case. Surely the Department should have given up the fight last year, not waited until the Appeal Court reached this conclusion.

May I ask the Minister to tell us more about how many people are affected? I think the Court heard figures of around 80,000. It is a very significant problem for a lot of claimants. In his keeping the House updated—I am grateful to him for his assurance on that—will he tell us much more about the numbers who are affected, and will he fix the universal credit computer system as soon as possible?

Will Quince: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question and the constructive way in which he has put it. I will, of course, keep him updated as the Chairman of the Work and Pensions Committee as our work in this area progresses.

The case was before my time as a Minister, but several legal points were considered, and it was on only one of those points that the Department lost. We face and recognise the decision of the Court, and we recognise that some people may face budgeting difficulties. That is why we are working as quickly as we possibly can to identify the solutions and to address the matter in line with the court order.

The scope of this case is limited and we believe the cohort, as I briefly mentioned, to be in the region of 1,500, but I am looking to identify that claimant cohort very carefully. I understand that fewer than 1,000 UC claimants have notified us over the past 18 months that they may be affected by this, and it is important to keep that in the context of the 5.2 million claimants to universal credit.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I welcome the Government's decision to deal with this issue and not pursue a further appeal, but, having been in his position as the Commons Minister responsible for universal credit in the past, I do not underestimate how complicated it is to put in place a fix. As the Minister does so, he should reflect that we should remain clear about the central purpose of universal credit, which is ensuring that everyone is better off in work, and on the fact that it has very flexibly dealt with the huge increase of claimants as a result of covid-19 and will no doubt face challenges later this year.

My specific question is this: we only have a few weeks now until the House rises for the summer, and the Minister may not be able to solve the problem before then, but will he at least update the House before we rise, to set out what further steps he is going to take?

Will Quince: I thank my right hon. Friend for that question. We received the judgment only on Monday, and it is a complex issue, as he rightly recognised and as I believe was recognised by the Court. The fix will not be a simple one, and we are facing unprecedented pressures on the Department at the moment. I will of course continue to keep the House and the Chair of the Select Committee updated as that work progresses.

My right hon. Friend is right absolutely about the universal credit system; it has not been easy over the course of the past six or so weeks. I must say that our people across the DWP have worked incredibly hard,

[*Will Quince*]

but the system has also worked exactly as it should have done, with around 90% of claimants consistently paid in full and on time—more than 3.2 million people since 16 March.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I add my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) for securing this important question.

This Government are “irrational” and they are “unlawful”. Those are not my words, but those of Lady Justice Rose, who delivered the verdict in this week’s Court of Appeal decision against the Department of Work and Pensions. Reading that decision, there is really only one question to ask: what on earth were Ministers doing fighting this case for so many years, only to be told by the Court of Appeal something that seems to most people a matter of basic common sense?

If universal credit cannot cope with the date when people are paid and the impact of bank holidays and weekends on that payment date, the solution should always have been to change how the system works, not to persist with something that leaves thousands of people with wildly fluctuating payments from month to month. I have a constituent affected, and the first time I saw the problem in my constituency surgery in Stalybridge, I could not believe that the regulations would work the way they do.

This issue goes to the heart of the problems with universal credit. Time and again, we are told by Ministers that universal credit is more flexible, that it is more agile and that it can be adapted to meet new requirements and respond to problems that are identified. Yet when it comes to making seemingly simple changes such as these, claimants are faced with a rigid, unbending, uncaring response.

The Government always seem unwilling to listen to the experiences of the people who actually use the system. I ask the Minister, first, how much public money has the Department has wasted fighting the case? Secondly, I welcome the Minister’s statement that the Government now accept this decision, so how, and how quickly, will the universal credit regulations be changed to accommodate the ruling? Thirdly, do the Government accept that four single mums should not have to go to the Court of Appeal to be listened to by their own Government? Will the Department acknowledge that there is an overwhelming need to recognise the lived experiences of people who are actually in receipt of universal credit and review a whole range of policies, including the five-week wait, the frequency of payments and how the initial assessment period works, so that we can then get a social security system that is fair and effective and works the way that it should?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. Each and every judicial review has its own grounds for being brought and is looked at on a case-by-case basis, and with each JR, the Secretary of State, Ministers and officials look closely at the grounds and respond accordingly. I gently point out to him that the Court of Appeal accepted our interpretation of the UC regulations. However, the point that some people may face budgeting issues is why we are acting.

I am disappointed, if not surprised, that the hon. Gentleman has taken the opportunity to launch yet another attack—a baseless, unwarranted and unfounded attack—on universal credit. We all know, and he knows, the truth: the system has worked incredibly well and Labour’s broken legacy benefits system simply would not have coped with the unprecedented demand that we have seen during covid-19. Universal credit has passed that test with flying colours. There have been over 3 million claims, and I am so proud of our DWP employees and the universal credit system. It is time that Labour got behind this Government and universal credit and worked with us to make the system even better.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): I echo the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) and welcome the decision by the Government not to appeal this judgment, because this has also affected constituents in North West Durham. I also welcome the fact that the Government have invested an extra £7 billion into the welfare system to support people during the coronavirus pandemic, which has clearly strengthened the safety net for a large number of my constituents. Will the Minister confirm how many families across the country have benefited from this extra support through the universal credit system at this difficult time?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend, who is a firm champion of his constituents in this place. He is absolutely right that we have introduced a series of changes during the covid-19 pandemic, targeted at those facing the most financial disruption, that could be operationalised as quickly as possible, ensuring that people get the support that they need. He is right that that is close to £7 billion in the welfare system alone and it will benefit approximately 10 million families.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) [V]: I pay tribute to the four women who brought this case and all those who supported them, including the Child Poverty Action Group, and I thank the Work and Pensions Committee Chair, the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), for securing this question. This really is damning for the Government and successive Secretaries of State, who have belligerently fought this in the courts. Why should women and disabled people have to go to court to get basic fairness? I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not here to respond.

The issue of people getting paid salaries on irregular but predictable days of the month is something that the Scottish National party has been raising as an issue with UC for years, and the Court of Appeal has ruled that it was irrational for the Work and Pensions Secretary not to act to resolve the problem. Why should claimants lose UC support simply because of the day of the month that they are paid? That question has not been answered. As part of the process of accepting this ruling, will the Minister at the very least ensure that the predicted 85,000 people thought to be directly impacted have their situations resolved? Will the Minister work with the Chancellor to finally add flexibility to the monthly assessment period to resolve this issue and the five-week wait, which is also impoverishing people?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I stress that we received the judgment only on Monday and it is a hugely complex issue. That is

recognised by the court—it is not a simple fix, as the hon. Gentleman points out. He knows that we are facing unprecedented demand, because he has raised this question with me before. I said that I will keep the House and the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, updated as we progress.

On the hon. Gentleman's points relating to assessment periods, there are some aspects of the universal credit system that are fundamental to its design and are deliberately designed to achieve its original objectives—to mirror the world of work. This includes the mechanism of a monthly assessment period and, of course, the initial assessment period at the beginning of a claim. It is important to stress that over 75% of people in this country are paid monthly and the majority of countries in the European Union also have systems that operate on a monthly basis.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): In March alone, about 1.24 million new applicants relied on the universal credit system to be able to process their claims and pay them within days vitally important sums of money to help them live. While the case has properly highlighted about 1,500 outlier cases, does my hon. Friend agree that it was the Government's decision to invest in an automated digital system that does not require manual intervention by DWP officers to carry out individual calculations of the amount of an award that has allowed this to happen?

Will Quince: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It was this Conservative Government who introduced our modern, dynamic, agile new benefits system, tailored for the claimant's personal circumstances. The fact it is online means we have been able to process the claims of more than 3 million people, getting them the support they desperately need as quickly as possible. Just imagine for a moment, Mr Speaker, the chaos that would have ensued had we been relying on Labour's broken legacy benefits system alone. Thank heavens for universal credit.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I have had many similar cases over the years, so I am really pleased first to see the court decision, but secondly to see the Government and the Minister in particular responding in a very positive fashion. The judge referred to common sense; it is about not just common sense, but the practical effects on families at a time of financial stringency over Christmas and the new year. Can the Minister confirm whether he will retrospectively correct the mistake, which quite simply boggles the mind and common sense? He referred to solutions, and I can give him one very quickly. Will those who have had to take out loans to cover the month where they lost full payment receive help to pay the interest on those loans? Some took out loans with tremendously large interest rates. It is important that people have help right now.

Will Quince: I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss those cases in more detail. As I said, I am absolutely committed to finding a fix. The court has not mandated any specific fix or action, but I am committing us to finding a solution, and I will do all I can to do so. The court dismissed the appeal on the grounds of discrimination. He mentioned families. The Department is absolutely clear in its firm support for all claimants. We continue to support families with things such as

childcare costs, and I stress that childcare support under universal credit is far more generous than the old legacy benefits system, with the ability to claim back 85%, as compared with 70%. I would be very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss those concerns in further detail.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): Many of my constituents in Bracknell work in the creative arts sector. We heard earlier about the millions of families who benefited from universal credit during the pandemic, but will the Minister please assure me that the minimum income floor will be maintained for this important area of the economy for the foreseeable future?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and he is right to raise the issue, because I know that those who work in the creative arts are particularly exercised and concerned by it. The issue is covered by the Minister for Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies). The minimum income floor rules are suspended at the moment. I will put the Minister for Employment in touch with my hon. Friend and ensure that his concerns are raised, but he has rightly put them on record.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): The universal credit system has come under unprecedented pressures for obvious reasons during the past few weeks. Having interrogated my office systems, I have encountered only 10 inquiries relating to universal credit, which were largely inquiries wanting more information. That is out of thousands of other cases that my office has received. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is in fact indicative of a system that is both resilient and working very well?

Will Quince: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: universal credit is standing up to the challenge during this unprecedented time. The digital approach of universal credit, as he rightly points out, has allowed us to get support to more than 3 million people over the past three months, which simply would not have happened under Labour's legacy benefits system.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I thank the Minister for his answers today. It is important to reflect on the fact that the computer system has been able to deal with an unprecedented crisis in terms of people claiming UC, which the legacy benefits system just would not have been able to cope with, but with automation comes inflexibility. Could he say whether this is a case of "computer says no" or "computer says not yet"?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful question. My universal credit programme colleagues may well have their heads in their hands as we speak, depending on what I now commit them to, but I am absolutely determined to find a fix to this issue.

Yes, a number of items are in the pipeline, ready to be changed on universal credit. Despite criticism from Opposition Members, we have made significant changes to universal credit, and much more is to come, such as the roll-on of legacy benefits next month, which will benefit people to the tune of £200. Those are all in the pipeline to be done, and this will be added to that. I will try to expedite it as much as I possibly can.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab) [V]: Many people on low incomes have suffered real hardship as a result of the Government's failure to address this fundamental flaw in universal credit. I pay tribute to the women who took the Government to court to seek justice on this matter, but they should not have had to do so. A number of my constituents have been affected. One is a single working mother who has fallen into arrears with her rent, has seen an increase in her anxiety and depression, and has had to turn to food banks and local welfare assistance as a result. I wrote to the Secretary of State and Ministers several times about this last year, so will the Government now look at the cases of my constituents and all those affected as a matter of urgency, and pay them the money that they should have received?

Will Quince: I am certainly happy to look at the cases raised by the hon. Lady. I have said clearly that I am determined to find a fix. That will involve looking at numerous solutions, identifying the cohort of people and the fix and putting it into action. That may take a little time, but as I say, I am determined to find that solution. I am happy to meet her when we are able to do so to look at those individual cases she raises in more detail.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): Three million people have claimed universal credit since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, which is a huge success. I thank the Department for Work and Pensions team who enabled that. Indeed, the robustness of the computer system behind universal credit has facilitated rapid and easy access to welfare support for so many additional claimants. However, does the Minister agree that, on occasion, human intervention when the computer does indeed say no might help prevent cases like those falling through the cracks?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for her helpful question. The system is largely automated, and that brings huge benefits—that is why we have been able to deal with those claims—but, inevitably, that also means that issues come up that we need to address. This is one of those issues and, yes, in some cases, they require a manual intervention. My first instinct is to look at whether we can find an automated fix, but we will of course look at manual fixes, if that is necessary. I know that my hon. Friend is on the Select Committee, and if she has any particular ideas in that regard, I am happy to meet her to discuss them.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab) [V]: The Court of Appeal ruling rightly draws attention to one of the problems with the universal credit system, but will the Minister also address why under-25-year-old single parents receive less on universal credit than they would have done under legacy benefits? I have lobbied Ministers with the Newport GoGirls group on that—it is unfair and it needs to change.

Will Quince: I did not entirely catch the question, but I think the hon. Lady is referring to the disparity between universal credit and legacy benefits. I would say that this Department acted at incredible pace to operationalise and bring in measures as quickly as possible to help those who have been most financially disadvantaged as a result of covid-19. That is why we

did it through the vehicle of universal credit. Legacy benefits will be reviewed and uprated ahead of April 2021 as per usual.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con) [V]: Is there any merit in having another look at the timing of assessment periods, such as having them generally fixed to the end of the month to remove some of the issues that seem to keep arising?

Will Quince: It is something I am exploring as I look at our different options. My hon. Friend is an experienced member of the Select Committee, and I am happy to work with him and to hear his ideas. It is important to stress that for the majority of the circa 5 million claimants, the date of their assessment period works well. Changing assessment periods to align with pay dates is problematic. Nevertheless, everything is on the table, and I am looking at all options. The court judgment was very recent—only on Monday—so I hope that the House will give me the time and space to look at this in the granularity of detail that it requires.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP) [V]: This is, in truth, just the latest failing in a pernicious and punitive welfare system. When Beveridge wrote his famous report in 1943, he said:

“A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching.”

As we attempt to enter a post covid-19 world, will the UK Government give their support to the Scottish Government and ensure collaboration from HMRC and DWP as we seek to run basic income pilots in Scotland?

Will Quince: At the heart of this problem is an interaction between employers and HMRC. If more employers followed the very clear and beefed-up guidance from HMRC, there would be far fewer people affected. That is why we are beefing up our work with HMRC colleagues and counterparts, to ensure that the guidance is absolutely clear. If employers follow it and report the correct dates, this issue simply will not occur.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): One key test of a benefits system must be the dignity that it confers on the recipient. Does the Minister agree that there is great dignity in an automated solution that is modern, simple and straightforward and that there is potentially a role for employers to align their dates with a system that is in the best interests of their employees?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He is right. The universal credit system and tens of thousands of dedicated DWP staff have processed an unprecedented 3 million claims since mid-March. As I have said before and will keep repeating, Labour's legacy benefit system, based on paper forms and a lot of face-to-face interaction and meetings, simply would not have coped with the pressures of covid-19. It has not been easy, and our people have had to work incredibly hard, but the important thing is that the system has held up, and people have been able to make their claims online, in their own time and in their homes. We have not seen the queues outside jobcentres that there have been in other countries, because we have universal credit, and this Government invested in it.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): I would like to congratulate these four women on their victory for social justice. It is shameful that the Government have pursued this case to the Court of Appeal. These were working women who were paid a regular monthly salary. Welfare rights experts described them as perfect candidates for universal credit. Does the Minister agree that a system that does not work for people like them does not work at all?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, but I do not recognise the picture she paints. As I said earlier, judicial reviews are brought for all sorts of reason. Like her, I pay tribute to the ladies involved in bringing this case, but I point out gently to her that the Court of Appeal accepted our interpretation of the UC regulations. Nevertheless, we accept and note that some people may face budgeting difficulties. That is why I have committed to take this action.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) [V]: Will my hon. Friend congratulate and thank the staff at Harlow jobcentre on all the work they have been doing on jobs and universal credit at this difficult time? I have had communication with a single parent in my constituency who says that if she puts her child into childcare, she may end up earning more, but then universal credit will cut £400, so it is better to be with her child. In essence, she is saying that she is worse off if she goes to work under universal credit. Will my hon. Friend look again at helping single parents, to ensure that it is better for them financially to work than stay at home?

Will Quince: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. He is a firm champion of universal credit and the benefits of it, and I certainly join him in paying tribute to all the staff at Harlow jobcentre who have done incredible work during this most difficult and unprecedented time. He raises an important point about childcare. One of the fundamental principles of universal credit is that work should always pay. That is why, under universal credit, childcare is at a higher rate of 85% as opposed to 70%. I will look at the case that he raises in detail and meet him at our earliest possible convenience.

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP) [V]: While I welcome the Government's decision not to draw this matter out further, it seems that it is always someone else's fault. This week in the Court of Appeal, the Department could not offer a single reason for its flawed and, in the words of Lady Justice Rose, "irrational" approach to universal credit's monthly assessment period. This is not the first time that this Government have been found wanting, only to be dragged through the courts to do the right thing. If they will not tell the courts, the Minister must advise the House: what exactly was their alleged defence this time?

Will Quince: I gently suggest—[*Interruption.*]—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) says from a sedentary position, that the hon. Gentleman reads the judgment, because the Court of Appeal accepted our interpretation of the universal credit regulations. Nevertheless, we accept that there may be people who face budgeting pressures, and that is why we are committing to take this action.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) [V]: Women and disabled people have had to resort to law to get the Government to listen to the unfairness and the hardship that universal credit creates. Danielle, a dinner lady, was losing about £500 a year as a result of being paid on the last day of the month. She has ended up in debt and behind with her rent, and she does not know how she will recover. If the computer system is as agile as it is meant to be, why has this, and so many other issues, occurred? Why is there a difference in the 1,000 people that the Government say have been affected, as opposed to the 85,000 people whom the court has identified?

Will Quince: I will certainly look at the individual case that the hon. Lady raises, but I would gently say that it is such a shame that the Labour party—and she is no exception to this—is constantly so negative about universal credit. It is a modern, flexible, personalised benefit, which reflects the rapidly changing world of work. Let us remind ourselves of Labour's position, which is to scrap universal credit with no plan whatever with which to replace it. That seems pretty foolish to me, but do not take my word for it; the Institute for Fiscal Studies has slammed Labour's pledge as uncoded and "unwise...expensive, disruptive and unnecessary." I could not have put that better myself.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): More than 1 million people have claimed universal credit since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic and have been able to access an advance first payment, giving them access to support in just a few days. Does my hon. Friend agree that this has been vital for dealing with hardship during this difficult period in my constituency of Rother Valley and across the whole of Yorkshire?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He is right. We have had more than 3 million claims to universal credit since the middle of March and more than 1 million applications for advances, getting support to people who need it quickly, often within just a couple of days. That support is important, but I would stress that, for the cohort coming on to universal credit at the moment, the take-up of advances is lower, which often reflects personal circumstances. Therefore, taking an advance is not for everybody. It is interest-free and repayable over 12 months—as of next year, that goes up to 24 months. We are making the changes, but I agree with him that we are supporting people who need it the most in a timely manner.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Understandably, the Minister wants to talk a lot about the people who have had to claim universal credit in recent months. I, too, pay tribute to the staff at Hackney jobcentre, who have worked very hard to make sure that people in need get it, but there is nothing wrong with being critical of this big failure by the Department. He said that 1,000 people have complained about mistreatment, but the court identifies 85,000 people who could be affected. Can he assure us that work is going on to identify them—perhaps through an algorithm with a human element added if something unusual is thrown up—so that people are treated fairly and do not have to complain, and the Department acknowledges its mistake and seeks them out?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Lady for her question and join her in paying tribute to the staff at Hackney jobcentre who have done an incredible job under the most difficult of circumstances. We will, of course, be doing a deep-dive exercise into the cohort that is affected. I do not recognise the 85,000 figure. If I am honest, I think that that may be a figure that came from the Opposition, but I will look at that in detail. I gently point out to her that we now spend more than £100 billion a year on benefits for working-age people—that is more than £100,000 million pounds. We will continue to reform our welfare system to ensure that work always pays, and universal credit is at the heart of that.

Mr Speaker: Ground control to first officer Bob Blackman.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: If you knew the broadband experience in north London, Mr Speaker, you would know why I need to wear this headset.

One advantage of the universal credit system is that it takes input from claimants that would otherwise have to be re-input several times, resulting in the correct level of benefit, but one problem is that it does not deal with the exceptions. Will my hon. Friend consider a system whereby, when people suddenly see huge increases in their pay and therefore a reduction in benefits, an alert is triggered to allow someone to look at what is going on and correct the position?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend. That is a helpful suggestion and certainly one that I will be exploring. He is right to extol the virtues of real-time earnings information. Among many other reasons, it is what makes universal credit much superior to the legacy benefits system, because we are able to ensure that as people's income fluctuates their support can fluctuate, too. His suggestion is a good one, and it is one that I will be looking at along with a suite of numerous other measures no doubt. I would be very happy to meet him to discuss it in further detail.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) [V]: I am glad of the Court's sensible judgment and the Minister's response, but this case highlights the flaws in UC, the need to adapt it to particular circumstances and the difficulties in doing so. With one third of Welsh households to receive UC by 2023, will he take this opportunity to respond to the Senedd's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's recommendations and look to devolve aspects of social security administration to Wales?

Will Quince: That is probably a letter that has gone to the Secretary of State, as opposed to me, and is well above my pay grade. I gently suggest to the hon. Gentleman that UC is good news for the whole UK, including, of course, Wales. I remind him that, once fully rolled out, it will be £2 billion more generous a year than the legacy benefits system it replaces. About 1 million disabled households will be £100 per calendar month better off, and claimants will have access to about £2.4 billion in benefits that previously went unclaimed under the confusing and clunky Labour legacy benefits system.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Minister is right to say that this judgment did not rely on an interpretation of regulation 54, as did the earlier

one, but will his solution necessitate an interpretation based on the real income that people earn, as opposed to the false one that the Department has been assuming because of the technical judgment it has made about the assessment period and earned income?

Will Quince: The assessment period is fundamental to the design. [Interruption.] It is not fundamentally flawed. A small number of people do have fluctuations, which is why we are looking to take action in this area. We recognise that there is an issue, but it is important that it is kept in the context of 5.2 million UC claimants. I would hazard a guess, because this is certainly the case for my inbox, that despite there being more than 3.2 million new UC claimants, Members' postbags are not full of complaints about UC. That is because the system is working very well.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP) [V]: The Department's assessment period has resulted in one of my constituents earning £846 a month with a double calculation. As a consequence, they have now received a council bill that has increased from £36 a month to more than £200 a month. Will the Minister also have discussions with local government to ensure that claimants do not have bills that they simply cannot afford due to the Department's errors?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question and I am happy to look at that case in detail. He is right to raise the point about passported benefits, and I would be happy to meet him to discuss it in further detail.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Newcastle was a pathfinder for UC, but the Minister seems to have learnt nothing from the experiences of my constituents. Having dealt with their experiences over years on these issues, I know not only the financial impact, which is devastating enough, but the impact on claimants' trust in government, in our welfare system and in technology itself. I find his lack of contrition astounding. Will he not apologise and learn the lessons of this mistake?

Will Quince: UC is working and it is working well. The point I make to the hon. Lady is that we constantly and consistently listen to Members from across the House, stakeholders and members of the public who raise issues associated with UC. It is a new system and we have made significant changes. We have pumped additional billions of pounds into this system to improve it. Instead of scaremongering on UC, which the Opposition continue to do and which is the biggest thing that damages public trust in our system, I suggest they work with this Government to improve a system that is already working well, in order to make it even better.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am suspending the House for three minutes.

11.10 am

Sitting suspended.

Business of the House

11.13 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): The business for the week commencing 29 June will include:

MONDAY 29 JUNE—Consideration of a procedural motion followed by all stages of the Business and Planning Bill.

TUESDAY 30 JUNE—Remaining stages of the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal Bill).

WEDNESDAY 1 JULY—Motion relating to the appointment of the chairman of the National Audit Office, followed by a motion to approve a Ways and Means resolution relating to the Finance Bill, followed by remaining stages of the Finance Bill (Day 1).

THURSDAY 2 JULY—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Finance Bill (Day 2).

FRIDAY 3 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for the business for next week.

I start by sending our condolences to the families and friends of James Furlong, David Wails and Joe Ritchie-Bennett, described as three of the loveliest people. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda) has worked tirelessly to support his constituents. It is a terrible shock to the whole community.

It is unlike the Leader of the House not to answer some of my questions, but answers were wholly absent last week, so let me ask again. The Opposition names are in for the Intelligence and Security Committee, but it seems that the Government names were in and then they were out. It is quite careless to lose two experienced members of the Committee—the right hon. Members for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) and for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers). The delay seems to be on the Government side, so could the Leader of the House update the House? Will the Committee members all have a letter of comfort from the Prime Minister that they will not be sacked if they vote against the Government? When will the Committee be set up? The list of ministerial responsibilities that I have is dated October 2019. Could the Leader of the House ensure that there is an updated document?

The Leader of the House is usually very courteous, but there was no mention in the House of the merger of the Select Committee on International Development into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Committee, other than the Prime Minister coming to the House. It was extremely chaotic, as the Chair of the International Development Committee was only told an hour before the announcement. It is not very female friendly, is it—losing a female Cabinet Minister, and then losing a female Chair of a Select Committee? And it is one of our Select Committees, too. When will the Leader of the House come here with an appropriate mechanism whereby that Committee can hold the Government to account over their work and in relation to money?

It is the Secretary of State for Education's birthday today; we wish him a very happy birthday. The Government have allocated £1 billion for pupils to catch up, including £650 million for primary and secondary schools—but that is for the academic year 2020-21—and £350 million for primary tutors with the national tutoring programme. That seems incredibly bureaucratic. Why can the money not go straight to the heads, given that they know exactly what is needed for their schools? Worse still, 16 to 19-year-olds and pre-schoolers have been excluded. Will the Leader of the House ask the Education Secretary to come to the House to clarify that? I think the Prime Minister allocated £120 million following our Opposition day debate last week, but there is also £9 million that has been allocated to schools for summer food and activities. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) has asked whether that is still available and whether communities still have to bid for that money. We definitely need a statement clarifying that.

Will the Leader of the House find time for us to debate the report from the Childhood Trust that says that children are suffering post-traumatic stress because of the coronavirus? Why on earth, then, are the Government introducing the reception baseline assessment for four-year-olds? They have been through lockdown, some have been through bereavement and some of their parents are key workers. Will he please ask the Education Secretary to reverse that decision?

The Government response to covid has led us a merry dance—slow, slow, quick quick. The Prime Minister said on Friday that the country was moving from a “huge one-size-fits-all” to a “more localised” response, leaving public health officials baffled why the Government will not share the data. How can local communities and authorities respond when they do not have the information? Will the Leader of the House ensure that this information is disseminated to local authorities? And how do we get our information now that the press conferences have been cancelled? Do we table more written parliamentary questions? The scientists are saying that the crisis is not over, so could we have a weekly oral statement on what is happening with the coronavirus pandemic?

The Leader of the House will say to me that there are FCO questions next week, but may I ask for the Foreign Secretary to make a statement on Nazanin, Anousheh and Kylie? They must be released soon.

Finally, on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition—and probably the whole House—may I ask the Leader of the House to convey our thoughts and prayers to the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson)? The whole House is thinking of him at this very difficult time.

Mr Rees-Mogg: If I may begin where the right hon. Lady left off; I thank her for those words. I will certainly convey the condolences of the whole House to my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) at this saddest of all possible times. He is in all our thoughts and prayers.

I will also answer with regard to Nazanin, Kylie and Anousheh because the right hon. Lady is quite right to keep on raising this issue. Kylie is being dealt with by the Australian authorities, in agreement with them, and not by the British Government at the moment. Nazanin

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

continues to have representations made on her behalf by the British authorities, and that will continue. As the right hon. Lady knows, she is currently out of prison on temporary release. We hope that that will lead to permanent release and that she will be able to be fully reunited with her family. We say the same in relation to all the arbitrarily detained UK persons in Iran. The right hon. Lady's efforts to secure their release are entirely admirable.

The right hon. Lady, as usual, asks a long list of questions, which I will come to. The ISC is going through the normal processes and we look forward to its being set up in due course. I hope that a motion will be brought before this House in due course. I had better not go into the discussions on who is going in and out, whose lists are going where and which Members of which parties and what parties may or may not be putting their names forward, having their names taken off or putting their names back on again. I am not entirely sure that it is a one-way street in this regard, but let me leave it at that.

The right hon Lady asks about the list of ministerial responsibilities. They were last issued in October and they are updated periodically. The Cabinet Office is in charge of that and will, I am sure, come forward in the fullness of time with an up-to-date list to help and assist and to ensure smooth communication with Members, so they know exactly who they ought to be writing to.

On the merger of the International Development Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee, discussions are going on within the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), the Chairman of the Liaison Committee, is, I know, involved in discussions with the various interested parties. I note the point the right hon. Lady makes about its being a Labour chairmanship that has been lost, and there are standard procedures in accordance with that, of which the Government are aware. However, I would stress that it is right that Select Committees follow Departments, otherwise we would end up with Select Committees that related to Departments that might have been removed years and years ago. For the House to ensure proper scrutiny, I think that principle is an important one.

I am delighted that the right hon. Lady wants to wish my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education a happy birthday. Can I remind the House that, apparently, if you sing "Happy Birthday" twice while washing your hands, that helps defeat the coronavirus? I prefer to stick to the national anthem, rather than "Happy Birthday" twice, but it has the same effect. I am sure many Members of the House will be singing "Happy Birthday" many times today, and will be thinking of my right hon. Friend and the marvellous job he has done in giving £650 million to headmasters and headmistresses up and down the country to spend on getting pupils back up to speed. I think it is absolutely the right thing to do.

The right hon. Lady mentions the Childhood Trust and the post-traumatic stress of children. I would encourage Opposition Members, and particularly her dear leader, to say loudly and boldly that going back to school is safe, as he has been encouraged to do by the Prime Minister on several occasions. That will encourage people,

make them feel safe and make post-traumatic stress disorder or other problems less likely, so that is to be encouraged.

On communication with councils, there are the local resilience forums, which are used very effectively to keep councils up to date, so that they know what is going on.

Finally, on the issue of updates to the House, we have many updates to the House. We have had so many statements—regular statements—and the Prime Minister made the major statement. I must confess that I think there was revelry, Mr Speaker, in your office when the Prime Minister came to the House to make the statement, something you have consistently asked for. Mr Speaker says go and we goeth, and come and we cometh, like the centurion's servant of old, for when he asks the Government that statements are made here, that is what happens.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I have been contacted by a number of driving instructors in my constituency, such as Tom Matthews of Viking driving school in Buckingham, who has set out comprehensive measures he has taken to be covid-secure and reports a long waiting list of people wanting lessons. While it is right that the economy is reopened cautiously and following the science, can I ask my right hon. Friend to ensure that statements are made to this House to give the thousands of driving instructors in this country the guidance they need, so that they know when they will be able to reopen and get fully back to work?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. Driving instructors are one of the unseen engines of the country. They train future generations of drivers, and I hope they can resume their important work safely as soon as possible. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency chief executive will be writing to all approved driving instructors on 25 June, setting out plans to restart driver testing and to help them to return to a life that is as close to normal as possible, as quickly and as fairly as possible, in a way that avoids a second peak of infections. From 4 July, I am happy to say that people will be able to take driving lessons on a motorcycle, or in a car, lorry or bus, and there will be a phased approach to resuming practical testing, so learners have the opportunity to practise before taking a test. But my hon. Friend can raise this with the Secretary of State for Transport on 2 July.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP) [V]: There are now less than two weeks until Parliament's emergency procedures are reviewed. Will the Leader of the House share his insights on what should happen next? Will he move forward, allowing people to participate equally by switching the e-voting system back on and allowing all Members to contribute to debates; or backwards, disenfranchising those who cannot be physically present?

Last week, I informed the House of the decision of the Scottish Parliament to seek a review of the financial arrangements within which it operates, so that it could better deal with the aftermath of covid-19. I asked when that request, backed by four out of five parties in Scotland, would be considered by this Parliament, and I did not get an answer. This week, we saw the publication of the report by the independent economic recovery group in Scotland, a mainly private sector perspective. Guess what its first recommendation was? It was also to loosen the financial straitjacket that constrains the Scottish

Parliament. We do need to discuss this. The financial set-up of devolution was not designed to deal with the type of problems the Scottish Government now face, and platitudes about how wonderful the Union is will not address this serious problem.

May I ask about hospitality and entertainment, and I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests? Many in the sector will have to stay closed beyond the lifespan of the current coronavirus support schemes. If a business is shut by public order, does the Leader of the House agree it should get public help? I know we have difficulty in getting the Chancellor to write a letter, but will the Leader of the House persuade him to come to this House and say what he intends to do beyond October?

We have six days left in which to seek an extension of the Brexit transition period. It is crystal-clear that the Government's necessary focus on the pandemic has affected preparations. Why will the Leader of the House not allow the House time to consider extending the time available? Does he not realise that the Government's Canute-like stance on this matter is looking increasingly foolhardy and cavalier, even to those who support leaving the European Union?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman has made the schoolboy error of not knowing what King Canute did. King Canute took his advisers down to the shore to show that he did not have the power to command the tide; he did not go there to show he had the power and was then embarrassed. The hon. Gentleman may be embarrassed that he has used the analogy incorrectly—as I said, it is a schoolboy error.

As we are on the subject of history, I thought that the hon. Gentleman might be a bit more cheerful today, because I happened to notice in *The Times* yesterday that it was the anniversary of Robert the Bruce's victory at Bannockburn in 1314. I thought that might have brought a smile to the hon. Gentleman's face—but this is a very difficult task to achieve, as I see him looking sternly down upon me.

I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman wishes to close down Parliament when it is just opening up the rest of the country, but we are back. We led the way. Things are really working extremely well. Voting is taking place. Next week there is a full programme of legislation. It is a proper Parliament; it is back to work. I am afraid the fact that SNP do not want to come here says more about their politics than it does about the state of the coronavirus.

The hon. Gentleman went on to wanting more money for the Scottish Government. They have already had £3.7 billion from UK taxpayers, and without the strength of the UK economy I hate to think what situation Scotland would be in had it been independent. The separatists' arguments are crumbling away day by day, and that is absolutely crucial.

As regards industries that have been closed, there has been an unrivalled package of taxpayer support, with 9 million people who are currently furloughed getting support. The Chancellor has said that everybody will be looked after, and that is what has been done.

Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con) [V]: Vida Loca tattoo studio based in Bolton North East has two months-worth of bookings waiting to resume. Can my

right hon. Friend give me and the nation the following to look forward to: a fine sunbed tan, tidy cuticles and possibly even a JRM tattoo?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My immediate plans for a tattoo or for tanning are on hold, but a kind gentleman did have tattooed on him "Moggmentum" a year or so ago, though this has not taken off as a trend.

I very much understand the issue that my hon. Friend raises. It is an important one, because it is difficult for businesses that are closed by compulsion, but the road map was set out on 11 May and many lockdown measures have already been released. We are at step 3 on 4 July, and following the review, we are coming down to three-and-a-quarter-feet distancing rather than six-and-a-half-feet distancing to ensure that people can get out and about more. Close contact services are the most risky, but the Government hope that tattoo and nail parlours will be able to open up as soon after 4 July as is safe and practicable.

Mr Speaker: We head to the north-east with the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, Ian Mearns.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab) [V]: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. The Backbench Business Committee has made the following determinations regarding estimates day debates in early July—we believe that the time allocation will be in the week beginning 6 July. We propose that the two days are divided five ways, with three two-hour debates on the first day and two three-hour debates on the second day. To facilitate a full two hours for each of the three debates on the first day, will the Leader of the House agree to protect the time for the debates on that day?

The Departments that have been chosen to have their spending scrutinised are, on the first day, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; and on the second day, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the Department for International Development, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. We also have a significant number of other Back-Bench debates on our waiting list waiting for allocated time from the Government.

Lastly, the Leader of the House mentioned local resilience forums to my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz). To the best of my knowledge, local resilience forums are being kept no better informed than local authorities about national testing data relating to their locality; they literally do not know.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for notifying the House broadly of the plans for the estimates days. I note his point on protected time. I will take that up in the usual way with other people who have interests in these matters and will try to bring him an answer when we announce the business that includes the estimates days, but I do note his point that the Committee has set out very clearly what it wants debated.

I am aware that Back-Bench debates have reached a point of logjam to some extent. As the hon. Gentleman will notice from today's business statement, there is a lot of legislation to be got through—the virtual Parliament did not allow us to get through business as fast as we

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

would have liked—but I hope to get back to a full programme of Back-Bench debates in the fullness of time.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Just outside the mother town of Burslem, in Longport, stand the grade II* listed remains of Price & Kensington teapot works. Sadly, the site is in poor condition due to a rogue owner who has allowed the site to crumble, at a big cost to Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Sections 215 and 216 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 are not tough enough to deter such recklessness, so will my right hon. Friend allow parliamentary time for a debate about protecting heritage assets and the creation of tougher punishments for those who negligently let them rot?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is becoming one of the House's most ardent and enthusiastic defenders of our country's history and heritage, and he quite rightly stands up for his constituency. I think he may himself be listed in the not-too-distant future—I think grade I rather than grade II or II*. Local authorities do have relevant powers that they can enforce, and in the first instance I would encourage him to get the local authority do that. After that, I think an Adjournment debate would be the next way to raise this matter in the House.

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP) [V]: Many of my constituents have expressed concern at the merger of DFID and the FCO. The 0.7% contribution is for the alleviation of suffering and the improvement of developing nations, not an arm of British foreign policy. Will the Leader of the House therefore ensure that we have a debate on what should be a moral position, not an administrative decision?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think they are two sides of the same coin. One can do good work in the world while also promoting the British national interest, and one should not be ashamed of the British national interest. It is an important consideration, and when hard-pressed British taxpayers are providing substantial sums of money, the interests of British taxpayers ought also to be taken into account. If we can use British firms and they can do things in the poorest countries in the world, paid for by the British taxpayer, that is not something to be ashamed of.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I note that the Leader of the House rarely mentions the safety of House staff. Many have highlighted how they have felt invisible as people have breached safe social distancing since Parliament was recalled. Before any further changes are made in this place, will the health and safety of House staff be put first, with full consultation and negotiation with the trade unions until agreement is reached, and will the Government look once again at extending virtual procedures to everyone so that less risk is brought on to the estate, particularly when people want to participate in debates?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The House authorities have done magnificent work—dare I say, led by you, Mr Speaker?—in ensuring the safety of House staff, which is of the

greatest importance. We are very lucky in the staff we have in this place, who have a wonderful pride in the Parliament in which they work. They know that this is one of the greatest, most ancient, most historic forums of democratic debate in the world, and most of them are proud to be here. However, those who are not well enough to come or who have to shield are being looked after, which is absolutely right and proper. We have gone away from a fully hybrid system and come back to physical working to ensure that business takes place, but we have ensured that people who cannot be here for a range of reasons can vote by proxy and that they can participate in interrogative proceedings. I think that is a very fair balance.

Mr Speaker: We go over to Bob Blackman, who is clear to land his question.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: Reports suggest that more than 2.5 million children have not received any education or done any schoolwork since the middle of March. Clearly, those young people need to catch up, to ensure that they recover their education as fast as possible. Given that many of them will be requiring free school meals and a nutritious meal at lunch time, may we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Education on what catch-up measures will be introduced and what attempts will be made to ensure that people attending also receive a nutritious meal at lunchtimes?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I hope he will join me in welcoming the Prime Minister's and the Education Secretary's confirmation of a catch-up plan to help headteachers provide extra support to children who have fallen behind while out of school. Some £650 million will be shared across state primary and secondary schools over the 2020-21 academic year and, importantly, it will be distributed by headmasters and headmistresses, who will know best how the money should be spent.

In addition, there is £350 million for a national tutoring programme, which will increase access to tuition for the most disadvantaged children. It is a comprehensive package. My hon. Friend will know that free school meals have been extended through the summer, so efforts are being made to ensure that children will be well fed during this crisis and, indeed, at all times.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson pointed out this morning that more than 100,000 people are employed in the leisure industry. Large gymnasiums, swimming pools and lidos such as the one in my constituency can open safely, whether it is 2 metres or 1 metre, and people are incredulous that we are opening pubs, restaurants and cinemas, but not allowing these important facilities and local amenities to open. They cannot wait for a taskforce. Will the Government urgently review the situation and allow them to open alongside pubs and cinemas on 4 July?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think everyone welcomes the reopening of pubs. People have been locked in for quite long enough and they want to go and have a drink, which is a jolly good thing and should be encouraged and welcomed. They will do it safely and properly. I am disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's slightly curmudgeonly attitude

towards the pubs being reopened. As regards other things, they must be opened in a phased way. There is a degree of risk that can be taken, but that risk must be managed and measured. Of course the Government want things to open up more, and that is being implemented as far as it is safe to do, but it has to be in an orderly way.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on support for women who are suffering from endometriosis? Frankly, not enough is known about this condition. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, women who suffer from endometriosis have experienced delays in their treatment, the waiting list has grown and, most stressful of all, operations have been cancelled. These women are suffering, and they need help.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is right to raise this important question, which has been raised with many of us by our constituents. The NHS has begun to restore services that were rightly suspended while it had to deal with the initial impact of covid-19. The NHS is working on the principle that the most urgent treatments should be brought back first, and that will be driven by local demands on the system. My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary has kept the House updated and will continue to do so. The point that my hon. Friend raises is a really important one, and he is right to raise it. People who suffer from this condition need to get the treatment that they require.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab) [V]: Nothing highlights the deep failings in the Government's response to coronavirus like our shockingly high deaths per million rate, by comparison with that of many other countries. We are very near the top of the deaths per million table, and that is a national scandal. Our deaths per million rate is six times higher than that in Germany, 100 times higher than that in South Korea and 150 times higher than that in Australia and New Zealand. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on comparisons with other countries' handling of coronavirus so that we can learn from best practices and help to protect lives in our country?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Every death from the coronavirus, whether it is in South Korea or the United Kingdom, is a tragedy, and the sadness for the families affected is very great and very real. However, a wide range of factors have affected death rates in different countries. Even things as simple as the weather may have influenced how the virus has spread, and so may the practices of individual cultures and societies. I think, therefore, that these headline comparisons are not necessarily enormously illuminative.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): I would have sung a "Te Deum" after the Prime Minister's statement on Wednesday, but for the fact that singing remains forbidden. Now that we have seen the full extent of the exemptions list and some of the guidance, will the Leader of the House allow us to get some of the frustration off our chests by debating it next week?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Te Deum laudamus, Mr Speaker. My right hon. Friend is right to be concerned about things not all opening up at once and to wish to raise this on

the Floor of the House, but the Government have to proceed at a cautious and sensible pace. I know that he raised with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the question of nail bars. It is a matter of national concern that the nails of my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) may not be in perfect condition, but it is also a serious matter for those who run nail bar businesses. The Government are very conscious of that, but there is a way of progressing that will keep things as safe as possible, and that is what the Government are trying to do.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: Many of us are concerned by the comments of Bank of America analysts, who said:

"We believe sterling is...evolving into a currency that resembles the underlying reality of the British economy: small and shrinking with a growing dual deficit problem".

Can we urgently have a debate on the matter in Government time, before the option to extend the Brexit transition passes and further exacerbates the situation?

Mr Rees-Mogg: No.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): This week, I spoke to the landlord of the King William Inn at Scaftworth in Bassetlaw about our plans to allow pubs and restaurants to reopen from 4 July. With social distancing in place, many will find a metre by using a yard. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the future of our pubs and the measures with which we can help them to bounce back from covid-19?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his excellent question, because I think there is a very easy answer in pubs, and that is that people should go back to drinking a yard of ale. If they drink a yard of ale, they will maintain social distancing while enjoying an extra-large drink to celebrate the fact that they are back in the pub.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that the Competition and Markets Authority recently published its findings on the leasehold-selling scandal, which has affected constituents in a number of areas across Warrington South, including Steinbeck Grange in Chapelford and Chaise Meadow in Lymm. I am pleased to see that the Government have promised legislation to tackle future behaviour with regard to mis-selling. Will the Leader of the House give us Government time to consider how those people who have been mis-sold can be compensated?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question and commend him for being such an ardent champion of his constituents' concerns about leasehold mis-selling. His is a model example of a Member of Parliament seeking redress of grievance. The Government welcome the CMA investigation into mis-selling and the onerous terms in the leasehold market. The CMA has said that it will engage with the Government as it moves towards enforcement action, and we look forward to seeing the next stage of its work. My hon. Friend may want to take the matter up with the Chancellor at the next Treasury oral questions on 7 July.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spennings) (Lab/Co-op): Last Sunday, 20-year-old Brad Gledhill was violently stabbed to death in Batley in my constituency. I wish to take this moment to send my condolences to the family, friends and neighbours. I cannot imagine what it must be like to lose a child in such violent circumstances. With knife crime offences at a record high in 2019, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on knife crime? We have not had one for more than a year.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her question, which allows me to give, I hope, a better answer. I join her in sending condolences to the family.

Knife crime is a terrible evil that Members on both sides of the House are committed to eradicating. I hope I can assure the hon. Lady that tackling knife crime is one of the Government's absolute priorities. The Government are supporting the police to tackle these crimes: the amount of funding available to the policing system for 2020-21 will increase by more than £1.1 billion, totalling £15.2 billion, and we have committed to recruit 20,000 new police officers over the next three years. Furthermore, we are introducing a new court order to give the police new stop-and-search powers in respect of anybody serving all or part of their sentence for a knife-possession offence in the community. That will increase the likelihood of such offenders being stopped and send a strong message that if they persist in carrying a knife, they will be punished and will face a custodial sentence.

I fear that what we say about what we will do in future is of remarkably little comfort to the families who are bereaved, but perhaps there is some comfort in how seriously the issue is taken and in the fact that what they have suffered will be a spur for action, not just from the Government but from the Opposition and from all across the House, to try to tackle this terrible scourge.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I was slightly surprised when the shadow Leader of the House referred to me in her opening comments; I did not know anything about that and it would have been a nice courtesy to have let me know. More importantly, people should not believe everything they read in the press. I probably wrote that sort of thing many years ago when I was a journalist.

A more important issue to my constituents is the future of a new hospital in Hemel Hempstead, an issue that I have raised in the House many times. The Prime Minister quite rightly and fantastically announced six new hospitals in the initial plan. However, my local trust, West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust, has no intention of building a new hospital; it wants to refurbish an old Victorian hospital next to a football ground in Watford. May we have a debate on how we hold trusts accountable? I have tried several times with Adjournment debates and have asked the Leader of the House about this issue. Many Members of this House have said to me that they feel frustrated that they cannot hold their own local health trusts to account when things like this are going on. This is nothing to do with the frontline—it is nothing to do with the brilliant work that has been going on over years and in respect of covid; it is to do with the management of trusts and how we can hold them to account.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend raises a fundamental point about how we are governed and how we hold administrations to account. Historically, that was done through Ministers, who had direct responsibility for and authority over how things were done. However, in recent years, and indeed decades, there has been a tendency to pass things over to unaccountable bodies, and that is a matter that the House is justified in wanting to debate.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): We are long overdue a statement from the Culture Secretary or perhaps even the Chancellor about what further fiscal measures will be taken to support our music venues, music festivals, recording studios, theatres and other cultural assets. When I originally raised this with the Leader of the House in March, he said:

“The Government are inevitably conscious that when we close places by order and that has an effect on people's livelihoods, there is a societal responsibility.”—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2020; Vol. 674, c. 27.]

I completely agree with that. When will we have a statement, before we suffer irreversible damage to our cultural landscape?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I reiterate the amount that has already been done: 9.1 million jobs are being protected and furloughed, at a cost of £20.8 billion to the taxpayer, and 2.6 million self-employed people are being supported, at a cost of £7.6 billion. This benefits all sectors, including the cultural sectors. We are at the stage in this programme where helping everybody is the right thing to do, because everybody is being affected by the closures. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is in discussions on how other support may be provided as things change and evolve, but I will pass on to him the hon. Gentleman's desire for a statement.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con) [V]: I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and the fact that I am a grower and farmer member of the National Farmers Union. We must have a debate in Government time on banning disposable barbecues in areas of outstanding natural beauty, upland areas such as the west Pennine moors and our national parks. As you know, Mr Speaker, an uncontrollable wildfire has burned above your constituency of Chorley and my constituency of Rossendale and Darwen, caused by a disposable barbecue. This is having a huge impact on agriculture and, most crucially, the huge conservation efforts that we are making to protect our blanket and peat bogs in the area. There is no place for open flames on our moors or in the other areas I have referred to.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising that point. People taking fire into areas that will be particularly damaged by wildfires are deeply irresponsible, and there are laws in place to deal with that. I think that banning all portable barbecues may be going too far. The inclination to ban things in a general way where there is a specific problem is not necessarily the right approach, but he would be wise to ask for an Adjournment debate on that issue.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The eyes of the world will turn again towards Hong Kong next week, when the 30 June deadline in relation to China's new security law will expire. Does the Leader of the House agree that it would demonstrate a seriousness of intent on the part of the Government if the Foreign Secretary made a statement on Monday outlining exactly what the Government mean when they speak about a route map to citizenship for BN(O) passport holders? Will he give us an assurance that if this new law is introduced, the Foreign Secretary will make a statement the next day?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Foreign Secretary will be in the House next Tuesday for Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions, so there will be an hour-long opportunity to question him. I will reiterate what the Government have said so far. Our approach to China remains clear-eyed and rooted in our values and our interests. That particularly means upholding the joint declaration, which China signed with us in good faith to protect the liberties of Hong Kong for 50 years from 1997. If the Chinese Government do not honour that commitment, there is a route map to support British nationals (overseas). Of course, more details will be brought forward depending on whether China implements its law, but the British Government strongly urge the Chinese Government to respect in good faith the joint declaration.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con) [V]: Following the question asked by the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), my right hon. Friend is aware that theatres and cultural venues are suffering greatly during the covid-19 crisis. Without support, some of our most famous theatres may have to close. Members with theatres in their constituencies will be aware that for every £1 spent in theatres, £5 is spent in the local economy. Given that my constituency is home to the west end's theatreland, with more than 30 theatres, the impact on the local economy cannot be overstated. Will the Government bring forward a statement or debate on support for theatre owners and producers, to ensure that it is not the final curtain for our theatres?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this point, and as a former leader of Westminster City Council, she knows how important it is. I am not convinced that extending the congestion charge to 10 o'clock at night will help the theatres when they do reopen. It will be a big disincentive to people coming into the centre of London to go to the theatre—typical of the socialist Mayor of London—but the Government are taking steps to help the artistic community, as we are helping the whole of the economy. The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has acknowledged that social distancing makes staging performances exceptionally difficult for theatres and that the industry will need a different approach from other sectors. He is consulting industry, medical experts and advisers in the hope that a solution can be found, but if I may say so, the show must go on and the Government must support the show going on, as they have been with the measures that they have introduced so far.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I unusually find myself in accord with the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne)

in calling for a debate in Government time about how well their guidance on lifting lockdown is working. The Leader of the House referred to pubs reopening. In my constituency, they have stayed open, selling alcohol off the premises, and this has caused havoc, with people drunk, urinating and defecating in our parks, causing a huge challenge for our police and park wardens and a huge cost to the taxpayer to keep on top of it. It is time that we had a proper discussion about the practicality of many of the measures that the Government are proposing, to ensure that they work for everybody.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think the changes that are being made have the great virtue that they do not involve compulsion, but they are advice. In their good wisdom, the British people can determine what they do, subject to the very clear guidance that the Government are giving. The restoration of our ancient freedoms that have never previously been so restricted is clearly the proper approach for the Government to be taking. As for a debate, the consideration of a procedural motion followed by all stages of the Business and Planning Bill will cover many of the issues that the hon. Lady is concerned about, so there will be chance to debate this on Monday.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): On Saturday, I was drawn to my local cricket club. I strode to the middle, stopped at the end of my run, the wicket looked superb, and, for a few moments, I imagined the crack of ball on willow, the ripple of applause from the boundary and the occasional shouts of "Howzat!" But I was imagining it. [Interruption.] Yes, in my case, it is imaginary—they always unfairly turn me down. Up and down the country, thousands and thousands of men and women, boys and girls are desperate to play competitive cricket. England is not England without cricket. Leader of the House, would you persuade the chief umpire to stroll across from No. 10 next week and make a statement in the House that play can resume?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think very few right hon. and hon. Members miss cricket as much as I do. All my tickets to watch various test matches over the course of the year and my visits to Taunton have had to be cancelled and, worse still, there was a chance that Somerset might win the county championship for the first time in its history—[Interruption.] Not Lancashire, Mr Speaker—it could not possibly be Lancashire. Somerset was so close, other than the points that were meanly taken off us by some unfair people.

Leaving that to one side, it is a real loss for this country that cricket is not coming back, but we have to be as safe as we possibly can be. People can play with their families, so they can get some practice in. But there is some good news: my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) pointed out to me this morning that the MCC, the Marylebone cricket club, has its first female president in its history, in the form of Clare Connor. As I think, second only to being sovereign, being president of the MCC is the highest post in the land—even, Mr Speaker, above the speakership or the lord presidency of the Council—may I congratulate Clare Connor warmly on behalf of the House?

Mr Speaker: And Lancashire will still win.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Last night, we saw once again unsafe bottlenecks in the corridors and behind your Chair, Mr Speaker, as Members queued to vote and then queued to leave after voting. Of course, we had a perfectly good remote voting system that had been developed and refined and was working well until the Leader of the House insisted on abandoning it. Can he tell us the cost of developing that system and the total cost of the various iterations of voting systems that have been developed in recent weeks? If he does not have the figure to hand—I would not necessarily expect him to—I am happy for him to write to me.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is a matter for the House of Commons Commission. However, the hon. Gentleman should be proud to be back. It is wonderful that this House is back and doing its duty in getting legislation through and that people are here and we are operating as a proper Parliament, not going for country walks while voting on serious matters affecting the lives of the British people. We should be really proud that we are back.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the importance of levelling up infrastructure in north Derbyshire, and, in particular, the need to build a purpose-built road between the M1 and Shirebrook so that we can unleash the economic potential of the powerhouse that is Shirebrook?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. The constituents of Bolsover, and Shirebrook in particular, are incredibly fortunate to have such an assiduous and capable campaigner advancing their cause. The name of Shirebrook conjures up images of such beauty that it surprises me that anyone wants to leave it to join the motorway. None the less, I would urge him to take the matter up with the Transport Secretary at the next oral questions on 2 July. I have a feeling, Mr Speaker, that you might look benignly on an application for an Adjournment debate on a subject of this importance.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP) [V]: A Bank of America report in the *Financial Times* yesterday suggests that, post Brexit, the pound will be weak and volatile—a situation that the Leader of the House will fully recognise will only help the spivs and the speculators. Before we move to third-world currency status, will he agree to a debate in Government time on the weakness and volatility of the pound in a post-Brexit Britain?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I spent decades in the City and you could always find some silly analyst to write some silly report and the FT to report it.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Public toilets are essential facilities, particularly in rural and coastal tourism areas, but many in Cornwall are now operated by small parish councils that are struggling to fund their running, particularly in a covid-safe manner. In 2018, the former Chancellor announced that public toilets would be exempt from business rates, but the Government did not manage to find time to bring forward the legislation in the previous Parliament. Can the Leader of the House confirm that this legislation will be brought forward and give an idea of when it will be, because that would bring great relief to many?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend knows how to play the cistern—he is doing it extremely well—and he will soon, I hope, be flushed with success, because I can assure him that this does remain Government policy. Although business has been under considerable pressure, using up a lot of parliamentary time, and legislation has been prioritised accordingly, I hope that we will find time for a Bill in due course.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): May we have a Government statement on why the Home Office will not ban the Satanist Nazi group, the Order of Nine Angles, when in the US a soldier has been indicted for plotting with the organisation to commit murder and vile acts of terror?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This sounds a very serious matter of which I must confess I was not previously aware. I will take it up on behalf of the hon. Lady with the Home Secretary, who will be in front of the House on 13 July for oral questions.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): For what it is worth, I think that Essex probably has the edge and for the third time in four years will win the county championship when it gets started.

Some 700,000 people have had their hip and knee replacements cancelled as a result of covid-19. Will my right hon. Friend find time for us to have a debate in this place about how we tackle that backlog, but also in a way that keeps services as close to people as possible so that we do not have a situation that has been proposed by East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust where it strips back our elective orthopaedic service in Ipswich and moves it to Colchester? This is very unpopular in Ipswich and, in my view, would be detrimental to my constituents.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question, leaving aside his jibe about Essex county cricket. I commend him for his stalwart representation of the people of Ipswich in this House. We know that fewer people are coming into the NHS when they need to. That is why the NHS has begun restoring services that were rightly suspended while we dealt with the initial impact of covid-19. It is working on the principle that the most urgent treatment should be brought back first, and this will be driven by local demands on the system. The matter in his constituency sounds like a worthy subject for an Adjournment debate to highlight it more broadly.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I feel phenomenally fortunate that I completed my cancer treatment before lockdown started, and I am delighted to hear that the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) has been able to catch her breast cancer very early—I wish her a full recovery. Unfortunately, the situation across the country has not been great for potential cancer sufferers: I believe that 290,000 urgent referrals for suspected cancer were not sent out during this period; 1.2 million screening invites for bowel cancer, breast cancer and cervical cancer have not been sent out; chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery has often been cancelled or delayed for a long time; and lots of clinical trials have been put on hold. So may we have a specific debate on cancer and coronavirus? We really need to get back on track on this. Otherwise, there will be more excess deaths from cancer than from coronavirus.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman raises a point we are all aware of. The crisis did lead to some diagnostic treatments being rescheduled, to protect vulnerable patients. I am very glad that he successfully completed his course of treatment, which I think is welcomed across the House. Everyone wishes him well. *[Interruption.]* Genuinely, however much we may disagree with him or find some of his interventions less than illuminating, we all wish him extremely good health. The problem he raises is a serious one, and the Health Secretary is aware of it. As for finding time for a specific debate, I am not sure I can promise that, but this issue is certainly worth raising in questions, and the Health Secretary has been assiduous in making statements to the House.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): This week is Armed Forces Week, and I believe we have the best armed forces in the world. They have really stepped up during this pandemic to provide fantastic logistical support for our brilliant NHS. So on behalf of the people of Ashfield and Eastwood, the people in this House and the people in this great country of ours, will the Leader of the House please say a big thank you to our armed services?

Mr Rees-Mogg: King Alfred is reputed to have founded the Navy and his army defeated the Danes and kept us safe. The British Army, the British Navy and the Royal Air Force have saved our country and provided wonderful service to it, over not just decades and centuries, but more than 1,000 years. My hon. Friend is right to bring to the attention of the Chamber this important event and to make sure that the people of Ashfield are known to be backing our armed services. He is right to do so and I am grateful to him for raising this matter.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I wholeheartedly associate myself with the comments made by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) about the armed forces, particularly this week. It is good to see questions being raised about the leasehold mis-selling scandal and to see other Members, on both sides, raise concerns about all sorts of issues that leaseholders face, particularly in major apartment blocks. May we therefore urgently have a comprehensive and full debate about the responsibilities of building developers and their liability for building defects, including in my constituency? Leaseholders are having to deal with a shabby situation. These issues often relate not just to fire safety, but to the actual construction of buildings, to water and to all sorts of other things. The situation is completely unacceptable.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think all of us, as constituency MPs, have had constituents complain that they have bought a new house that has had defects and they have found it extremely difficult to get those defects put right and have suffered considerable inconvenience. For one constituent of mine, the defects were dangerous, because of the poor quality of work that was done. This is a real issue, because although we need to build more houses, we need to build them safely and people need to have some form of redress if mistakes are made.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): Kensington is home to many of our leading cultural institutions, such as the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum

and the V&A. Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on how we can support the arts and our cultural institutions as we come out of lockdown?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend represents what was called Albertopolis at one point after the success of the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the wonderful museums that are in her constituency. I refer her to what I said earlier about the Government being aware of this issue, the support that has been available for all businesses and the Secretary of State's knowledge that there are particular problems in certain sectors.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) [V]: Will the Leader of the House allow an urgent debate on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on shielded and disabled people, and will he allow shielded MPs like myself the opportunity to participate? I need to correct him: we do not think there is a fair balance in Parliament at the moment, and we are definitely not going for country walks. We have a lot of important stuff to contribute, so please stop excluding us.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who is clearly not excluded, because we have just heard from her very clearly and heard her thoughts in a very straightforward way—*[Interruption.]* The issue with legislation is: how do we have people appearing remotely in a debate? It is perfectly practical with interrogative proceedings, but debates and interventions are different. I believe that this is being looked into, but we have a system that is working. It is delivering the legislation that is needed. I can reassure the hon. Lady that the Government have said that shielded people will be free to return to their full activities after the end of July, so after the summer recess, people will be able to come back into this House.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): In Crewe and Nantwich, we have recently had the difficult news that Bentley, a key local employer, is to make up to 1,000 redundancies. I am sure that many Members will share my concern about the potential for such job losses to hit the economy later in the year. Will my right hon. Friend find time for the House to debate how best the Government can prepare people who lose their job to find new skills and new opportunities in our economy?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. I have a particular affection for Bentleys, as I have both a 1936 and a 1968 version, and they are the most wonderful cars. Bentley is a great company, of which the country can be very proud, and of which he, as its representative in his constituency, can be very proud. We have to try to restore our economy to full health, and there is a range of support that I have already mentioned. There is a debate this afternoon on the support being offered to UK industries during the pandemic, and it will be worth bringing up at that point how things will need to evolve and how the economy will change fundamentally because of this crisis.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP) [V]: The Leader of the House will be aware of the support group Excluded, which has been established to assist the 3 million self-employed people and personal services companies in

[*Dave Doogan*]

the UK that have been left without any Government support during this pandemic. The Prime Minister said to me on Tuesday in this place:

“There are some people who perhaps have not got the support that they felt they needed, because of the difficulties in identifying what is appropriate and because of technical difficulties of all kinds.”—[*Official Report*, 23 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 1192.]

There are not “some people” left behind. There are 3 million construction workers, cleaners, caterers, photographers, sound engineers, architects and consultants, including many in my Angus constituency, and there is not a constituency on these islands that has not been so affected. It is not too late to put this right, so may we have a debate to establish how and when the Government can assist these people to ensure that their businesses trade into the future?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think the debate later on will cover this subject, but I would point out how much the Government have done: 9.1 million people are in the furloughing scheme; 2.6 million self-employed people are receiving help; 2.3 million people have got on to universal credit since 12 March; 49,000—nearly 50,000—loans to the value of £10 billion have been made to small and medium-sized enterprises; 279 loans, with a value of nearly £2 billion, have been given to larger businesses; and there have been 860,000 bounce-back loans to the value of £26.3 billion. These are enormous sums that have been provided by taxpayers to support businesses through these difficult times. I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point that some people have not benefited from all or any of these schemes, but what has been done is the most enormous package produced by any British Government at any point in our history, and it will ensure that the chances of an economic bounce-back are as high as possible.

Mr Speaker: Order. In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival that those participating in next, I am suspending the House for three minutes.

Virtual participation in proceedings concluded (Order, 4 June)

12.14 pm

Sitting suspended.

Point of Order

12.17 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Do you recall the situation in this Chamber just a year ago, when people were piling in and virtually everyone was being called to speak on statements and urgent questions? I put this point to you and to Mr Speaker: I hope that as soon as 4 July comes—although it will probably happen in September, but as soon as is practicable—we can allow more spontaneity in this Chamber. After all, we are turning to the 1 metre rule from the 2 metre rule and, generally, as we can see from looking around us, the Chamber is naturally socially distanced anyway. People are quite good at self-regulating, and it is very important to have more spontaneity and people able to come in, particularly for questions, as we have just had with the Leader of the House. The present Speaker, every other Speaker and you have been anxious generally to try to call everyone who wants to get in. I make that point to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and hope that you will take it back to Mr Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you very much, Sir Edward, for that point of order. I, like many Members, am looking forward to 4 July for reasons more than you have just enunciated. None the less, clearly, this is not Parliament as we remember it a few months ago. I know that Mr Speaker himself would wish to see this House working more effectively than is allowed in the current circumstances, as the pandemic is still alive, but he is working with Public Health England to ensure that we are able to make this Parliament as effective and as safe as we possibly can. I thank you for that point of order.

BILL PRESENTED

BUSINESS AND PLANNING BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Alok Sharma, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Priti Patel, Secretary George Eustice, Secretary Robert Jenrick and Secretary Grant Shapps, presented a Bill to make provision relating to the promotion of economic recovery and growth.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 29 June, and to be printed (Bill 148) with explanatory notes (Bill 148-EN).

Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Clause 1

MORATORIUMS IN GREAT BRITAIN

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 1.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With this we may take Lords amendments 2 to 116.

Paul Scully: The Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill has been a demonstration of what can be achieved in the best interests of businesses, jobs and the country's economic future when there is collaborative work across both sides of the House. I am grateful to right hon. and hon. Members for the constructive way in which the Opposition have engaged with the Bill, both in this House and the other place.

Over the past three months, this country has faced the unprecedented hardship of needing to adhere to stringent social distancing measures due to the covid-19 pandemic, where Government had no choice but to order businesses to close their doors to safeguard the nation's health. We recognise the huge sacrifices that has entailed, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has provided unprecedented economic support to businesses and workers across the country to help them make it through this challenging time.

Some UK businesses have been hit hard, with many unable to trade or facing a significant short-term reduction in demand for goods and services. As a result, many otherwise viable companies face the threat of insolvency.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): With regard to Lords amendment 75, which extends the temporary provisions to 30 September, the Minister is absolutely right that a lot of businesses can survive this crisis, but they need these measures in place. They also need the packages of support from the Treasury alongside the legislative changes. The clock is ticking for many, particularly in the theatre and entertainment industry, the steel industry and others affected in my constituency. Does he agree that we need to see financial packages, too?

Paul Scully: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that we remain flexible. We continue to work with businesses from all sectors to ensure that we can get to a point where we can work through the gears to get a full economic recovery over time. That will mean support from the Government in all manner of ways, which we are considering.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): We have no idea what will happen—there could be a second lockdown or other things; we do not know. Will the Minister comment on the necessity or value of including in the Bill a review procedure, which, if something changes, would allow the Government to be fleet of foot in aiding businesses? That particularly applies to those

who lose their premises because of the difficult economic situation and who may find it very difficult to find new ones.

Paul Scully: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention. He will note that the Government have extended the moratorium on the forfeiture of leases due to covid-19 debts to 30 September, with which the amendments in the Bill have become aligned. In my conversations with retail and hospitality in particular, but not solely with them, I have been exercised by property and the balance between landlord and tenant. We must keep an eye on that.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I recognise that what the Minister is bringing forward is important. We thank the Government and him for what they are doing. In relation to circumstances in the regional devolved Administrations—the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly—there may be peculiarities in those systems that mean businesses are particularly under threat or having problems specific to those regions. Does the Minister feel that within the Bill we can get help through the devolved Administrations, and in Northern Ireland through the Assembly, to those businesses and, in particular, tourism?

Paul Scully: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is so important that we work with all parts of the nation and all the devolved Administrations, which we do regularly. My colleague my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) has regular conversations from our Department, and other Departments liaise closely with the devolved Administrations to ensure that local economies are protected, as well as looking at the overall national picture.

The measures that the Bill introduces will give our businesses the vital support they need to keep afloat, preserving jobs, maintaining productive capacity and enabling the foundations to be laid for the country's economic recovery. Saving lives and livelihoods is at the heart of what we are seeking to achieve. Measures such as the new moratorium and restructuring plan, together with a prohibition on contractual termination clauses, will help more businesses in future to survive rather than become insolvent. Many of the permanent measures have been improved through scrutiny in the other place, and I will set out some details of the amendments that the Government have brought forward to ensure that the measures work as intended.

I turn first to the financial services super-priority amendments. The Government want to prevent firms gaming the system through a moratorium. Our amendments seek to disincentivise financial services creditors from seeking to accelerate their pre-moratorium debt solely to benefit from super-priority should the company fail, or to obtain protection from compromise if a restructuring proposal was put to them. The amendments exclude pre-moratorium financial services debts from having super-priority status in a subsequent administration or liquidation where the financial services debt has been accelerated for payment during the moratorium. That ensures that the correct incentives are in place for the moratorium to work effectively and not be brought to an end prematurely.

[Paul Scully]

On amendments relating to pensions, the aim of the measures in the Bill is to rescue a company, which is ultimately the best outcome for its pension scheme. Nevertheless, the Government have been alive to the concern that the new procedures could result in a pension scheme being disadvantaged as an unsecured creditor of the company. As a result, we agreed that there is a need to build in specific protections. Amendments made in the other place ensure that the pensions regulator and the Pension Protection Fund get appropriate information in the case of both a moratorium and a restructuring plan and that the PPF can challenge through the courts, the directors and the monitor of a company in a moratorium. There is also a regulation-making power, which will allow the PPF to be given creditor rights in both procedures in certain circumstances. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will agree that these are important and fair amendments to the Bill.

We have also made amendments to the temporary measures in the Bill. These temporary measures allow businesses to focus on what is important for their survival through this extraordinary period, rather than having to respond to aggressive creditor actions, or struggle with statutory filing or meeting requirements during the disruption. The amendments to the temporary insolvency provisions in the Bill extend the life of those provisions beyond what was proposed when the Bill first came to the House. They will now expire, as I have said, on 30 September.

It is already clear that businesses will need these measures in place for longer than we first anticipated, and we brought forward amendments in the other place to take account of that. The provisions retain the capacity to be extended further through a regulation-making power should it be required, and the affirmative procedure will apply to such regulations.

Amendments have been made in the Bill in relation to pre-pack sales in administrations. Pre-packs are a valuable tool for saving businesses and jobs. However, concerns have been raised about the lack of scrutiny of them. The amendments reinstate a power that had elapsed earlier this year for the Government to regulate pre-pack sales in administrations to connected parties. The Government will look carefully at pre-packs and I can inform the House that a commitment was made by my ministerial colleague Lord Callanan to review current practices in the summer before making any decision on regulatory changes.

Finally, a number of technical amendments have been made to the Bill where it was judged necessary. These include changes that will restrict the period for which certain powers have been given in the Bill that will be available to Ministers, changes to clarify the intended effect of the legislation and changes which place a condition on the use of some powers. We have ensured that there is appropriate parliamentary scrutiny of any regulation made under the Bill, as well as appropriate safeguards on these powers. Where they relate to powers for a Scottish or Welsh Minister or a Northern Ireland Department, the corresponding change has been made to ensure equal scrutiny for all the Parliaments of the UK.

This Bill has been improved by the scrutiny of the House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, as well as by the incredible work of the

Government's own parliamentary counsel and their legal advisers. I hope that the House will agree that making good, accurate, appropriately balanced and clear legislation is very much in the interests of all, not least of businesses that rely on this legal clarity. I am confident that we have now achieved that in this package, which we have, nevertheless, brought forward as quickly as possible to respond to the covid emergency. Taken together, these amendments improve this important and much-needed Bill. The debates and discussions in this House, as well as in the other place, have shown quite what this Parliament can achieve, even if socially distanced, when we share that common aim to save and support businesses in this emergency context. I therefore call on Members to support all the Lords amendments.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I want to start by echoing the constructive tone of the Minister and thanking everyone, both in this place and the other place, who has been involved in the scrutiny of the Bill. I also want to thank the Minister specifically for how he and his colleagues have engaged with us on this Bill and listened to the concerns we have had as it has progressed. We on the Labour Benches welcome the amendments that the Government have brought forward, which improve and strengthen the Bill in some important regards. As we have said previously, this is just one of the measures that we hope will safeguard businesses and livelihoods through this crisis. Our objective as the Opposition is to be constructive and to ensure that businesses get the support they need now and in the longer term and that the number of insolvencies over coming weeks and months is as few as possible. We back this Bill, but we are clear that it is a last resort for many businesses and that there is much, much more for the Government to do now—now—to support businesses, safeguard our economy and protect jobs and livelihoods, so that the measures passed today only have to be used in a limited number of companies.

12.30 pm

As we have said at every stage of the debate on the Bill and through this crisis, every previously viable business that needs to call on these insolvency changes because of the crisis is a business that has been failed. Even with the limited unlocking of our economy that we have seen so far, some sectors will take longer than others to recover. That is why we have argued that the furlough scheme should be made more flexible and specific to sectors that are still struggling, and also why we have called for sector-specific support packages for those in particular difficulties, including hospitality, steel, aerospace and automotive manufacturing, to name but a few.

Turning to the Lords amendments, we are grateful that Ministers listened to our concerns about the impact of these changes on pension funds and the voice of workers and have amended the Bill accordingly to provide extra safeguards. There are some lessons to be learned from the passage of the Bill, however, and for the Government to think about as they plan further changes in this area of insolvency and corporate governance.

Stephen Doughty: I entirely endorse the point my hon. Friend is making, particularly with regard to pension schemes, because we have seen the tragedy of where this

has gone wrong, such as the Allied Steel and Wire pensions scandal in my constituency, which is still affecting people today, years afterwards. Does she agree that we need to take some of the lessons from this process into protections for pension schemes and pensioners, who are expecting, having paid in, that they will get out in due course?

Chi Onwurah: I thank my hon. Friend for that extremely constructive and to-the-point intervention. We absolutely need to learn from this process, and we also need to ensure that not only the mistakes but the injustices of the past are not repeated, particularly now, when the economy and so many workers and pensioners are so vulnerable.

First, I hope that Ministers will learn from the experience of passing this legislation in such a hurried manner, with a mixture of permanent and temporary measures. While we understand the need for speed with this Bill, it is clear that there have been problems in combining temporary changes with permanent reforms that have been a long time coming and the lack of time for proper scrutiny. That point has been strongly voiced in the other place, and we hope that Ministers will bear this in mind when introducing complex permanent changes along with temporary measures.

Secondly, the ranking of priority debts in insolvency cases has not been changed in a number of years and concerns have been raised that this is out of date. There is no mention of FinTech or some of the new complex ways in which firms finance themselves. If further insolvency changes are planned by Ministers, they must be relevant to where the world is now.

Thirdly, the interaction between pension funds and insolvencies is very complicated, particularly around defined pension schemes. That needs to be looked at afresh. Fourthly, the lack of mention of employees in the whole Bill is a complete oversight, which is why we argued for greater recognition of, and voice for, employees during the passage of the Bill. Any further changes to insolvency and corporate governance legislation must consider how workers can be better included. Finally, there are clearly issues, as the Minister has raised, around pre-pack. They will need to be resolved.

We are pleased that we have been able to work so constructively with the Government to pass this important legislation to support business through this crisis. We are grateful for the listening ear of Ministers. We hope that this legislation will save businesses threatened with becoming insolvent through this crisis. We will keep a close eye on how the measures are implemented, and we hope Ministers will do the same.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and in particular to my roles as a director of companies.

Like the Opposition, I welcome the changes that the Government are accepting in the Bill today. I have listened to a couple of interventions from Opposition Members, with their strong support for Government measures to support the economy, and that is emblematic of how successful they have been. However, I would just gently warn my hon. Friend the Minister that we have made great progress so far, but there are issues, as we emerge, about how those programmes are helping certain

people, while other people are not receiving that support. We need to get the economy going back to normal business principles as quickly as possible, not seek to extend Government intervention unnecessarily or for too long.

This Bill is a very timely Bill and it is a good Bill. As the shadow Minister said, there is a mixture of short and long-term issues here, but getting this on the books is really rather important for the market. May I ask the Minister, building on some other comments about the changes in the role of the Pensions Regulator and the PPF, whether he sees this as part of a longer-term view of the Government about the role of pensions regulators in insolvency and whether this is an indication of something that may outlast and be outwith any short-term changes? I would be interested in his perspectives on that.

I am not sure if the Bill continues to relate to the primacy of HMRC as a creditor in insolvencies, but I would be interested if the Minister has any observations on that. I know that, for many businesses when they are trying to seek resolution in insolvency, HMRC can prove to be one of the most difficult creditors to deal with—and that is putting it perhaps a little lightly. So do the Government have the intention of providing, or does the Treasury have any intention of providing, any guidance on how HMRC may be treating its obligations during this particular period? For many companies, that would be a welcome piece of information as they go through what may otherwise be very difficult periods.

May I ask the Minister about the extension to 30 September? That seems to be a very sensible change, but may I ask him about what happens in the event that there is a repeat lockdown that is a national lockdown? He has talked a bit about an affirmative decision here. That, it seems to me, is perhaps a bit more focused than that. Perhaps more tellingly, what happens in the instance where there is a localised lockdown in a particular county or a particular region that affects businesses there and they go insolvent? What happens to those particular businesses? I would be interested to see if the Minister has some thoughts on that.

My final observation, Mr Deputy Speaker—and you, with your great experience, may know this, too—is that frequently measures that come into this House that are seen as short-term measures have a habit of sticking around on the statute book. So could I have, on the sunny-side view of the recovery of the economy, an absolute assurance from the Government that it is their intention, as these things sit, as the economy recovers, that they will implement the sunset clause, and they will come forward so that we can enable businesses to go back to the longer-term framework, some of which is in this Bill, for managing corporate insolvency?

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I, too, thank the Minister for the collaborative and refreshing way, given his Government's record, of engaging across the Benches to take this legislation through. I will come to my constructive criticisms in due course.

The areas I want to expand on are, basically, that we accept the Lords amendments and, within that, seek assurances from the Minister, his Secretary of State and his Government that they will work with the trade unions to ensure that workers are adequately protected,

[Drew Hendry]

acknowledging that, while the Bill is a welcome step, the help it will give firms to get through the covid-19 crisis is going to be a drop in the ocean of the challenges they face. If this Tory Government are serious about reducing insolvency, they need to do much more. They should then support the Scottish National party's amendments to the Finance Bill to prevent HMRC's vulture powers from taking effect.

We welcome the technical changes made through the Lords amendments, not least the fact that the Scottish Parliament can play its full role in matters relating to clause 43. That is extremely welcome. It is also welcome to see the Government make concessions to Lord Stephen to ensure that directors will have responsibility for informing employees about moratorium arrangements and reassuring them about their conditions in the future. The Minister and the Government must provide assurances that they will continue to engage with trade unions and give an unequivocal guarantee that workers' rights will not diminish as a result of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) was very kind in her criticisms. I am going to be a bit more direct. The swathes of Government amendments required in the Lords are indicative of the Government's ongoing failure to grasp the details of the measures they propose—that is notwithstanding the very good engagement I have already referred to by the Minister here today. It is not the way to take such important matters forward.

As I said earlier, we welcome the measures, especially the provision of a short business rescue moratorium to protect companies from creditor action while options are considered; the new court-based restructuring tool; and new rules to prevent suppliers from cancelling contracts with businesses in an insolvency procedure. They are all helpful to business, as is the temporary suspension of the wrongful trading provisions to give company directors greater confidence to use their best endeavours as they continue to trade during this pandemic emergency, without the threat of personal liability should the company ultimately fall into insolvency. Importantly, we are keeping the existing laws for fraudulent trading and potential director disqualification to deter director misconduct—so far, so good.

The main and most pressing issue, however, is that these measures do not address the mountain of corporate debt that will prevent firms from investing to rebuild the economy. With reports that less than half the bounce-back loans will not be repaid, it is high time that recipients of the bounce-back loan scheme and coronavirus business interruption loan scheme debt were offered the chance of that debt being turned into equity instead. It is simply unrealistic to expect economic growth while numbing investment, crushing productivity and adding to corporate debt.

To be serious about avoiding insolvency, much more attention will need to be paid to the breadth of effects. Even businesses that survive will face a much longer road to recovery, especially in sectors such as tourism, hospitality and the arts. Without meaningful action, jobs will be lost and communities scarred, probably for decades. The effect on those sectors and others means that the brunt will be borne by thousands of people in the gig economy and on zero-hours contracts—and disproportionately by young people.

The Minister said that he wanted to make a commitment to supporting local economies. It is important that he takes that message back to the Chancellor because, when redundancies come, businesses will focus on those who will cost them the least to release: the low paid; those with no contract; and, as I have said, younger people. I have to declare an interest here as a father who still has two teenagers in the house, and, of course, as a newly-surprised grandparent of my new grandson Cameron Hendry. I want to ensure that all young people have a future to look forward to that is not going to be hampered by decades of retrenchment. [Interruption.] Indeed, Cameron Hendry. It is a fine name, isn't it?

To get back to the serious point, although the hospitality sector is hopeful of some meagre income in the dying embers of the season, it has effectively faced a three winter situation. It may get 15% to 20% of that which July would normally bring, and maybe a bit more in August, if it is lucky. I have been engaging with and listening to the industry's concerns, which are similar in tourism areas across the nations of the UK.

Current hotel occupancy rates seem to be below 10%. In my own constituency, the owner of the Kingsmills Hotel Group, Tony Story, told me that his company will have to bear the cost of an additional 15% to 20% per room for electrostatic spraying and hospital-grade cleaning in his hotels. That experience has been reflected by other smaller hotel owners across the sector. They need the Minister, his Secretary of State and his Government to implore the Chancellor to extend furlough support in the sector beyond this year. As it stands, because of the changes—because of the contribution they will have to pay towards furlough—they will lose more money opening their businesses than when they were closed. It makes no sense to punish them in that way. The furlough scheme has been of great help; we have mentioned that many times and supported it. That is why it is important that it continues in order to avoid insolvencies that may come out of this.

12.45 pm

Tourism and hospitality also need a VAT cut. As Mr Story said, cutting VAT

“makes it much more attractive for us to the European market, even though”

that cut would only level the playing field. He means a meaningful reduction, not tinkering about with 2% or 2.5%.

The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee heard this morning that theatres will run out of cash by the end of this year. Culture and the arts face an absolute hammering. Those are the businesses facing the highest risk of insolvency. They, too, need special measures: extended furlough, investment through grants and engagement to allow their unique skills to be put to use throughout our communities.

In the highlands, our big local theatre, Eden Court, led by James Mackenzie-Blackman and his wonderful staff, has for years done outreach in the community, helping build the fabric and the health of our communities across the highlands. That is replicated across the nations of the UK, and it must be protected. Communities have benefited from that work, but such theatres are starved of income due to this vicious virus. They need deeper and more meaningful help than we see in the Bill to avoid the prospect of a soulless environment if they collapse.

If the Government decide that those businesses are to go without specific support, will the Minister work with the Scottish Government and the Chancellor to make simple amendments to borrowing powers to allow the Scottish Government to invest £500 million in Scotland so that we can take further action for ourselves to support businesses, jobs and communities?

Finally, while the Secretary of State and the Minister should be working to champion these sectors, which are vital to so many, will the Minister also take the practical step of supporting the SNP amendment to the Finance Bill that would stop HMRC's planned vulture powers? Two policies in part 4 of the Finance Bill could damage business lending even more. Preferential status represents a significant challenge to the UK's business community and access to working capital finance. Preventing tax avoidance, evasion and phoenixism is vital, of course, but that measure is not the way to do it, so will the Minister indicate his support for our amendment to the Finance Bill?

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): It is a pleasure to be here on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. Along with other Opposition parties, we support the Lords amendments.

I have taken the opportunity of the easing of some of the lockdown restrictions to get out and about in my constituency and speak to some of our local business owners who are beginning to reopen on the high street. It is quite a positive picture. Many of them have implemented diverse ways of selling to their customers and diversified their offering. They have got through the difficult stage of the lockdown and they are optimistic about the future, but I am conscious that that is not necessarily representative of all sectors and all parts of the country. The economic disaster that we are expecting as a result of the lockdown is really only just beginning to play out. In every news bulletin, we see more redundancies—Swissport yesterday, Royal Mail today—and we know that this is just the start. Therefore, it is incumbent on us all to be shrewd about the legislation that we need to pass to meet this challenge.

It is important that we strike a balance in the Bill between enabling the release of capital from companies that are going to fail, so that it can flow to new ventures with better prospects and secure future employment, and shoring up existing companies and jobs that will be viable once they can trade profitably again. For that reason, we welcome the moratorium provisions. We particularly welcome Lords amendments 67 to 71, which define the priority status of creditors and limit the powers of banks to take precedence in calling in their debt. That allows the moratorium to be more effective, as companies can then prioritise employees and other creditors.

I think that will be increasingly important not just once the immediate crisis has passed but in the coming years. TheCityUK estimates that there will be £100 billion of unsustainable lending in quarter 1 of 2021. That really does need to focus the mind, in respect of not only the Bill but future Government policy. The moratorium provisions will play a part in ensuring ongoing stability next year, but they would have been undermined if banks could not be restrained from taking their cut first, as the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) mentioned.

When businesses can function again after the crisis, it will be important above all to be able to protect jobs. We welcome the amendments that strengthen the protection of pension schemes in particular, but I echo what the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), said: it is disappointing that the Bill does not go further. We do, though, recognise the importance of speed. For that reason, we also welcome the amendments that extend the temporary provision to 30 September. We believe that to be a prudent decision.

I wish to take this opportunity to echo other Members' calls for measures for the theatre industry in particular. I have three theatres in my constituency and the industry is an important part of Richmond Park's society and culture. I emphasise the fact we are trying not only to meet the challenge of the coronavirus crisis but, for the first time in 40 years, to become an independent trading nation. We should focus on the fact that globally we have a massive competitive advantage with our theatrical industry. Our entire performing arts and cultural sector is something in which we are world beating. If we want to start to export the things that are greatest about Britain, we really must support the sector urgently.

As other Members have highlighted, our theatre sector is facing a crisis and needs an urgent bail-out. Not only is it so important for all the jobs and all the future income that it can bring—not just to individual communities but to the nation as a whole—but it is a seedbed for our film and TV industries, which are also world beating and will be looking to get back on their feet as soon as they are able. I particularly single out theatres for help because we have one in every community—even in the highlands of Scotland, as the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey pointed out—and they have a critical role in the community at this time. Not only can they shore up employment in local areas, but they can play a vital role in helping children to reconnect with the education on which they have missed out over the past three months. I hope the Minister agrees that that is of absolutely first priority across government at this time.

Our theatres have large spaces in which social distancing can be practised. They are experienced in education—the Orange Tree theatre in my constituency certainly has a very well-developed education programme—and can provide all kinds of programmes over the summer, particularly to help out young people who may have been unable to access online learning and perhaps do not engage well with traditional forms of learning. We have a fantastic opportunity to reconnect those young people with new ways of learning to stimulate their creativity.

Above all, when the lockdown is over—when we can communicate face to face with each other again—I want everybody to have the opportunity to experience a live performance, because we have all spent too long staring at our unresponsive laptop screens. We want live theatre, live music and visual arts. We want to reconnect face to face again. If we do not have a thriving theatre in every community, it will be much harder to deliver that. For the sake of the theatre industry and the benefits it can bring, not only in actual income but in projecting the United Kingdom to the world, which is more important now than it ever has been, I urge the Minister to make representations to the Government as a matter of absolute urgency to support the theatre industry.

Paul Scully: First, I thank for their contributions all right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken in this and previous debates on the Bill. Overall, it is reassuring to me, and I am sure to the country, to see that the House can come together to provide constructive and challenging scrutiny of important legislation while moving quickly towards agreement in the national interest. The amendments made to the Bill since we last saw it have strengthened its ability to deliver on its ultimate aim of supporting business and reducing the threat of insolvency faced by many during this challenging time.

I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) for her kind words about the engagement on the Bill. She highlighted the need to address sector-specific issues, including those faced by aerospace, the automotive sector and the steel industry. The measures in the Bill apply to companies across all sectors of the economy, including airlines and the automotive industry, provided they meet the relevant eligibility criteria, for example to enter into the moratorium. Ministers and officials are in regular contact with representatives of the steel industry and will continue to work closely with it to determine how steel companies can access the support required at this extremely challenging time.

We know that all sectors must get as much support as possible. As my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) said, we must also come back to a sense of business as normal, so that we can start to move through the gears to get the economic recovery that we all want to see, knowing that it will not happen overnight—there is no light-switch moment—but that we must all come together to make that happen.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central made the point that the financial market is changing rapidly, which is why there remains a regulation-making power in the Bill to adapt as markets do. She also raised the role of employees. My ministerial colleague Lord Callanan committed in the other place to the Government's plan to conduct a review of the permanent measures in the Bill within three years, with a focus on the impact on employees. We will not hesitate to make changes if that review suggests that there is a need to.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire asked about pensions. He is correct that the interaction between certain measures in the Bill and the pensions legislation gives rise to a number of complex issues. Setting out the detail in regulations will help us to ensure that the balance between trustees' rights as creditors and the Pension Protection Fund's interests can be achieved and quickly amended as case law relating to part 26A develops. The pensions framework is, to a great extent, set out in regulations, which allows the law to develop and respond to changes in the market. It is right and proper that the Pension Protection Fund and the Pensions Regulator are able to play a role in the new procedures when it is appropriate for them to do, and that is what the Government amendments allow.

The Pension Schemes Bill will be in the other place at the end of this month. That Bill builds on the Government's commitment to tighten the rules on abuse of pension schemes by improving the Pensions Regulator's power. My hon. Friend asked about the regulations that allow an extension of the temporary changes. Of course, where required, the Government will not hesitate to extend the measures, but we will not extend them

indefinitely. We will consider the individual merits of each measure before any further blanket extensions. As he said, it is important that business gets back to usual, but it is also important that shareholders get their say fully at an annual general meeting, as well as at shareholder days. Although we allow directors the leniency to concentrate on their own business rather than their responsibilities to Companies House, there comes a time when we must get back to business as usual, so that Companies House can record companies' measures.

Richard Fuller: I do not want to delay my hon. Friend's speech, but the point I was trying to make is that clarity about a change of rules is very important for directors, and that also applies to a change in regulations. If there is an extension, it needs the same debate and airing that we have had at this stage, and when these regulations end, that also needs to be communicated as clearly as possible.

Paul Scully: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. The Department and the Government have been engaging with businesses to try to give that clarity. It has not always been possible, as we move in real time. Those of us who run businesses are used to making decisions in real time. What we are doing at the moment is about as close to real time as it gets for a Government. Normally, consultations can take months, and policy changes can take years. We have been working from day to day sometimes.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) on his new grandson, Cameron—what a brilliant name. I do not know whether it was inspired by a former Prime Minister; maybe not. I hope that his joyous, optimistic and collaborative comments were not coloured by that fantastic news and that that relationship will carry on.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of HMRC's status in the Finance Bill. This is something that came up clearly through the procedure. It is a matter for my colleagues in Her Majesty's Treasury, but I can say that the role of HMRC is to ensure that tax paid by employees and customers rightly pays for public good. With regard to corporation taxes, HMRC's status remains the same. I appreciate his input and I am grateful for the way that he has engaged with me and the team. I agree that it is very important that we protect as many jobs as possible. I will continue to work with my colleagues to ensure that we are doing as much as we possibly can to protect the jobs of the young, and the less young.

1 pm

Drew Hendry: I am grateful to the Minister for his kind comments. I would say in passing that there has to be at least one good Cameron mentioned in this House.

I have asked about a range of things, in addition to the HMRC issue, that are not within the Minister's direct power. One of them was supporting minor changes to borrowing powers to allow the Scottish Government to take decisions themselves to support economies locally. That is important, as he said. Will he take that forward with his colleagues, to make sure that we can have those measures taken in Scotland?

Paul Scully: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Clearly, these are all things that we will continue to look at.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the hospitality sector. Let me reassure him that the Government recognise that this sector is particularly hard hit by closure. I have regular conversations with representatives of the hospitality sector, including, most recently, only yesterday. They were very pleased and optimistic about the fact that we have now been able to change the rules within England and start giving them the certainty that they need to reopen. I look forward to successful reopening in England and, in time, in Scotland as well. It is so important that we work with the hospitality sector. The three winters issue that he described has been raised with me and I do appreciate it.

This shows the interlinking of the economy. I also hold the position of Minister for London. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) talked about culture. With regard to the hotel sector in London, people do not tend to go to a hotel just to sleep in another bed—they come, they sleep and they go because of the theatres, the restaurants and the culture around the area. It is therefore important that we get each of these sectors up and running. That is why we have these frequent discussions and work as collaboratively as we can. That also gives us the understanding we need to inform our support. A range of hospitality bodies and companies were consulted on the safer workplaces guidance, for example.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park talked of striking a balance, which is what we have tried to do in this Bill. I am grateful to her colleagues for making the point so clearly that measures are needed for longer. I hope she will agree that the Government have taken on board those concerns. She also spoke about the theatre sector. I know the Orange Tree. I tend to know the Orange Tree pub next door a little bit better than I do the theatre, but I know the great work that it does in the community. I will take her concerns back to colleagues.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the House of Commons Public Bill Office and the House Clerks for ensuring that this vital piece of legislation could be expedited through the House and consequently come into force as a matter of urgency. The support they have

provided has been invaluable. I thank the officials who have brought this legislation into existence: my Bill team of Andy Ormerod-Clarke, Muneera Lula, Jess Bradbury, James Roddy and Alice Roycroft. All those in the teams in BEIS and the Insolvency Service—there are too many mention—have worked tirelessly, across weekends and in the evenings, to make sure that we could bring this to bear as quickly as possible. I want to mention the lawyers who have worked day and night, some of them with very young children, to draft this legislation: in particular, Jo Ashida, Denise Fawcett, Samihah El-Gindy, David Anderson, and our lead parliamentary counsel, Diggory Bailey.

I pay tribute to the policy leads, some of whom have worked in this area for many years, and who have worked with outside experts to make sure that we had the measures right: Steve Chown, Simon Whiting, Laura Bardsley, Rob Mak and many, many more. Colleagues from HMT, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions have also been invaluable. I pay tribute to all the organisations and representatives of businesses, consumers, workers, shareholders, investors and insolvency experts who have engaged with us in developing these proposals.

I conclude by mentioning those for whom this Bill is intended: the millions of business owners up and down our country who are keeping Britain moving. I say to them: please keep it up. Let us keep moving and let us bounce back our economy as and when the limitations and the restrictions are lifted.

Lords amendment 1 agreed to.

Lords amendments 2 to 116 agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am sure we all wish baby Cameron Hendry the very best of health and luck for the future.

I suspend the House for three minutes.

1.5 pm

Sitting suspended.

Health and Social Care Workers: Recognition and Reward

[Relevant documents: e-petitions 300073, 305219, 301948, 302897, relating to recognition and reward of health and social care workers.]

1.8 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petitions relating to the recognition and reward of health and social care workers.

The Petitions Committee is delighted to have been allocated this business time today. On behalf of more than 4.6 million people from across the country who have signed petitions relating to this pandemic and other issues, let me say that we hope this is now the first of many debates we will be able to have, as 29 petitions are waiting to be debated and more are heading toward the 100,000 signature threshold—the petitioners’ concerns must be heard.

I am honoured to be leading this debate today on recognising and rewarding our health and social care workers. Indeed, the first ever e-petition debate in Parliament was on contracts and conditions for NHS staff, back in September 2015. I also believe we could hold this debate 10 times over, to recognise the contribution of so many during what has been an incredibly challenging time for our country. I am thinking of those who have kept our public services going—those in the police, the fire service, local government and other Government Departments, who have been working tirelessly to ensure that the support that is needed gets to households and businesses—and those who have been working in our shops, ensuring that we can all get essential supplies. There are so many people to recognise and thank for their service.

It is absolutely right that every week for 10 weeks, we came together especially, as a country, on a Thursday evening at 8 o’clock to recognise and clap for our carers. It was incredibly moving every time. Taking a moment to stop and reflect on the lives lost to covid-19, but also on those many lives saved through the tremendous skill, care and sacrifice of health and social care workers right across our country, we must never forget a frontline on which more than 331 NHS and care workers across the UK died as a result of covid-19. Indeed, it is concerning that we do not know exactly how many health and care workers have sadly lost their lives, because the Government are not producing consistent figures. That is one of the things that I ask the Minister to update the House on in her response.

Yet, as so many people have contacted me to say, those same people have been saving lives and caring for us day after day, long before this horrendous virus presented itself. It is absolutely right that we should clap and thank them for their extraordinary service during this period, but we must also recognise that a clap and a thank you is not enough. It was not enough before this pandemic, and it certainly is not enough now.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend join me in commending the Welsh Labour Government who recognised the efforts of care workers in Wales during covid by paying them £500 more? Many people could benefit from that. Will she also join me in calling for the Government not to make them pay tax on that £500?

Catherine McKinnell: I am sure we will hear much more about the work of different parts of our NHS and the support being given in different ways to the extraordinary contribution that our health and social care workers are making.

There are clearly still huge challenges ahead for our country. We remain in the grip of one of the greatest challenges to our way of life in a lifetime. In recent weeks, more than 290,000 people have signed parliamentary petitions calling on the Government to reward those caring for us and our loved ones at this time of national need. I am sure that colleagues have received many messages and emails about this, as I have.

Last week, one of my constituents wrote to me:

“I am confined to the Freeman”—

—a hospital in Newcastle—

“after a nasty fall. It has given me an opportunity to see the NHS up close and personal. I must say the nurses and others are amazing workers. Doing more than they need without complaint. Their only beef is doing everything masked all the time. However, they keep the rules throughout long shifts. They should be properly rewarded for such skilled and professional work.”

Another said:

“What I hope for now is less posturing and instead some competent administration. Recognise the contribution of those who continue to work on the frontline. At the very least they must have proper working conditions, remuneration and PPE—and no-one working in the NHS or in a caring role should be asked to pay a surcharge.”

There is clearly widespread agreement across this House that health and care workers deserve recognition, but the question is, how do we best do that? Some have suggested medals or honours. In a statement last month, the Prime Minister said:

“The honours system recognises exceptional contributions made across every part of the UK and will play a key role in demonstrating the nation’s gratitude to all those involved in the response.”—[*Official Report*, 20 May 2020; Vol. 676, c. 32WS.]

He has also said that the Government will consider the creation of a new medal for healthcare workers. That call has been echoed by *The Mirror* newspaper, with its “Give NHS Heroes a Medal” campaign, which has picked up lots of support, from politicians and trade unions to doctors’ leaders and footballers.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): While I hear everything my hon. Friend says about medals, I am sure she will agree that medals do not put food on the table, and there are many people working in our NHS and social care who work through agencies and are paid the minimum wage or less. Does she agree that that is what needs to be righted?

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend anticipates my next comment, because that idea is receiving a mixed reception. One NHS worker wrote to me:

“I’ve heard whisperings of NHS staff getting medals after the pandemic. Please don’t let this happen! It’s utterly ridiculous; when we are working in understaffed and under resourced settings for money to be spent on medals is outrageous! No one wants that. We’d rather the money go towards improving staff car parking or access to hot food if anything!”

Another constituent wrote to me to say:

“pay rise for the NHS and care workers. They do not need medals.” While medals and honours have a place in recognising exceptional achievements, there is clearly also a need for

true recognition of their bravery and resilience during this crisis, and also for the amazing job they do every single day.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I want to begin by stating an interest: my sister Kathleen and her daughter Chloe both work in the care system. Does the hon. Lady agree that what is missing here is political will, in talking about decent pay that tries to measure the value of the work they do? As of 1 April, the Scottish Government gave an immediate 3.3% pay rise to social care workers and are in the process of establishing a top-up fund for social care workers who contract covid-19 in the course of their duties. Does the hon. Lady agree that that kind of action should be replicated across the UK?

Catherine McKinnell: We will see if there is the political will when the Government respond to this debate today, and afterwards as well.

One of the petitions we are considering today, with over 162,000 signatures, calls for an increase in pay for NHS healthcare workers. They are doing tough work in very challenging circumstances, putting their lives on the line and for ever-squeezed pay. There have been calls for staff to get paid properly for all the hours they work, especially overtime, which really is not too much to ask.

The Royal College of Nursing has taken issue with recent claims by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care that nursing staff have received a “significant pay rise”. The college’s research shows average earnings for NHS staff have not kept pace with the cost of living since 2010. Ahead of the next pay round for 2021-22 it is calling for an

“honest dialogue...in valuing the nursing workforce”.

We know we have a shortage, and paying health workers properly is key to having the workforce we need. It would be a grave error by the Government if, following the crisis and the recession that we are already heading into, they look to balance the books on the backs of public sector staff in the way we saw after the banking crisis in 2010—the very same public sector workers we have been clapping for in gratitude for saving so many lives. Neither must we see a repeat of the junior doctors dispute, where staff were treated appallingly and morale was devastated as changes to pay and conditions were forced through.

While he and I would certainly disagree on the detail, I echo the comments made by the former Chancellor the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), calling on the current Chancellor to focus on growth, not austerity. We cannot cut our way out of this recession, and certainly not with cuts aimed at the very people who are getting us through this crisis.

Many medical students have also stepped up to support their future colleagues in fighting the virus. There are parliamentary petitions calling for reimbursing fees and reducing student loans. The Petitions Committee is conducting an inquiry into the wider impact of this crisis on students, as there has been unparalleled disruption to higher education.

Before this crisis, student finance reforms also impacted on the healthcare workforce. The decision to scrap NHS bursaries in England and replace them with loans led to applications falling by a quarter, and there are

almost 40,000 unfilled nursing posts. While that error has been partially corrected by the restoration of maintenance grants, this will not benefit current students.

One petitioner says that nurses

“will surely work tirelessly to do their best to keep the rest of us safe while at the same time they continue to be charged interest on these loans for a cost which they should not have been required to bear in the first place.”

Another, calling for the current intake to receive grants, says:

“Most student midwives and nurses in those intakes will leave university with at least £60,000 debt, despite having committed to a career in a valuable public service at a time when the NHS is in desperate need of more of them.”

Addressing student finance for healthcare students would be a way to both recognise the efforts of the current intake and help attract more to the profession, but unfortunately the insensitive comments of the Minister for Care recently are a bad start to this, so I urge the Government to do everything they can to rebuild trust.

But the most devastating impact of all has been in social care. Our care homes and their elderly and vulnerable residents have painfully borne the brunt of this crisis. More than 16,000 people have died from covid-19 in care homes, almost a third of all fatalities. Far from the Government wrapping a protective ring around care homes, in the early days of this crisis they were left exposed, without adequate PPE or testing for staff despite their desperate pleas. The human cost of this failure is harrowing.

The crisis has well and truly exposed how neglected our care system has become. Too many staff are low paid and on insecure contracts; too many have had to make choices between risking people’s lives, including their own, or going without pay. Many carers do not receive even the national minimum wage because they are not paid for travel or sleep time.

Campaigners, including the trade union Unison, have been calling for care workers to earn the real living wage of at least £10 an hour outside London. Working conditions and employment rights vary immensely between care providers and we need to see care workers properly recognised and rewarded for the vital work they do.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Given the sacrifices that care workers have already had to make, many with their lives given the shortage of PPE, does my hon. Friend agree that, going forward, particularly with the risk of a possible second wave of covid later in the year, the Government need to step up and make sure that care workers get not only the support and resources they need, but proper PPE in preparation for what could be a very difficult winter?

Catherine McKinnell: One petitioner summed it up by saying:

“I wish social care workers were considered as equally important as NHS staff.”

I think that that says it all.

Finally, across social care and the NHS, migrant workers are a key part of the workforce and make a huge contribution. The Prime Minister made the right decision to scrap the immigration health surcharge, but this must be fast tracked to include refunds for those who have already paid. Many are also worried about their visa renewal, which is stressful enough. The 12-month visa extension announced by the Home Office is welcome,

[Catherine McKinnell]

but it leaves out thousands of dedicated workers who are also working on the frontline. The extension should apply to all.

Many migrant workers in health and social care are stuck in limbo without indefinite leave to remain. The Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Physicians have called for indefinite leave to remain to be granted to all international health and care workers who have worked in the UK during the pandemic. Many migrant workers on the covid frontline are also subject to “no recourse to public funds”, which adds immense financial pressure, especially if they fall ill and have to self-isolate. Unison has called for the policy to be suspended. One petitioner said:

“I strongly believe the Government can do better than that one-year free automatic visa renewal for these NHS heroes. A grant of indefinite leave to remain or citizenship is not too much to ask to appreciate the covid-19 pandemic frontline fighters.”

We cannot expect migrant workers to put their lives at risk and help our nation fight this virus, and then expect them to pay through various means for the privilege of doing so.

In conclusion, the key issue at the heart of today’s debate is how we value our health and care staff and the tremendous work that they do. The pandemic has thrown their dedication, bravery and compassion into the national spotlight as they put their lives on the line, but this dedication is not new. They have been serving our country, day in, day out, long before this pandemic. I hope that this debate will be just the start of a proper conversation about how, as a country, we not only show our gratitude and appreciation for the work that they do but, take real action to make their job easier. For now, to all our doctors, nurses, carers, support staff, and every person working on the frontline during this pandemic, I say a heartfelt thank you to you all.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Given the popularity of this debate, we will have to impose a three-minute limit on speeches from the outset in order to get as many Members in as we possibly can.

1.22 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): First, let me place on the record my thanks to my constituents in Darlington who have taken time to sign petitions and to those who have emailed me to express their gratitude for the exceptional service of our NHS and social care workers. Today’s debate is an opportunity to place on the record both their thanks and my own for the tremendous work of the NHS not only during this pandemic, but every day and every night of every year.

Over the past few months, our nation has come together to save the NHS from being overwhelmed, but it has also united every Thursday with its clap for carers. Darlington’s own newspaper, *The Northern Echo*, recently published a supplement featuring the incredible work of our health and care workers, providing a permanent record of an army of previously unsung heroes, and I thank it for that recognition.

Throughout the period of the lockdown, I was in weekly contact with Sue Jacques, the chief executive of our local NHS trust based at Darlington Memorial

Hospital. Sue shared with me and other Members of this House from the region news of how the NHS locally was responding to the crisis. We were given updates on PPE supplies, which never ran out; numbers of covid patients they were treating; and many, many stories of service above self from the team. I want to place on the record my thanks to Sue for her leadership throughout the pandemic and for her open and transparent engagement with me. The entire team at County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust have been truly incredible and I thank them all.

I have been in regular contact with many throughout the care sector in my constituency over the past few months, and like the efforts that we have seen in the NHS, there has been incredible service, sacrifice and support for our elderly and vulnerable. I pay my thanks to them all for everything that they have done and are continuing to do.

In addition to the health and care community of Darlington, many hundreds of people have stepped up to the plate and gone above and beyond. There are literally hundreds of examples, but I particularly want to highlight the work of the Mowden pub and Maggie’s Place, the entertainment provided by Peter Miller, the exceptional service of Joanne Hammond and the efforts of Louise Graham and the team at Food for Thought. They truly are the best of us, and they have underpinned the efforts of all our key workers, not just those in the health and care sector. Again, I want to place on record my thanks to them on behalf of everyone in Darlington.

The NHS long-term plan sets out to make the NHS a world-class employer, and I understand that the NHS people plan will lay down how all NHS staff will be supported and recognised. I look forward to its publication. I fully endorse the steps that the Government have taken to support the families of the key health and care workers who have tragically lost their lives, with the commitment to the death in service award—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We must now move on.

1.25 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): May I say how delighted I am to be back in this place? For the last period of time, I have been working, rather like Harry Potter, under the stairs of my home in the highlands. Whether that has affected me as an hon. Member is up to others, from all parts of the Chamber, to decide.

By definition, health is devolved in Scotland, so my remarks will be pertinent to Scotland, but they may have a wider application to England. Of course, my colleague the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) will be enlarging on our party’s position in the rest of the UK. As my colleagues on the Back Benches have said, the notion of an award—a gong, a medal or a ribbon with something on the end of it—without a whole-scale review of pay and conditions is just not on.

I want to make several comments about conditions, and to quote two people. On occasion during the pandemic, from under my staircase in my home, I have telephoned Dr Alison Brooks of the Princes Street practice in Thurso, in the very far north of Scotland, and she gave me sage advice at all times. Today she said this to me about the nurses with whom she works. She knows of a

nurse—a friend of hers in Glasgow—who has worked 10 night shifts on the trot just to cover the job, because colleagues were sick. Dr Brooks said to me, “Remember, NHS staff don’t just walk away; they go above and beyond. They feel a moral obligation.”

Dr Brooks encouraged me to think about the toll that it takes on NHS staff when they know that they have been in a risk situation, albeit with the best of equipment, but they go back to their families, loved ones and young ones with the niggling fear at the back of their minds that they might bring the virus back with them. When we reflect on pay and conditions, we must think about how we cover sickness absence.

My second example is from a nurse from Wick in Caithness who worked in the high-dependency covid ward in Raigmore for the duration of the pandemic. This is what she wrote to me:

“My suggestion would be that there could be skills based tiers within bandings. For example: one for those who have little clinical responsibility and/or skills; one for those who have advanced clinical skills and responsibility.”

She says that the doctors cover the advanced stuff, but very often the doctor will have to cover the entire hospital, so they have to make clinical decisions. Perhaps remuneration for such people should be fine-tuned within the banding.

I conclude with this. When I was a councillor, a long time ago, my colleagues gave me the area chairmanship of social work because they thought that nobody else would want it. Remember that social work may be seen as a Cinderella service, and we must sort that out in the review.

1.28 pm

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): I would like to place on record my thanks to everyone who works at Peterborough City Hospital, the North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust, Caroline Walker and her team, my local clinical commissioning group, everyone at Peterborough City Council, all the GP surgeries in Peterborough and all the community pharmacies in Peterborough who have worked so hard to get us through this tough time.

I want to focus my remarks on home care and domiciliary care workers. If we want parity of esteem between social care workers and NHS workers, and there is a conflict there, we need the same parity of esteem between care workers who work in care homes and those who help people in their own homes.

I have heard many personal stories, both good and bad, as a member of the Health and Social Care Committee and in my work as the constituency MP for Peterborough. I remember talking to Richard, who told me that he felt that it was almost cheating to call what he did “work”, because he spent lots of his time talking to friends—the people he cared for. Mel told me that she would always recommend social care as a career, despite some of the challenges that she has, but too often we hear bad stories about the experiences of staff who work in domiciliary care. People were being tutted at for wearing their uniform out in public—there is a lack of understanding that domiciliary care workers wear their uniforms as they travel between clients’ homes.

Understanding is key to all this, because lots of people still call this low-skilled work, not understanding that domiciliary care work involves administering medicines and doing other complex tasks. A domiciliary care worker

needs to be a real people’s person, and they are often hidden heroes in our communities. My father died relatively recently. He was a strong and independent man. Domiciliary care workers cleaned him, dressed him and gave him back his dignity, and my mother and I can never say thank you enough for that.

Home care is the biggest part of the social care sector and it employs hundreds of thousands of people. I would like to ask three questions in the time remaining. We talk a lot about valuing our social care staff and parity of esteem, but how can we resolve this problem relating to the value of NHS and social care workers? What can we do that is concrete? Would it be right for local authorities to pay for social care activities? Can we do better by looking at outcomes? Finally, can we look to integrate our NHS and social care workforce as they have in Denmark?

1.31 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I am pleased to be able to speak in this important debate, supported by millions of people across the country, including some in my constituency. Nothing we do will ever truly recognise our care workers for what they do, but the Government must acknowledge their sacrifices and their dedication and commitment. As Ministers and Members from across the House have acknowledged time and again during the pandemic, these are truly exceptional times. Our NHS and care workers across the UK are doing truly exceptional work, so often invisible to the vast majority of us.

It has never been more important than now to recognise the invaluable contribution our care workers make, especially those who are not paid properly for their sacrifices and the often difficult and long hours they work to support those in need, families and local communities. I pay tribute to the Welsh Labour Government for leading the way, as ever, in recognising care workers. In April, the Welsh Government agreed a £500 payment and subsequently agreed that it will apply not only to carers in Wales, but to cooks, cleaners and a range of other key frontline staff working on the frontline in care who make an immeasurable contribution to the health and wellbeing of those most in need.

I urge the UK Government to do the right thing, make an exception in this case and allow care workers to keep the entire £500 one-off payment in recognition of their efforts not only during the pandemic, but all year round. To do anything less is an insult to the sacrifices they have made and the pressure that they put themselves under to care for those most in need during such a difficult time. I ask the Minister to confirm that she will make representations to the Treasury in this regard and will indeed allow carers in Wales to receive the full £500 in recognition of their amazing efforts during the pandemic, and remove the tax requirement in this case.

The Welsh Government have arranged for payment to thank care workers, despite operating on a budget from Westminster that has been subjected to a decade of harsh austerity. As we have heard, there are many ways in which the UK Government can give proper recognition to the many thousands of people working in social care across the country, rather than simply clapping on a Thursday night. The Government should

[Gerald Jones]

fully recognise the work of care staff and, at the very least, increase pay, testing and the provision of PPE for NHS and care workers immediately to ease the immense pressure on the shoulders of many who provide care to those in need, allowing them to feel safe, given the many risks they face day to day, not only on the frontline during the pandemic but throughout the year. I urge the Government to act and I hope the Minister will respond accordingly.

1.34 pm

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): We have been fighting a war in Rother Valley over the past few months. Our enemy has been the coronavirus and we have all made great sacrifices. No one has sacrificed more than our incredible health and social care workers, who have put everything on the line to defeat this terrible virus. I speak from personal experience: my mother-in-law, Joyce, works in the NHS, and our family has shared the anxiety and worry that health professionals' families are experiencing up and down the country.

Paul Bristow: May I place on record my thanks to my hon. Friend's mother-in-law, Joyce, who I believe works at Peterborough City Hospital?

Alexander Stafford: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) for his kind words. I thank all the people who work in the NHS. Without their dedication and experience, we would not be in the position we are in today. The British people owe those heroes an eternal debt of gratitude. Thanks to them, and to the Government's strong and decisive actions, Britain is recovering day by day.

I pay tribute to the health and social care workers of Rother Valley. Once again, they have risen to the challenge and proven themselves to be the backbone of our community. Likewise GPs, such as those at the Stag medical centre and the Swallownest health centre, have been working hard to continue to treat people throughout the pandemic. I was moved by a recent letter from one of my constituents, Graham Makin, notifying me of the phenomenal work carried out by the care workers at Waterside Grange care home in Dinnington, who are looking after his wife during this crisis. Graham writes:

"the outstanding dedication and incredible expertise that all the staff give to the residents. It is very close to a 'family' environment. To them this is not a job—certainly not for the money they earn—it is truly a vocation and a passion."

Graham is of course right. He goes on to urge a better deal for those in the care sector. I am delighted that the Prime Minister has made social care a priority and pledged to consider social care as being of equal importance to the NHS. I know that everyone in this House and across our nation wants us to get social care done.

However, we must not forget that behind our health and social care workers there are many others in the community who have helped the NHS. Robert Holland, an engineer from Dinnington, offered to use his engineering expertise to convert tyre inflation equipment to hospital ventilators. Cawthorne's Travel has been laying on free buses to take NHS workers to Rotherham General Hospital. Local groups, such as the Thurcroft coronavirus action group, led valiantly by Cath MacCartan and

Diane Oxley, have been doing such great work for our community. Those selfless actions are just the tip of the iceberg in Rother Valley.

I ask the House how best we can recognise and reward health and social care workers, but also those who have done so much to help the NHS. People in Rother Valley have already taken this matter in their own hands. For example, coaches, parents and players of Laughton FC's under-11s have already been fundraising for hampers for NHS workers. Mark Kelsall from Maltby has been creating wonderful oil paintings of local NHS staff. Shaun and Halle Salmon created an amazing Lego superhero mural that is now in the reception of Rotherham Hospital. Those are just a few ways that the people of Rother Valley have given back. For my part, I am proud to have instituted the Rother Valley hero awards for this very purpose.

I contend that nationally we must do the same by rewarding campaign medals to our British heroes who have fought the virus. My constituent Andrew Gardner of Thurcroft suggested to me that we should hold a memorial event for health and social care workers, which would take place in Whitehall much like the events on Remembrance Sunday. I believe that that proposal merits serious consideration and should be taken forward. Ultimately, it is of the utmost importance that the House pursues all avenues, including looking at pay and rewards, in recognising and rewarding the heroism of our health and social care workers and the selflessness of those who have helped the NHS both in Rother Valley and across the United Kingdom. Without them, we would not have been able to pull through this crisis.

1.38 pm

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): I rise to speak on behalf of the 434 residents in the Pontypridd constituency who have signed the petitions relating to the recognition and reward of health and social care workers. It is clear that the creation of the NHS is undoubtedly the Labour party's greatest ever achievement and one that I will always personally champion. I hope colleagues on all Benches will indulge me as I also use today's debate to celebrate the 20th birthday of NHS Direct Wales, which is taking place this week.

It is all too easy to reduce the NHS workforce to doctors and nurses, but given that there are around 400 different job roles in our NHS, it is important that all NHS staff are given the credit they deserve for their incredible work all year round. Among many others, the porters, cleaners, caterers, healthcare assistants, allied health professionals and the many invaluable volunteers who give up their free time truly are the unsung heroes of our NHS. The coronavirus pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to truly show our thanks and appreciation. Call me old-fashioned, but I am not sure that a handclap or a medal quite cuts it. I wonder whether the Minister would be satisfied with a handclap or a pat on the back instead of receiving her additional ministerial salary—something tells me the answer is no.

Naturally, as a proud Welsh valleys woman, it would be wrong—rude, even—for me not to take the opportunity today to highlight how different things are across the border, thanks to the fantastic Welsh Labour Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) said, the Welsh Labour

Government are leading the way in the response to the coronavirus pandemic. They say that where Wales leads, England follows, and I am more than inclined to agree.

Thanks to the Welsh Labour Government, social care and domiciliary care workers in Wales, including agency workers and support staff in care homes such as kitchen workers and cleaners will soon receive a diolch or thank-you payment of up to £500—a payment that will be available to 64,600 care home workers and domiciliary care workers throughout Wales. That comes after the Welsh Labour Government have already pledged to commit an incredible £40 million of extra funding for adult social care services, to help meet the extra costs associated with the response to the pandemic.

Clearly, that payment is a reward in recognition of the unprecedented circumstances and strain that have been placed on all our NHS staff across the Union, from Pontypridd in south Wales to Perth in Scotland. It is even clearer to me that this payment should be exempt from income tax and national insurance contributions—something that the Welsh Labour First Minister and colleagues in the House have been calling for. So far, Her Majesty's Treasury has point-blank refused—talk about a kick in the teeth for workers who have literally put their lives on the line to keep us all safe. NHS workers in Pontypridd and throughout Wales deserve better.

Colleagues will be aware that, thanks to another fantastic Labour-led campaign, the Prime Minister was forced to U-turn again this week. He is running in circles. If the Minister needs any information on Wales and how we can best tackle the coronavirus pandemic, I am more than happy to offer my services; she knows where to find me. I hope that where Wales leads, England will follow.

1.41 pm

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): I want to place on record my thanks to the pharmacists, GPs, hospital staff and everyone in between across Watford for the amazing work they have done recently and over many years. I sit on the Health Committee—now the Health and Social Care Committee, importantly—which has given me great insight into the challenges that the health and social care sector has faced over the past few months. Over the past 10 or 11 weeks, I have also been a volunteer at Watford General Hospital, literally on my knees cleaning Zimmer frames at times and carrying water to staff. I have been proud to be part of the volunteer hub there, alongside people like Monica, Theo, George, Denise, Linda and so many more who are offering their time for free to help our brave NHS staff as they tackle this terrible pandemic. The hospital has also been working closely with Watford football club, which has provided amazing facilities, including a sanctuary for staff's mental health.

During this time, I have also been listening. One of our jobs as parliamentarians is to listen. What I have been hearing is that the pandemic has shown how this Government are trying to be innovative, trying to use technology in different ways and, ultimately, trying to unbind the red tape that has held back so many people on the frontline. For so long, we have been stuck in a process of looking at points and targets, and we have forgotten what frontline workers really want. They want respect. They want trust. They want us to cut through the red tape, so that they can get on with their jobs

across the health and social care sector. I am hearing loud and clear that, during this pandemic, we have enabled that to happen because we have had to, but we need to continue that.

We also need to listen to what staff really want. I had an eye-opening moment when I was delivering sandwiches to one of the wards, and the nurse said, "Don't worry about the sandwiches—we're getting fed over at Watford football club. We get delicious pizza over there, so we probably won't eat those." That really opened my eyes to the fact that, while salary is critical, this is also about what life is like on the frontline day after day.

We need to listen to what staff really want, and that is partly about career pathways and opportunities such as sabbaticals after 10 years of working in the same job. It is about corporate discounts, working with the private sector to enable not just NHS staff but social care workers to have free opportunities and discounts and go to the front of the queue. It is also about innovation and the use of data and technology. I believe that, if we look at all those things, although it may not happen overnight—it might take years, perhaps even decades—we can really make a change for the better for all our brave staff and be, not just the biggest employer, but the best employer in the world.

1.44 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): It has been said many times, but we should never tire of saying that our NHS and care workers are true heroes and that we are incredibly grateful for their skill, dedication, selflessness and sacrifice. We came out on Thursday evenings to applaud them; now it is time to build a system that rewards them with more than applause. That is why it is important that the Government put their money where their mouth is and start to recognise them, as hundreds of thousands of people in each of these petitions have called for. After a decade of austerity, the NHS and social care system is on its knees. The Government were already missing A&E targets as far back as 2015. We know that the NHS has vacancies of 100,000 and that NHS trusts are £1.23 billion in deficit, which needs to be addressed quickly so that they can get on with the job of protecting us. Then there is the mental health crisis.

Across the NHS and care system, there is the scourge of low pay. Unison predicts that we will need another 1 million extra care workers by 2025. It is vital that we learn the lessons now and ensure that we have a resilient, well-resourced, effective NHS, where people are properly rewarded and have their skills and expertise recognised, rather than being treated shoddily, which is what we have seen.

We also need the Government to ensure that junior doctors are properly rewarded. The Government's behaviour in recent years has been appalling, yet the doctors, nurses and carers have been the people on the frontline, saving people's lives and protecting us. We also know that black, Asian and minority ethnic NHS and care workers have had the highest death rate, yet the Government have been inadequate in protecting them. To be frank, the Government have treated them like cannon fodder and the fact that they do not have proper recommendations for those workers is scandalous. They need to get a grip before more lives are lost.

[*Rushanara Ali*]

If the Minister for Care thinks that health and care workers should be protected, she should act instead of saying appalling things about them. I hope she will apologise for the remarks she made recently about care staff. The point is that we need to ensure that, when the crisis eases, this Government do not forget the sacrifice and commitments that people in the NHS and care system have made and that they act to ensure those people are properly rewarded, properly recognised and protected.

1.47 pm

Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con): It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak in this debate on behalf of the many vital care workers and NHS staff in my constituency. I therefore begin by putting on record, on behalf of everybody in Bridgend, our sincere and heartfelt thanks for everything carers and NHS staff are doing. They do a fantastic job, delivering world-class care. Even with increasing pressures due to, among other things, an ageing population and changing public expectations, they work incredibly hard, always putting patients first and keeping them safe while providing the high-quality care we have all come to expect.

Alex Davies-Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in order to reward and recognise these care workers in Wales, the £500 money that has been given to them by the Welsh Labour Government should be exempt from tax and national insurance by the UK Tory Government?

Dr Wallis: I agree with the hon. Lady, and I have been talking to Her Majesty's Treasury about it. I was disappointed in the response that I got from Welsh Labour Ministers when a perfectly reasonable suggestion was put forward on how care workers could receive the net amount of £500; I would be happy to forward that correspondence to her after this debate.

It is vital that we continue to break down some of the long-standing barriers between health and social care. We have learnt the importance of both of these sectors over the past few months, and our appreciation must go equally to all carers. They play a crucial role in managing the complex care needs of thousands of people every single day. Even with the additional risks they take, they continue to work so hard to support the people we all care about in these unprecedented times.

If there is some positivity to hopefully come out of this horrendous time, it is how it has highlighted to us all that the social care sector does so much. We are now all well aware that, without them, our communities and our loved ones would suffer. I have received many tributes to our carers. Indeed, the Porthcawl male voice choir, of which I am vice chair—not a participant, the House will be pleased to know—have produced a wonderfully emotional and heartfelt video to say thank you, and I encourage others to watch it. It bears a fitting strength of feeling, recognising how proud we are of our carers during this global crisis.

I was also delighted to see the personal message that Ant and Dec sent to all the care staff in the Princess of Wales Hospital, and I will end with their words:

“We just wanted to say thank you so much for all the hard work you're doing every day on behalf of the whole country, and we would like to send you lots and lots of love. Keep up the good work.”

1.50 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): All sides of the House have rightly recognised the immense sacrifice and service to this country made by our health and care workforces, but it is now time to put our money where our mouths are and start to recognise and reward those staff. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches have argued through this crisis for a package of frontline support, including something akin to the deployment allowance given to the military frontline. We should have a frontline service award of a daily allowance during this crisis, but beyond that, this is not the time for a pay freeze. Negotiations on public sector pay must reflect the service and sacrifice that many on the frontline have made for us and our loved ones.

In social care, many do not work in the public sector. Two million people in care jobs are largely on the minimum wage. Half are on zero-hours contracts, yet they are undertaking highly skilled work, taking care of the most vulnerable and providing intimate care. They are often not paid benefits or for travel time, which can be significant in London. It is possible to earn more money stacking shelves in Tesco. It is important to recognise that they have very few career prospects and little training. The pay differential between care workers with less than a year of experience and those with more than 20 years' experience has now reduced to just 15p an hour. That is because of the funding crisis in social care, which is keeping those wages down. The case for ensuring that our care workers are at the very least paid the real living wage is overwhelming and a moral imperative.

In the longer term, to tackle the workforce crisis and put social care on an equal footing with the NHS, pay scales must be reviewed and ideally aligned with the NHS, but that obviously needs to go hand in hand with tackling the long-term funding crisis in social care. Those reforms are well overdue.

We know there is a huge number of migrant workers in social care and in the NHS. The figure is one in seven in the NHS and one in six in the care workforce. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches have argued through the crisis that the cruel policy of no recourse to public funds must be suspended. That is particularly relevant for those on the frontline who may be reticent to take time off or self-isolate because they are only eligible for statutory sick pay, which, frankly, is not enough to live on. A number of other benefits are not available to them, but, most importantly, when people have put their lives on the line for us and our loved ones, we must recognise those workers by granting them indefinite leave to remain. A visa extension is not enough. It is not enough to just take their service and say, “Bye bye. Thank you very much.” We have a moral responsibility to allow them to stay.

1.54 pm

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): I hope you will join me, Mr Speaker, in paying tribute to the incredible work of care workers across Beaconsfield. In Denham Manor, Lent Rise House and Chiltern House in Gerrards Cross, countless hours and much time has been spent. They have been the real heroes in Bucks, and I pay tribute to them, but I also want to look at how we distribute funding for our care workers.

We have always looked at adult social care as being on the bottom tier of the ladder in terms of the NHS

funding allocation, and I would like to see it brought up to the top. I would like to see it given equal footing with the NHS to allow for career progression and for the statutory duty that councils now have to take on. That should be reflected in the money that is allocated to councils to carry out their care responsibilities.

We have gotten through this crisis, and I pay tribute to my local council and Bucks clinical commissioning group, but we need to look at how we can give care workers the respect and the pay that they deserve as we move forward. The money comes from the same pot, but we need to look at how it is allocated. I hope the Minister will join me in looking at how we can help give people in the care sector career progression, the pay they deserve and respect for the jobs that they hold.

1.55 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): I begin by thanking every single health and care worker in my constituency of Coventry South. They have gone over and beyond to keep us safe and healthy. I know that I speak on behalf of all of Coventry when I say thank you. They have faced this crisis with incredible strength, selflessness and determination. At its height, millions of people across the country went out every Thursday to clap for health and care workers. Now it is our responsibility to match that appreciation with meaningful action—with NHS staff and carers getting the real pay rise and recognition that they so richly deserve.

The simple truth is that NHS staff and carers have been failed for far too long. Since 2010, newly qualified nurses have faced an 8% pay cut. Half of frontline carers are paid less than the minimum wage and years of devastating cuts to the NHS and neglect of care work have left us all more vulnerable to a pandemic. We saw that with the PPE shortages in hospitals when the crisis hit. We saw that when doctors and nurses repeatedly—desperately—asked for testing, only to be told that there was not capacity. We saw it again with black and ethnic minority NHS workers killed by coronavirus at a disproportionately higher rate, exposing the inequalities that lie at the heart of our society.

Let me go through some of the experiences that my constituents who work in our health and care system have told me of. There are migrants who work on the frontline, but have been hit by the hostile environment and burdened with visa fees and health surcharges. There are NHS staff who, until recently, were forced to pay obscene parking charges at University Hospital Coventry—in some cases, almost £500 a year. These charges are exploitatively set by private companies that are making profits on the back of our workers.

There are nurses robbed of NHS bursaries, leading to a 32% decrease in nursing applicants nationwide. Now we have an overstretched and overworked workforce, with more than 7,500 nursing vacancies in the midlands alone, which has been called a “full-blown crisis” by the Royal College of Nursing. Then there are the A&E workers, who face a mental health crisis, with one of my constituents describing their work as heart-breaking and soul-destroying and their work environment as a war zone.

Those are just some of the wrongs done to the NHS and care workers in my constituency. I urge the Government, who clapped for them through this crisis, to match that with action: give our carers, nurses, porters and cleaners a real pay rise; end poverty wages in the NHS and care

work; ensure that they are all on good contracts with no more precarious work; give indefinite leave to remain to all migrant workers; and restore the NHS to a truly public service, free from privatisation and run for the public good, not private profit.

1.58 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): NHS and domiciliary care workers in Warrington have been on the frontline of our national effort to control coronavirus. They have been there for every family in their time of need. It is right that they get the reward and recognition that they deserve. I thank everyone in Warrington South who signed the petition.

In our community, district nurses from the Bridgewater NHS trust, our village and town GPs, along with doctors, nurses, cleaners, porters and healthcare assistants from Warrington Hospital, have all worked alongside social carers and mental health teams at the North West Boroughs NHS trust. The leadership in Warrington has meant that the supply of PPE has continued uninterrupted, urgent A&E services have been maintained and the number of high-dependency beds has increased, so that everyone who needs care gets it. Hospitals have collaborated. I want to recognise Professor Simon Constable, chief executive officer of Warrington Hospital, who has led the fight against covid-19 from the front.

One group we should single out is the infection control teams, not just in Warrington but across the country, who have worked around the clock in hospitals to keep areas clean and to minimise the spread. I also want to pay tribute to the nursing and care staff at Spire Cheshire Hospital in Warrington. It has turned its operating theatres over to the national health service so that urgent cancer care and trauma operations can continue in a non-covid hospital environment. Our health and care workers, and social care workers, have been one team, dedicated and working together to do the best for everyone in our community, through our national health service.

I do not underestimate how challenging the recent months have been for health and social care staff in Warrington. I saw this at first hand as a member of my family was hospitalised with covid-19. I also saw the dedication and care that was given to her in the most difficult circumstances, and I am incredibly thankful for their heroic efforts. I also want to remember and give thanks for three nurses, Jo Habab, Andy Collier and Janice Glassey, who worked for our local NHS trusts and have, sadly, succumbed to this dreadful virus. I am sure the thoughts of this House and everyone in Warrington go to their families at this difficult time.

Life in our hospitals has been made just a little easier by the tremendous efforts and generous giving of our community. Last week, I met the aircrews from Manchester airport who were operating Project Wingman, where pilots and cabin crew were caring for our nurses and our doctors in their staff lounges. The Sikh community have delivered 13,000 meals free of charge to our NHS staff, turning up every week without fail.

To conclude, I put on record my thanks and incredible appreciation for our teams in Warrington.

2.1 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I speak today in favour of a pay increase for NHS

[Abena Oppong-Asare]

healthcare workers. More than 500 constituents have signed the petition calling on the Government to recognise the hard work and sacrifice of healthcare workers with a pay increase. I completely agree that those working in the health and social care sector deserve a pay increase, not only as a recognition of their hard work during the crisis, but as a necessary step towards ensuring their future wellbeing.

For years, this Government have stood by as our NHS and care staff have given their all to provide a great healthcare service while their families fall further into poverty. In 2018, we saw a rise in the number of nurses using food banks, with one study finding that 38% of nurses struggle to buy food and that 50.5% had considered quitting their profession because of financial difficulties. More than half of all care workers are paid less than the real living wage and these workers are four times more likely to be on a zero-hours contract than the average worker.

This pay rise is not just about rewarding people for their hard work; it is about recognising the real and negative impact that low pay has had on our health and social care workers. Some 15% of workers in low-quality, low-paid jobs say that they have poor-quality health, which compares with a figure of 7% for those in good working environments. Covid-19 has thrived on inequality, with people in the poorest parts of England twice as likely to die from covid-19. Perhaps there is some correlation between that fact and the fact that our poorly paid social care workers are almost twice as likely to die from covid-19. Ensuring that health and social care staff work in a high-quality and well-paid environment benefits us all.

Covid-19 has highlighted how much the UK needs a well-functioning NHS and social care system, and how lucky we are to have access to healthcare. However, organisations are already warning of mass vacancies in the future. How are the Government planning to fulfil their promise, as well as to recruit more than 100,000 employees to the care sector, given that what they are offering is low-paid, high-stress, insecure work? I have been contacted throughout this crisis by many constituents urging me to support a pay rise for workers in the healthcare sector. Today, I am asking the Government to show all the hard-working NHS and social care staff in Erith and Thamesmead, and across the UK, the support they deserve and to give them this much-needed pay rise.

2.4 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I thank all the people who have signed the petitions that we are debating for expressing their support for NHS and social care staff and for the generosity of spirit that they have shown. It has given everyone in this place another chance to show our appreciation for NHS and social care staff. From working alongside colleagues, I know that it makes a difference: they notice these things.

We have seen an astonishing contribution over recent months, but many NHS and social care staff make fantastic contributions every day as part of their normal work. People go into the NHS and social care with open eyes—they are not naive about what their roles entail—but that does not mean that we should not try harder to understand better how some roles and areas of work do

not give staff the work-life balance that we would expect or the ability to deliver the care that we would want them to be able to deliver. As the workforce more generally moves towards greater flexibility and better work-life balance, NHS and social care staff will increasingly compare their work experiences and will perhaps not recommend that future generations go down the same route. We must tackle that.

That is why I am glad that at the most recent election the Government made some incredibly ambitious commitments for NHS staffing levels, particularly GP and nursing staff levels. The successful delivery of those goals will make an enormous difference. To get there, the Government will really have to get to grips with recruitment and retention in the NHS in a way that in recent years no party has done. We have made some good progress already: we have seen some good figures today on the increases in NHS and doctor numbers; junior doctors' pay scales will have increased by at least 8% by 2023; and nurses will have received increases of between 6.5% and 9% by next year. The reward package also includes things such as pensions, some of which are the best available: members of the scheme can generally expect to receive £3 to £6 in pension benefits for every £1 that they contribute.

This is not just about pay, though. For example, in GP practice we see an enormous shift among new recruits to part-time work, because people want more flexibility. They want to live a different style of life, and that will have an enormous impact on the workforce across NHS. I want to use the focus on NHS and social care staff that has come about in the light of the pandemic and the extraordinary contributions that have been made to get everybody in this place to engage with the significant workforce challenges that we will face given an ageing population and an increase in demand.

Pay is never easy for any Government—there is always a need to look after the nation's finances—but a recognition of the important role that healthcare can have in stimulating the economy and creating jobs and innovation should be given greater weight in the Treasury's calculations. We do not yet know what the underlying finances are going to be in future years, as all the impacts of the pandemic play out, but within those constraints I want the Government to do everything they can to go as far as they can to reward and recognise the contribution of NHS and social care staff.

2.6 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I agree with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) that pay is difficult to sort out because it is often systemic, but it needs to be fair.

I speak today solely about contract staff in the NHS, although I associate myself with the comments made by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) about the similar situation in the social care sector. I am not talking about those who are directly employed; I am talking for myself and on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who is unable to speak because of shielding, about the thousands of staff working on outsourced contracts who are paid considerably less—often lower than the minimum wage—and who have fewer rights to sick leave; who have much less job security, if any; who are often on zero-hours or uncertain contracts; and who are disproportionately from black, Asian and

minority ethnic backgrounds. I pay tribute to the GMB trade union for highlighting how many agency workers were going to work sick because they had to choose between working and paying their basic bills. The move to a secure sick pay is a start, but it is not enough and it is not yet firmed up for the long term.

Homerton University Hospital in my constituency is an excellent hospital that does great work, but it is now in the throes of agreeing a five-year extension to a contract for hospital cleaners and other ancillary staff employed by ISS. My right hon. Friend and I are concerned about such a long extension leaving key workers on low pay without the protection and recognition that NHS employed staff have, but the real issue is systemic: it is not about the individual trusts but about how the Government choose to fund hospitals, such that from day one they cannot fund their full staff complement. The NHS systemically is funded such that it bakes in the assumption of low-paid, insecure workers on outsourced contracts. As of 2018-19, for which we have the most recent figures to be audited, the combined deficit of trusts in England was £844 million—up £86 million from the year before. That is the heart of the problem.

My right hon. Friend and I are really clear that the Government need to foster a system that is not reliant on low pay. So low-paid are these workers, the irony is that their pay is topped up by taxpayer-funded universal credit and other benefits. We are both clear that if people are facing the same risk, they should have the same reward. This inequality cannot continue, and if we are to learn anything from the covid-19 crisis, it is that we need to level up so those who work for the lowest pay—poverty pay—are getting a fairer deal.

2.10 pm

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this important debate. The “Protect the NHS” slogan represented the very real danger, at the beginning of this pandemic, that the health service might be overwhelmed. That did not happen, I believe, for two reasons: because the public adhered to the strong public health messaging and because our NHS staff stepped up to the challenge.

As the Member of Parliament for Gedling, I receive regular updates from Amanda Sullivan, from NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire CCGs, and Tracy Taylor, the chief executive of Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust. I would like to thank them for their work in updating me. I was amazed in those updates at the very hard work being done throughout the county, such as working rapidly to expand intensive care capacity and ensuring that the demand for PPE across the county was being met.

I would like to put on record my thanks to the doctors, nurses, GPs, pharmacists, care home workers and other key workers who have worked hard for their dedication. It is clear to me that that dedication and hard work is widely appreciated. As I have walked through my home town of Arnold, I have been amazed at the drawings of rainbows in front windows, showing support for key workers and offering hope for a better time to come.

That better time will, of course, require a strong economy to generate revenues for our public services. I am pleased that, because of that, we have been able to

offer a 6.5% pay rise for all staff on the “Agenda for Change” pay scales, including nurses, and the implementation of a five-year GP contract framework. I am also pleased that we have been able to deal with the thorny issue of pension tax rules and the change to the taper allowance at the last Budget, which I know had been a big concern for consultants and made additional work prohibitive. As the British Medical Association has acknowledged, the vast majority of doctors have now been removed from the effects of that taper.

We have faced what is possibly a once-in-a-century event, and I think it is right that we recognise that in some way. A constituent of mine, Elizabeth Gull, has proposed the creation of a medal for NHS workers. When I raised this with the Prime Minister last month at Prime Minister’s questions, I was pleased to see that he considered it to be an excellent suggestion, and I understand the Cabinet Office is looking into the measure.

We should also recognise that NHS staff and others have been working at full capacity for several months now. I hope that there will be some reflection by employers and others about giving assistance not only in pay, but to help them rest and recuperate so that, going forwards, they will be able to work at their full mental and physical strength.

2.13 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): We have clapped and we have clapped. In fact, the country clapped week in, week out for eight weeks, and we all embraced it—so much so that, when we did not, we missed it. There is no taking away from the fact that this pandemic has been tragic for many people, and to those who have lost loved ones, what can we say? Our heart goes out to you. There is really nothing worse. For those who have lost their jobs, it is tough. I have lost mine before, and I know it is tough and how hard that can be.

The clapping—yes, the clapping—became to many a symbol of a country coming together and of thanking the ones on the frontline. They are the ones who, in effect, were coming out of the trenches every day to save people who had caught this terrible virus. I can only imagine how it would have felt for myself or my wife going to work and knowing that one of us would be coming into contact with this deadly disease, which could be taken home. Even worse would be knowing that I would, at some point in the day, see someone die, and such deaths would be reported on the news each night. Some might say, “Well, that’s what nursing is about.” Some might say, “You must get used to it.” Some might say, “It’s just another day.” Some might, but I will not: I was not there, so how can I? What I can say is that I am glad that they were there for us. Thanks to this Government, the efforts of the frontline staff and our national effort, we are coming through this. There is light at the end of the tunnel. In fact, it is within touching distance—so much so that we can now start to reflect on what we have all been through.

This motion comes after several petitions calling for us to recognise and reward our health and social care workers. When I last counted, 200,000 people, including 245 of my own constituents, had signed one of these petitions calling for our frontline staff to receive the recognition they deserve. I keep saying “frontline staff” because I think that many thanks should go to the doctors, carers, nurses, porters, cleaners and everyone

[*Nick Fletcher*]

else who makes up the frontline in our NHS and social care sector—those who, when many in the country were furloughed and spending time with their families, were putting themselves at risk and missing time with their loved ones. For many in these frontline jobs, Easter was cancelled, and many have worked back-to-back shifts.

We must remember that we may not all end up in hospital during our lives, but there is a good chance that we may spend some time in a nursing home, so carers there, who are pretty much all on the frontline, need recognition, too. Some of them really went the extra mile, as they never went home at all to keep the virus away from their residents. Every night the Government have taken time to stand in front of the nation and tell us where we are with this virus, but they have never given us the figures for the people our carers have put back on the road to recovery. This is difficult with care homes—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order.

2.16 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for setting the scene in this debate, all those who have contributed, and all those who will. I am so very thankful that the debate has been accepted. I had applied for an Adjournment debate on this issue, particularly highlighting the return of NHS staff from retirement—those who returned to the trenches—which is worthy of attention and note as well as the overall NHS effort.

As we watched things unfold in other countries—in Italy, for example—I read inspiring stories that lifted my heart and ones that filled me with dread for our country. I thank the Government for spending the money and making the finance available to source the additional ventilators to prepare for what was to come. I knew, at the end of the day, the burden would rest on the shoulders of every person in the NHS and in care home facilities—those on the frontline, who did not let us down. Over 20,000 staff returned to the NHS to fight this battle—20,000 people who had already paid their dues and yet were prepared to return and stand in the breach. We thank them for hearing the call and responding to it.

The army of volunteers—some 600,000 people—said, “We will do what we can.” They helped with the shopping lists and the food deliveries. They rang and spoke to the elderly people to be a social lifeline and to ensure that no one was absolutely isolated. We do not know, and possibly may never know, what the whole story of coronavirus would have been without their input.

We thank every consultant, GP, doctor, nurse, nursing ancillary worker, porter, lab technician, cleaner and administrative agency worker—we thank them all. Saying thanks sometimes seems so little for those who signed up to help. I know that sometimes they must have felt that they were in something similar to a warzone. It is my sincere belief that we must do more than just say thank you to all those who went above and beyond their job descriptions and into community hero mode. We appreciate every person who could not see their children or partner because their work was too dangerous, and every exhausted parent who worked their shift and then

went home to carry out household tasks, home-school their children, shop and everything else. We appreciate the sacrifices that they made more than words can ever say.

I subscribe to the view of speakers who have said that we should be looking at some sort of financial remuneration and pay rise for those who served on the frontline in the NHS. They do deserve that, but they also deserve investment in the NHS, more training in the NHS, more technology and more staff—all those things. It is not enough—it can never be enough—but it would be a lasting testament to the battle fought, a reminder of the precious lives lost, and a demonstration that this wonderful United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, always together, always better, can rise to any challenge when we stand together shoulder to shoulder.

2.19 pm

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I am very grateful for the opportunity, on behalf of all the residents of Bolsover, to say thank you so much to all our care workers and all our NHS staff, who have done so much during these incredibly difficult months. We thank them unreservedly for everything they have done for our communities and our country.

A few weeks ago, I suggested in oral questions that we should have a special honours list to recognise those who have done so much and sacrificed so much during this period. I say again to the Minister that I feel that is something we should pursue. I suspect that many, many people from Bolsover would be suggested for inclusion on such a list.

One of the most humbling and difficult things that I have done during this period has been to speak to every single one of the care home managers in my constituency. One in particular stands out. She said that this had been the most difficult period of her life. In tears, she said, “But I’m also incredibly proud of what we’ve done—of the leadership we’ve shown and how well my team have coped.” That just goes to demonstrate the amazing spirit that we have seen in this period. In my conversations with my local hospitals—the Chesterfield Royal, the King’s Mill Hospital and the hospital in Bassetlaw—I have heard only good things about the efforts that the staff have put in.

Our manifesto committed us to seeking a cross-party consensus on the future of social care. Now more than ever, we should continue to seek to do so. We can talk about pay and conditions—we can talk about all sorts of aspects of social care—but ultimately we need a vision for that sector that is sustainable and that is suitable for those who live long lives. I have a background in the care sector, and I know that there is so often a stigma attached to it. There is a fear of care homes and a fear of older age that should not be there. Based on the contributions today, I think there are many things on which we agree and many things that we should look to solve together.

2.21 pm

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): I am disappointed that I am not speaking immediately after the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who I found out yesterday supports Leicester City. I encourage him to follow his son’s wisdom and to reconsider that and support the Tractor Boys instead. I will talk to him about that another time.

Yesterday in this place I thanked NHS staff and care workers in Ipswich for their incredible work to save lives during the covid-19 pandemic. I reiterate that gratitude for those professionals as we discuss these petitions to recognise their fantastic work and to consider the pay that they receive.

I mentioned yesterday that these workers have taken on considerable additional risk to their own physical health to help look after the most vulnerable. Most of us can only imagine what it is like for them to deal with many sick and deteriorating patients under such tough conditions, always having the thought in the back of their mind that they could catch the virus themselves and potentially pass it on to their loved ones when they leave work that day.

It is clear to me from the correspondence I have received quite how much my constituents want to thank NHS and care workers. There are a couple of stories that I want to elucidate slightly. One is about the local pub on Woodbridge Road, the Lattice Barn, which right now still faces an uncertain future. It closed its doors and there were lots of questions about its finances and so on, but the first thing that the landlord thought about was local NHS staff and how he could open his doors to nurses and frontline NHS workers. Immediately, he thought not about himself but about how he could support our wonderful NHS workers. I also thank Northgate High School and Ipswich School, where all the pupils worked together to make PPE for our frontline workers.

Yes, a monument or a medal would be a good idea. These things are not insignificant, and I do not think they should be belittled. They do matter, and they are a way of us saying collectively, as a society, “We acknowledge what you’ve done and we will never forget it.” However, I encourage the Government to reflect on the strength of feeling in the country and to consider any way that we can increase pay, particularly for frontline NHS workers and social care staff, at the first opportunity. In particular, we should show everybody who works in the social care sector how much we value them and the work that they do, give those workers the status they deserve and acknowledge that they have been the best of the best. From the bottom of my heart as the Member of Parliament for Ipswich, thank you.

2.24 pm

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): Alongside many other colleagues speaking today, I pay absolute tribute to the healthcare workers in my constituency and also across the entire country. The news today is great, that we are looking at 6,000 more doctors and 12,000 more nurses in the NHS, which is a move towards what we would like to see in the future.

To pick up on the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson), we have both had excellent communications with our local NHS throughout the coronavirus period. Sue and the entire staff of the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust have been absolutely phenomenal, whether at the main hospital in my hon. Friend’s constituency, over at the University Hospital of North Durham, down at Bishop Auckland or in the small community hospitals, such as Weardale in my constituency and Shotley Bridge—which is one of my main campaign issues, just to flag that up to the Minister.

We are desperate for Shotley Bridge to see renewal. The number of beds that it has had to use has increased from eight to 16 over the past few weeks, to look after the extra patients. As Simon Stevens said in evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, one of the things that the NHS wants to look at in the long term is ensuring that we have capacity within the existing NHS estate for crises when they occur.

I also pay huge tribute to the care homes in my patch, in particular Shotley Park and Crescent Homecare in Langley Park, which have been in regular communications with me, to all the other care providers locally and to the pharmacies. Last week, I visited Consett pharmacy, which only does direct delivery to homes. It has seen a 25% increase in the number of people getting those home deliveries, often the most vulnerable in society, people who cannot go out and might not have friends and family nearby. The pharmacy has been delivering direct to homes, which over the past few months has been such a lifeline for many people, in particular those with complex conditions.

I have two final shout-outs. One is for people who were not mentioned when the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) introduced the debate: carers who are still at home, caring for people in a home setting. My dad is one of those; he has been caring for my grandmother throughout this crisis. A lot of people in my constituency have been carers at home, often having to shield themselves with the person they are caring for, and the sacrifices that people have made on incredibly low pay have been phenomenal.

Finally, I associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow), who hoped that this will help us to look towards how to integrate the health and social care system in the future. I hope that, across the House, that is something we will be working on going forward.

2.28 pm

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I want to place on the record the devastating fire last Saturday night at the Budgens in Holt in my constituency, the town in which I grew up. It has rocked the community, and I will do all that I can to help the town and many of my friends and colleagues who have been affected.

North Norfolk has been exemplary in its fight against covid-19. Our number of infections has been one of the lowest in the country, significantly behind the national average, and so have our death rates. That is in large part thanks to the incredible work of the NHS staff and to the resilience of my residents, who have followed the guidance religiously, keeping one another and the area we live in safe.

Our carers are the group most often forgotten about. They are often unsung heroes, and they must have the recognition that they need and deserve. Many people have even taken leave from their jobs to care for the vulnerable and for family members. Some carers in my constituency have worked tirelessly caring for those who have dementia. None must be left out of recognition.

I want to spare a thought here in the Chamber for our young carers, who have not been mentioned today— young people who may be caring for a parent who is ill. During the lockdown, I spoke to some young carers, and it made me wonder whether we really knew enough

[*Duncan Baker*]

about these young children—sometimes they are as young as five or six—who, day in, day out, support their parents at home. Research shows that young carers are often vulnerable. They are part of a hidden group that is falling through the gaps in public policy and health and social care services. Imagine a five-year-old climbing on a stool to boil a kettle to make a drink for their parent who is incapacitated. These young people must not be forgotten. They are not getting a proper childhood.

I pay enormous tribute to the tireless work of Julie Alford and all of her team at the Holt youth project, who are looking after 38 young carers across the constituency. We must do more to raise the profile of this group of people who need support. They must not be forgotten. Their education often falls behind. I call on the Government to do everything they possibly can.

Caring Together is a charity in East Anglia, doing great work to support all carers. I warmly endorse its carer-friendly tick scheme, in which a wide variety of organisations help to identify that there is a support system out there for young carers.

2.30 pm

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): I wish to begin my remarks by paying tribute to two people who personify the extraordinary commitment of those working within our NHS and care sectors to the communities they serve. Dr Saad Al-Dubbaisi worked at the Garden City Medical Practice within Holcombe Brook in my constituency for 20 years. During this crisis, he sadly passed away. This tribute was among the many that were paid:

“A loving kind man who gave everything for his community.”

In remembrance and in recognition of his service, hundreds of members of our community lined the streets to pay their last respects to a doctor who spread kindness and warmth over two decades within Bury.

Carol Jamabo was a care worker in my constituency. She served the public as a key worker for more than 25 years. She was popular, caring and compassionate. A relative commented that she will be remembered for her “uplifting, joyful and enthusing” personality.

There are doctors, nurses, healthcare assistants, porters, cooks, receptionists, ambulance service staff and drivers. There are just too many people to mention, but all are working in NHS and care services in Bury, Ramsbottom and Tottington. All have made immense sacrifices to help those affected by coronavirus. They are all heroes and heroines. I cannot mention them all, but we shall forever be in the debt of kind, compassionate, caring individuals such as Marie Sharp, the manager of Bankfield care home on Gigg Lane, and Dr Afzal Hussain of Walmersley Road medical practice.

The NHS long-term plan outlines the next step in the Government’s vision to support staff not just through headline pay but through improving their working lives, giving them the reward and recognition they deserve for always putting patients first and providing the high-quality care that all Members in this House have seen throughout the covid-19 crisis. They will forever be heroes to us all.

I will conclude by associating myself with some of the remarks of my hon. Friends. I have had the pleasure and honour of speaking with all care home managers and workers in my constituency. My hon. Friend the

Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) called them the best of the best and they truly are. They deserve recognition for their highly skilled work and for the care they give to some of the most vulnerable in our community, and as a House we must do everything possible to recognise that skill and to reward their immense contribution to our country.

2.33 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the Petitions Committee and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on opening the debate and securing the time for it. I also congratulate the Members who made thoughtful and, in some cases, personal speeches. One hundred and forty five of my constituents signed the main petition that is being discussed today and a proportionate number signed the others. It is important that they have the opportunity to hear that their voices have been heard. They and all of us joined in the 10 weeks of the clapping for carers, but all recognised, as others have said, that clapping is not enough and that there must be action and they demonstrated that by signing these petitions.

I would just note that there was another petition during lockdown that achieved 1.2 million signatures, but, because it did not come through the e-petition site, it is not available to be debated in the House in quite the same format, but I know that many Members would want to have the behaviour of the Prime Minister’s special adviser discussed on the Floor of the House.

When this crisis is over, the UK Government must find a way of honouring the amazing heroes in our NHS and care sector who are continuing to work tirelessly to help us all to defeat the coronavirus. The Scottish Government—the SNP Government—remain committed to passing on all Barnett consequential for health spending to the NHS in Scotland. Throughout this time, and for many years now, all NHS staff in Scotland have been paid the real living wage, not the pretend living wage implemented by the Tory Government. Nurses across all bands are paid better in Scotland than anywhere else in the UK, and the Scottish Government are delivering the highest pay rise for NHS “Agenda for Change” staff anywhere in the UK. Employees will receive at least a 9% pay rise for the three years from 2019.

The Scottish Government spend about £130 per head more on social care than is spent in England, and they are the only Government in the UK to fund free personal care. Also, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) said earlier, they have already brought forward a 3% pay rise for social care workers in recognition of the work that they are doing at this time. Recognising the particular challenges presented by covid-19, the Scottish Government, with cross-party support in Holyrood, are working to establish a sick pay fund as a matter of urgency to ensure that care workers whose employer terms and conditions fall short and who test positive for covid-19 receive sick pay above the current statutory level of £95.85 a week. As we know, that is one of the worst sick pay legal frameworks anywhere in Europe.

The Scottish Government were also the first in the United Kingdom to announce a death in service provision for covid-19 deaths among NHS staff. That benefit mirrors what is available in the NHS pension scheme: a lump sum and ongoing survivor’s benefit. However, it is

unacceptable that some social care workers' contracts of employment offer no cover for death in service, so the Scottish Government are putting in place that kind of cover for when any social care worker dies without death in service cover in their contracted pension arrangements. The Scottish Government will provide a one-off payment of £60,000 to a named survivor, and this will be retrospective. That is important because, as of 23 June, the Scottish Government have been informed by health boards or the Care Inspectorate of seven deaths of health care workers and 12 deaths of social care workers related to covid-19.

I have some experience of this. The Wyndford Locks care home in Maryhill was one of the first in Scotland to experience the death of a staff member due to covid-19. Also, one of my constituents, Christine Gallagher, lost her beloved son Michael to the disease. He was providing frontline care, employed by an agency, in central Scotland. His loss is keenly felt by his family. Too many families across the country are feeling such losses. His mother told me that she could not attend his funeral because of public health restrictions. She had to stay at home with a photograph of her son and light a candle. I want to pay tribute to Michael for the love and support that he showed to so many in his care, and express my condolences to his family and all the other families who have experienced tragic losses due to covid-19. May they all rest in peace.

This is why it is so important that the healthcare and social care workers, whether in the NHS or private sector, have the pay and benefits that they and their families deserve for the work they do to keep us all safe. That includes healthcare workers who have made their home in Scotland, even if they began their lives or careers elsewhere. So, while we welcome the principle of scrapping the NHS surcharge, it does not appear to have happened in practice yet. Perhaps the Minister can tell us when it will come into effect, because we are still hearing of healthcare workers being told by the Home Office that the surcharge is still payable and there is no guarantee of a refund.

In too many cases, the hostile environment continues despite all these warm words. Even in the middle of the pandemic, we see cases of NHS staff being told that they are no longer welcome. I have a constituent, Jessica Forsyth, an Australian national on a youth mobility visa. Her visa expires at the end of July and she has been told by UK Visas and Immigration that she cannot apply because she is deemed unskilled and earns below the £30,000 threshold, even though she is providing essential services to the NHS. She has made Scotland her home and built her life here, and I hope the Minister can help me to solicit the reply I am waiting for from the Home Office about her case.

It is clear that, while all this work has been taking place, we also have to ensure that we are planning for the next phase. We must learn the lessons and use the coming months to ensure that PPE is fully stockpiled, that supply lines are in place and that procedures are changed where necessary, so that as the second wave hits, there will be a vastly improved level of preparation. As we open up the health service to wider services, that must be done using an evidence-based, cautious and phased approach, for the sake of both staff and patients.

I think that many in the NHS and social care would echo the words of the declaration of Arbroath—it is not for glory, nor honours, nor riches that they fight.

But that does not mean that they do not deserve them, and when all this is over we have to make sure that they are properly rewarded and recognised.

2.39 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), the Chair of the Petitions Committee, on introducing the debate and brilliantly articulating the many issues relating to the recognition and reward of health and social care workers. I thank all those who have signed the four petitions, which have so far amassed some 290,000 signatures between them. By doing so, they have brought this very important debate to Parliament today.

This debate comes at a particularly poignant time, when health and social care workers have been at the heart of the fight against coronavirus, working day and night to protect the NHS and save lives. They, and all the key workers who keep this country going, are the very best of us. I want to take this opportunity to once again pay tribute to the hundreds of NHS and social care staff who have lost their lives to the virus. I hope that when this is over, we can find an appropriate way to remember the frontline staff who gave their lives in the line of duty.

This was a heavily subscribed debate, and it was clear from every Member who spoke that the gratitude the whole country feels for our health and social care workers is replicated in this place. We had some superb speeches from Opposition Members, with good representation from Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) spoke with typical eloquence and highlighted the wise decision of the Welsh Government to recognise the contribution of care workers. I hope that the Minister will be able to respond positively to my hon. Friend's request, or at the very least confirm that she is making strong representations to the Treasury about the tax treatment of that payment. We heard a similar point from my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones), who also reminded us of NHS Direct, which was a great innovation from the last Labour Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) rightly said that staff need to be rewarded with more than just applause, and she drew attention through her strong speech to the sorry record we have seen over the last 10 years on the NHS. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) spoke with great passion and listed a whole series of ways in which the health workforce is hit with extra burdens in the course of their duties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) drew attention to the scandal of nurses being forced to use food banks. That should shame us all. We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), who made the powerful point that medals do not put food on the table. She brilliantly highlighted how insecure work is a blight on the NHS and a systemic problem that needs addressing once and for all.

As we heard, even before the pandemic our frontline health and social care staff were working in overstretched and under-resourced settings. We must acknowledge that many of our frontline care workers have been in

[Justin Madders]

extremely stressful and sometimes traumatic situations as a result of covid-19—situations that those of us who have not been on the frontline cannot even begin to imagine. Working in these uncertain times, dealing with a new and emerging disease, often without adequate protection, while coping with losing patients and worrying about getting ill themselves or taking the virus home to their loved ones are all contributing factors to staff burn-out and poor mental health. It is vital that we keep them all safe in the event of a second wave.

Yesterday, following the Prime Minister's announcement of the relaxation of the 2-metre rule and sweeping changes to the lockdown in England, health leaders called for a rapid and forward-looking assessment of how prepared the UK is for a new outbreak of the virus. Those health leaders from the Royal Colleges of Surgeons, of Nursing, of Physicians and of GPs say:

“the available evidence indicates that local flare-ups are increasingly likely and a second wave a real risk.”

They also point out:

“Many elements of the infrastructure needed to contain the virus are beginning to be put in place, but substantial challenges remain”,

and they call on the Government to focus on

“areas of weakness where action is needed urgently to prevent further loss of life”.

We cannot have any failures in preparation this time.

We may no longer be gathering outside our homes on a Thursday night to clap for our carers, but our admiration remains. It has been incredible to see the effort from staff in the last three months—staff who, too often, get very little in return. We hope that they are recognised for their true worth now.

Jamie Stone: Will the hon. Member give way?

Justin Madders: I am sorry; I do not have time to give way.

Many of our NHS and care staff are exhausted and fearing burn-out. They need our support now, which means safe staffing ratios, adequate PPE and decent fair pay, because for them the hard work is not over—it is only just beginning. They will continue to give their all as they begin to tackle the backlog in non-covid care. The millions of routine operations, screening tests, treatments and therapies that were suspended or cancelled during the pandemic will now have to restart. Those challenges cannot be met without the staff.

As we know, there are well over 100,000 vacancies in the social care sector, and systemic insecure work and low pay are not the answer to resolving that issue. We know that prior to the covid-19 outbreak there were also 106,000 vacancies across the NHS, including 44,000 nurse vacancies. Those vacancies matter. They mean that NHS services were already under extreme pressure due to the ongoing staff shortages, before being further stretched by more shortages due to sickness or caring responsibilities during the pandemic. That, in turn, has put all healthcare staff under intolerable and unsustainable levels of pressure.

On top of those staff shortages, healthcare staff have had to work in unfamiliar circumstances or in clinical areas outside their usual practice, and of course they have had to work in very difficult circumstances. A survey

by the Royal College of Nursing found that half of nursing staff felt under pressure to work without the levels of protective equipment set out in official guidance, and a survey by the British Medical Association of 7,000 doctors found that 45% were experiencing stress, exhaustion and burn-out. We need to listen to what the staff are telling us.

Just last week, we learned that student nurses who joined the frontline six months ago as part of the coronavirus effort are seeing their paid placement schemes terminated early, leaving them with no income and no guarantee that they will not face extra costs for completing their studies. That is no way to treat student nursing staff who have put their studies on hold to join the fight against coronavirus and who are at the start of what we hope will be a long career in the NHS. They deserve better.

The Government still have not quite resolved the issue of the immigration health surcharge, where NHS and social care staff coming from abroad and working on our frontline are required to pay a surcharge of hundreds and sometimes thousands of pounds just to use the NHS themselves. It was welcome that, after considerable pressure, the Government announced last month that the surcharge would be abolished, but, as we have heard, there are still reports of people being charged. I would like an update from the Minister about what is happening in respect of that.

In conclusion, no one hearing this debate would be in any doubt that our health and social care workers are appreciated, admired and respected, but warm words are not enough. A clap on Thursday night is not enough. It is time for action, and for the Government to finally recognise the monumental contribution that health and social care workers make. No more poverty pay. No more “work until you drop”. No more sending people into work inadequately protected from exposure to a deadly virus. That cannot happen again.

The Government were too slow to recognise the need for PPE, too slow to protect the social care sector, and now they are too slow to properly reward our brave health and social care workers, who have literally put their lives on the line for us all. It is time we put that right.

2.48 pm

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): I welcome this debate, because our NHS and care system is only as strong as the people within it. Throughout the pandemic, NHS and care workers have taken centre stage; we have all seen the dedication and care with which they approach their work and the esteem in which they are held by the public, as these petitions demonstrate. This debate has also demonstrated the esteem in which they are held by hon. Members. I am determined that we should look after our health and social care staff, just as they look after us.

First, I will talk about pay, as that is the focus of the petitions. I want to reinforce that we have already delivered multi-year pay and contract reform deals for over 1 million NHS staff, in partnership with trade unions. In the past three years, nurses have seen their starting salaries increase by more than 12% and the vast majority of nurses have seen their pay increase by at least 6.5%, while the starting salaries for healthcare assistants have also increased by 16%. We have also increased pay for junior doctors to recognise the huge

contribution that they make to our NHS. By the end of their four-year deal, junior doctor pay scales will have increased by at least 8%.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Dr Mullan) referred to the Government's commitment to increase the number of doctors and nurses in the NHS, and he rightly said that recruitment and retention are not just about pay, but about experience. I am determined that we must improve the experience for the NHS workforce.

The shadow Minister spoke about vacancies in the NHS. I hope that he will welcome the good news that we heard today in the latest NHS workforce statistics that the number of nurses in England has gone up by more than 12,000 in the past year and we have over 6,000 more doctors. Compared with 2010, we now have 23,100 more doctors and 22,200 more nurses in the NHS. We want to recruit more, however, so we are providing financial support for nurses to train, and from this September, new and continuing nursing students will be able to get a maintenance grant of at least £5,000 per academic year.

Our social care staff have also played an incredible role during the pandemic. I am always blown away by the compassion that is shown by our care workers, who look after people who are at their most vulnerable. That was articulated so well this afternoon by my hon. Friends the Members for Peterborough (Paul Bristow), for Watford (Dean Russell), for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) and for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) and many other colleagues.

Hon. Members will be aware that the Government do not set pay for social care workers in England. However, we are committed to raising the profile of our social care workforce and giving them the support they need. At a recent meeting of the Health and Social Care Committee, we heard from care workers about how some of them felt underappreciated by the public as a whole, and that is something we need to fix. After all, this is a job where staff have a chance to make a difference to people's lives every single day that they go to work. As a start, we have adopted the CARE brand, for which I thank Care England. We have taken that on in order to build recognition of care workers.

Since the pandemic hit us, we have put in place support for care workers who have been at the frontline during this time. We are providing mental health support and bereavement support commissioned from Samaritans and Hospice UK. We have launched the care workforce app to bring together resources and guidance, and we are providing funding of £3.2 billion and then a further £600 million for local authorities to pass on to care providers so that they can provide full pay to staff who are isolating. We have made it clear to local authorities and providers that we expect that to happen.

One of the petitions that is in front of us today is entitled:

"We would like the government to consider social care as equally important to NHS".

That is something that I passionately believe in. Social care is, absolutely, equally important. I know my colleagues in government agree. As we heard in this debate, that sentiment is shared by many hon. Members, and we rightly now talk about health and social care workers in the same breath.

In the months ahead, as we pledged in our manifesto, we will be looking at how we can build a long-term solution for social care, so that in the long term care workers get the rewards they deserve, and—as argued for by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher), in particular—so that everyone can have the dignity and security that they deserve.

Finally, I want to raise the contribution of our overseas staff. The NHS has benefited from the contribution of so many people from all over the world. I would like to take a moment to thank all our overseas NHS staff. I know that this has been a difficult time for many of you, especially as we have learned that BAME communities have been disproportionately impacted by the virus. We are so grateful to you for your hard work, and I want the system to do all it can to protect you.

On 21 May, the Prime Minister announced that NHS and social care workers would now be exempt from the immigration health surcharge. NHS and care workers who paid the surcharge from 21 May will be refunded, and we are getting on with the arrangements as fast as we possibly can. We are also continuing to provide free visa extensions and auto renewal of visas for workers who are eligible, and we will be introducing a new fast-track healthcare visa to make it quicker and easier for health and care staff to come and work in our health and social care system.

Our NHS and social care workers do a truly wonderful job delivering world-class care to so many. I would like to thank everybody who signed the petitions for making their voice heard. I would like to end by encouraging everyone who is thinking about joining our health and care system to do so. Caring for others is one of the greatest and most important vocations. We will do everything in our power to protect and support health and social care workers during this pandemic and beyond.

2.55 pm

Catherine McKinnell: I thank everybody who has contributed to this debate. It is vital that the voice of petitioners is heard in Parliament and we have all played a part in ensuring that today. This is a very important issue, which petitioners have clearly prioritised in great numbers having experienced and witnessed the enormous contribution our health and social care workers have made to our national effort to fight covid-19.

I am disappointed with the Minister's response. I do not think it fully acknowledged the question put by the petitioners that we do not yet have full recognition and reward for our health and social care workers in the way that we would like to see, but, as I said in my contribution at the beginning of the debate, I hope that this is the beginning of a conversation on how we can arrive at that point. I am sure that hon. Members will support that conversation continuing and action to follow. Above all, I want to put on record once again our gratitude, from this House and from the Petitions Committee, for the service that every health and social care worker has made to this country in the weeks that have passed and will continue to make in the weeks ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petitions relating to the recognition and reward of health and social care workers.

2.56 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19: Support for UK Industries

[*Relevant documents: e-petitions 301186, 308733, 301836, 303081, 320711, 301903, 300210, 307959, 305024, relating to support for UK industries in response to covid-19; Second Report of the Treasury Committee, Economic impact of coronavirus: Gaps in support, HC 454; Second Report of the Transport Committee, The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector, HC 268; Oral evidence taken before the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee on 9 June 2020, on The impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors: Creative industries, HC 291.*]

2.59 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

This is a very, very well-subscribed debate and I also want to accommodate a maiden speech. Until the maiden speech is finished there will be a time limit of six minutes, including for the maiden speech. However, I must warn colleagues that if everybody who is down to speak actually turns up—I suspect they will—it is likely that we will have to put another three-minute time limit on in order to accommodate as many people as possible. I strongly discourage interventions, because they will prevent others from speaking. That is how I intend to conduct the debate.

3 pm

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petitions relating to support for UK industries in response to covid-19.

As we have heard already today, the volume of signatures on parliamentary petitions has been huge in recent weeks, reflecting the immense public anxiety about the health emergency we have been living through. I thank every one of the 641,986 people who signed the five petitions that reached the 100,000 threshold and that we are considering today. They are on support for the events industry; for the arts, theatre and music; for zoos, aquariums, and rescue centres; for nursery and childcare providers; and for aviation. I also thank the 74,735 people who have backed seven other petitions that are also relevant. Those petitions are on help for performers and creators; for pubs and hospitality; for early years providers; for wholesalers; for health businesses; and for small businesses.

There is no escaping the devastating impact the covid emergency has had on our economy. That is unavoidable when vast swathes of business activity are shut down. But the Government have listened and have heard the calls to intervene, from the 12 e-petitions and from millions of other people afraid for their livelihoods and their future, including many in Chipping Barnet, and I thank the Government for their intervention. At immense speed, the Government put in place the biggest package of help for jobs, livelihoods and businesses in our nation's history.

Through the furlough scheme, the Government are paying the wages of more than 9.1 million workers, providing £20.8 billion to more than 1 million employers. More than 2.6 million people have received grants from the self-employed income support scheme, which is one of the more generous in the world. More than 863,000 companies have received bounce-back loans—these have been worth more than £26 billion.

Some £10 billion has been lent to 49,000 firms under CBILS—the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme. Small businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector have received cash grants of up to £25,000 and been given a 12 month business rates holiday. A £1.25 billion package is available for start-ups, and £30 billion of VAT payments have been suspended for three months. Some 68,000 businesses have benefited from the deferral of other taxes, and smaller businesses have received help with funding sick pay.

Without that bold and radical intervention by the Government, and the speed at which it has been delivered, our situation today in this country would be far, far worse, as the Office for Budget Responsibility, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD and the Bank of England have all confirmed. Unemployment would have rocketed and thousands of businesses would have gone bust, both in the sectors highlighted in the 12 e-petitions and in many others. There has been extensive backing for what the Government have done, including from Len McCluskey, of Unite, who said of the furlough scheme:

“We recognise that these are huge decisions for any government, and especially for a Conservative government, but they have listened to the calls for action and have acted appropriately. Rishi Sunak’s wage support measures are a historic first for this country, but are bold and very much necessary...This will definitely be some relief amid all the fear in households across the UK this evening.”

However, were it not for the difficult decisions taken by Conservative-led Governments since 2010, we would not have been able to respond in this way or on this scale. It is only if we fix the roof while the sun is shining that we have the resources and the balance sheet to intervene aggressively to provide the kind of action called for in these petitions. Sadly, we all know from our inboxes that, even with the scale of what we are doing, there are gaps in support. In an economic disaster as great as this one—possibly the worst for 300 years—there are inevitably still many people facing hardship and uncertainty about their future. I hope that the Minister will consider whether any further help is possible for the sectors highlighted in the 12 e-petitions.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The right hon. Lady is making a fine speech. I welcome the support that the Government have put in. Does she agree that people in the concert and festival industry, in particular, are facing a double whammy? Not only will they be among the last industries to get back to anything like normal, but many of them are self-employed and, for various reasons, fall through the gaps in the self-employed scheme. Does she agree that we need sector-specific support for the concert and festival industry?

Theresa Villiers: I do agree with the hon. Gentleman on that. They are more heavily impacted and I hope it will be possible to have a sector-specific scheme for them.

I was about to turn to exactly that point—the arts, events, theatre, performance, musicians, actors and creators. With no date set for the resumption of events and performances in theatres or music venues, this crucial part of our economy could be the hardest hit of them all. The future of our regional theatres in particular looks perilous. Adrian Vinken, chief executive of the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, wrote in the *Daily Mail* today:

“The entire performing arts industry is...facing oblivion. This is not only a human and economic disaster—it is a cultural catastrophe.”

As we heard from the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), the insecure and sporadic nature of jobs in the industry means that many workers fall within the gaps in the Government's covid intervention package. This includes, typically, freelancers who get part of their income through PAYE and part of their income through self-employment. They may not have been in their PAYE contract at the right time to be furloughed, and they may not earn enough of their income from self-employment to qualify for the self-employment income support scheme. As well as considering further funding support for those workers and sectors, we must have a clear plan to get theatres and venues open and to get events starting again, as has been managed in countries such as South Korea.

It is also really important to reflect on aviation, which, as the petitions highlight, is also hard hit. We need the air bridges in action. Blanket quarantine requirements will make it a hundred times more difficult for aviation to recover, and it is hard to understand the need for quarantine for people coming from places that have fewer covid cases than we do. I appeal to the Minister for a risk-based approach on quarantine so that travel can start up again and we listen to the petitioners who are demanding help and support for aviation.

Our nurseries and childcare are also mentioned in the petition. I welcome the extension of the business rates holiday, directly implementing one of the demands of petitioners, but Ministers need a firm and funded plan to support the sector in the long term. The early years stage of education is crucial in determining life chances, and if we are to deliver on our promises on social mobility and respond to legitimate concerns on equality of opportunity, we need to help nursery and childcare providers through this crisis and ensure that they are on a stable footing for the long term, including restoring funding for maintained nursery schools.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Does the right hon. Lady agree with me and the Treasury Committee that the Government, unfortunately, have left out more than 1 million people through the job retention scheme who are struggling? Many of them are freelancers working in the theatre sector and others—there are new starters who are suffering. We need to make sure that they get support they need, alongside the many things that she is talking about.

Theresa Villiers: I certainly acknowledge that the Treasury Committee identified gaps in provision. Unfortunately, a number of my constituents fall into those gaps, so I hope that there may be further help, but more importantly, we have to get the economy opened up again so that people can start earning a living in a normal way.

On zoos and aquariums, I welcome the grants of up to £100,000 offered by the Government to get them through the crisis, again responding directly to the e-petition. I pay tribute to the dedicated work of zoo staff, many of whom went the extra mile to look after the animals in their care, despite lockdown.

Whether it is zoos or nurseries, theatres or airports, hospitality or wholesale, the best shot in the arm the Government can give all these sectors is to let them open for business again. It was therefore an immense relief to hear from the Prime Minister that the 1 metre rule, with safeguards, will be introduced in England

from 4 July. I have been advocating this for weeks as the only way to save our pubs and hospitality, travel and tourism businesses—and the only way to save the summer holidays.

The multiple schemes I have set out have provided vital life support for the economy and are protecting the livelihoods of millions upon millions of the constituents who vote for us to serve them in this place. They have protected people who would otherwise be facing great hardship and adversity, but their eye-watering cost means it is inevitable that they are time-limited. The only way to put the sectors highlighted in the 12 petitions on to a sound and successful footing for the long term is to let people out of their homes, back to work, back to the shops and back to the pub. That is starting to happen and I very much welcome the news that 4 July will truly be our independence day as we take the next cautious steps in lifting lockdown and moving on from the covid emergency.

3.11 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) and I absolutely agree with her sentiments about opening up the economy.

May I say right at the outset that I think what the Government have done in terms of this unprecedented economic support—the support for businesses and for workers against the economic consequences of the pandemic—has been truly extraordinary, and the speed at which those programmes were put in place was particularly impressive?

In my constituency alone, 10,000 jobs were furloughed under the job retention scheme—10,000 incomes. With that support through the crisis, people have a chance of a job in the future as the restrictions ease. I am very pleased that the scheme has been extended and that there is the ability to part-time furlough. That flexibility has to be right; the businesses want that as they gradually reopen.

However, I would point out to my hon. Friend the Minister that there are a number of issues with the scheme, which, with a little bit of tinkering, could easily be put right. He will be aware that one particular problem is that eligibility is based on a real-time information submission to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. The problem for a lot of small businesses is that they had agreed with HMRC that they would make an annual return and, therefore, not being required to make the RTI return, they are ineligible for support. A brief word with the chief executive of HMRC would sort that problem out.

The self-employment income support scheme is very welcome. It is estimated to help 4,000 people in Wimbledon, but I have been contacted by a number of people who, because they became self-employed last year, do not qualify. They feel they have fallen through the cracks. Will the Treasury look at that? A number of the people affected are starting businesses for the first time and are likely to be the lifeblood of the economy as we recover; a little help now would work. Of course, the same applies to directors of small limited companies. If they were put on the same footing as the self-employment income support scheme, that would mean a grant, which, in some cases, would save their businesses. With that minor tinkering, the scheme could be even better than it already is.

[Stephen Hammond]

The hospitality, retail and leisure industry is obviously at the forefront of the economic costs, having been unable to open until 4 July—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet said, we look forward to that date. The support for the sector has been outstanding, but the Minister will know that in some parts of the country the £51,000 rateable value limit is relatively small compared with the sums the businesses are transacting. On future economic packages, I say to the Minister that it would be really helpful if the Government recognised that there are some quite major regional imbalances in rateable values when businesses are broadly of the same turnover and this would be a huge benefit.

While there has been extraordinary help to the retail, hospitality and leisure chain, inevitably a lot of the suppliers to those industries have not been able to get any help at all. What has been seen to be a postcode lottery has been developing on the basis that the Government have given advice on what qualifies as a retail, leisure or hospitality business. It is pretty specific, although the Government do say that the list is not exhaustive. The trouble is that different councils are choosing to interpret it in wildly different ways and it is having a major impact on suppliers to these industries.

I pick up the events industry in my constituency, with White Light and Oxygen Event Services being two companies that may not be able to reappear in the way they were before this pandemic hit the country, and that would have a huge impact on the concert, festivals and hospitality industry. May we have a bit of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government guidance to councils, that industry and also language schools, which are huge providers to local economies, particularly in Wimbledon? I have seven language schools that provide consumer expenditure into the local economy from the students, jobs for teachers and support for local families who house these students. Again, a postcode lottery has developed: in some places these businesses and schools are getting help and in others they are not. Again, if the MHCLG could be more prescriptive about exactly what should be allowed to be available for business rate relief, that will help.

There are a number of other industries I could comment on, but finally, can I just say that, as a London MP, I am proud of the culture and the arts in this city? I want to see that arts and culture not just in the west end, but across constituencies. I have the New Wimbledon theatre and the Polka theatre. On what such venues need to survive, can I ask the Government to really look very hard at this? A number of people working in these industries have had no income or access to help since the pandemic struck. I know there are various packages that the Arts Council funds, but we need a specific performing arts financial package, so that all theatres and concert venues can survive and the people who work in that industry will be there to make sure that, when they reopen, arts are being performed in them. That would mean that the culture in this country would survive, which is so vital to our future, alongside the economy and our health.

3.17 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I will follow your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I will not take interventions.

Coronavirus has hit all sectors of the UK economy, some harder than others, and aerospace and air travel will be one of the hardest hit. I have been here long enough to remember the effects on the industry of 9/11 and the banking crisis. These were severe, but nothing compared with the challenge that we face today. For Airbus in Broughton in my seat, this has meant a reduction in production rates of about a third. Some 40% of the UK workforce in the commercial aircraft division is currently on furlough. About 500 employees at Broughton have been working on the ventilator programme. I am sure everyone here and everyone in the country will be extremely grateful and proud that that has happened. It demonstrates what a dedicated workforce we have, but their reward for this work, as the programme comes to an end, is that many of them will not qualify for furlough. I think that that is an absolute disgrace. I would ask the Minister to really look at this situation. It cannot be right that the people who have done this work do not qualify. They are a special case and they should be treated as such. Airbus has stepped in and will cover the furlough, but that is hardly the point. I ask the Minister to press his Treasury colleagues on this matter urgently.

Industry experts do not expect passenger demand to return to pre-crisis levels before 2023. That will in turn mean that actual production rates will not catch up until 2025. With 70% of the value of an aircraft in the supplier chain, the effects there could be devastating, leading to a near total collapse of the sector if intervention does not occur. If we are serious about maintaining a viable aerospace sector in the UK, we need to be serious and have a strategic plan that embraces not only companies such as Airbus and the airlines, but the supplier chain. All parts need to work together to that end. I am concerned that some airlines—well, one in particular—see this crisis as an opportunity to remove rivals and ride roughshod over the terms and conditions of their workforce. That type of attitude and approach needs to change. We need a united front to face this crisis.

In the US, Germany and France, we have had announcements of targeted programmes of support. The latest announcement from the French Government included a raft of measures. Its aim is to protect some 100,000 jobs. It includes a reduced working week or working hours, with the difference picked up by the state. That will last up to two years. There will be a one-year moratorium on aircraft loans under the export credit agencies, amounting to around €1.5 billion. In addition, Airbus will have 18 months to pay loans, rather than the six months currently. That is worth around €2 billion. Defence procurement projects are also to be brought forward with new investment to help the sector, and the defence sector SME fund will be increased by 50% to €100 million a year. Air France-KLM has already been given a €7 billion loan guarantee to secure its future.

In addition, the French Government have promised more investment, with €1.5 billion to decarbonise and produce carbon neutral aircraft by 2035, rather than the current target of 2050. Those are bold plans that look at the medium and long terms. They recognise that there will be no quick fix, and we in the UK need to rise to that challenge, otherwise we will be left behind and could lose one of our greatest and most important industries.

What can we do to help to secure the future? We clearly need a job retention support scheme, not just for now and a few more months, but for the long term. We need to retain skills and we need the flexibility that reduced working hours can offer. We need to build support for Airbus by speaking to the airlines and retiring older, less efficient aircraft from their fleets. Around 70 aircraft flown by UK-registered airlines are more than 15 years old.

We need to address the complete mess, as has been mentioned, of quarantine, which has already added to the crisis. We need to invest in research and development, make advances in R&D tax credits and confirm that funding of the Aerospace Technology Institute will be doubled to £300 million a year. We need something for the supply chain, because that is in many ways the most vulnerable part of the sector. We need a long-term policy to ensure that there is an investment fund to keep suppliers alive during this crisis. We need to bring forward defence projects, but they need to be in this country, not just bought off the shelf from America.

If we do not step up to the plate, the future will not be good. For Broughton, it is always about securing the next wing. If we do not secure the next wing and Germany, France or Spain get it, the future will be bleak. I ask the Government to act and act now before it is too late.

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

3.23 pm

Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con): Thank you for the opportunity to make this, my maiden speech, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is a great honour and a great responsibility, joyfully accepted, to represent the people of Broxtowe with all the energy, determination and commitment of which I am capable. I say to all my constituents: "I will be your man. I will stand up for you. I will not turn from the challenges you face, but make them my own. While I have the privilege to serve you, you will not be forgotten in this place."

I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor as the Member for Broxtowe, Anna Soubry. I may not have agreed with all that she said in this place, but I wish to set on record my acknowledgement of the good work she did for Broxtowe and for her constituents. I wish to thank her for her efforts on improving access at Beeston railway station. I admire her strong will and her determination to do what she felt was best for Broxtowe and for this country, and I wish her the best of British.

This week is the 72nd anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush. The people of the Windrush generation came to Britain to help rebuild our great country, and my parents were among them. Dad, Harry, is from Jamaica, and Mum, Gloria, from Trinidad. Like many of that too long ignored generation, they worked hard to make a good life here. Dad worked double shifts, and Mum worked all day in a factory. They saved; they bought a house. They were ambitious, and they prospered. We were a traditional British working-class family: hard working, loyal, fiercely patriotic—and Conservative.

Opposition Members claim Windrush as their own, as if it is obvious that immigrants are somehow obliged morally and practically to be Labour supporters. Well,

my family were not, and I am not. I stand here as evidence of what immigrants and their children can achieve in what my parents called the land of opportunity. I am proud to be the first Conservative MP of West Indian heritage—black, British with all my heart, immensely proud of my West Indian heritage and Conservative to my fingertips.

Before coming to this place, I spent 26 years in the Royal Air Force. Like others here, I knew that service to my country was the right and dutiful career for me. On my first day in the RAF, I had a splendid Afro hairstyle, and now, because of weeks of lockdown, I am delighted—my Afro is coming back!

The armed forces are known for getting things done, and that is what I will do for the people of Broxtowe. At Chilwell station, also known as Chetwynd barracks, we have seen service personnel assisting efforts to tackle the covid-19 pandemic as part of Op Rescript. As it is Armed Forces Week and Veterans Day today, I hope that this message is heard loud and clear by my fellow veterans: "If you are driven by public service, as I am, stand up and serve your community again."

During my election campaign, I pledged to support investment in our local hospitals as part of my six-point plan for Broxtowe. This is a cause that is close to my heart. My wife Caroline spent 25 weeks out of her 34-week pregnancy in hospital. It is to Caroline and the NHS staff at Nottingham City Hospital that I say thank you for the blessing that is my twin children. That is why I am delighted that, after months of lobbying, the Government have provided seed money for the local Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust to develop and rebuild modular buildings and key sites, including a new women's and children's unit, which will benefit families in Broxtowe.

Parents do their best for their children. As the father of two children with autism, I recognise that those in Broxtowe who are on the autistic spectrum or suffer with mental health conditions have found it particularly difficult being cooped up during lockdown. In normal times, getting mental health support is a struggle. I am convinced that it does not have to be this way. The Government's planned reform of the Mental Health Act 1983 must ensure that people subject to the Act receive better care and have a much greater say in that care. I will continue to fight to secure the needs of vulnerable people in Broxtowe. They will not be forgotten.

In today's debate, we are considering support for UK industries in response to covid-19. In my own constituency of Broxtowe, enterprises as varied as the Boots headquarters, which opened the first non-NHS swab testing site in the country, and independent, family-run firms such as Fred Hallam grocers, who delivered extensively to help people during covid-19, have diversified to ensure that the needs of our community are met. With the HS2 east midlands hub set to be in Toton, and Stapleford soon to be revitalised by the town deal funding, Broxtowe will have a thriving future.

I will work to make that vision a reality for the people of Broxtowe—my constituency; my people. To paraphrase D. H. Lawrence, a local lad made good, I will be still when I have nothing to say; when genuine passion moves me, I will say, and say it hot.

3.30 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Darren Henry) on an excellent maiden speech and on his very powerful story. I add to his tribute to his predecessor, who brought great passion to our debates in this House. I am sure that he will bring many insights from Broxtowe, too.

Many businesses across the country are breathing a sigh of relief that they can start trading again. The level of Government support for businesses has been unprecedented, and that is undoubtedly to be welcomed; it has provided a lifeline to swathes of our economy at this incredibly challenging time. However, although the support is extensive, we cannot ignore those who have slipped through the gaps. We also cannot pretend that this is not going to be difficult for months for industries where normality is still a long way off.

Aviation is a key area in which recovery will be slow. Flights may be restarting and discussions on air bridges under way, but the sector does not expect demand to return to pre-crisis levels until at least 2023. The crisis will have a sustained effect on our aviation industry.

Newcastle airport in my constituency is an international and domestic transport hub, a strategic asset for the north-east and central to our economic growth. It is a large regional employer but also supports many regional jobs, on site, off site and in the supply chain. Our airport supports manufacturing business, exports, and higher education through our world-class universities. It also supports the tourism sector, which was thriving before this crisis.

I have raised support for aviation in the Chamber a number of times, but there is still a concerning lack of appreciation for the special circumstances faced by the industry. There also seems to be a lack of understanding of how this crisis will impact the sector's transition to being greener and cleaner and of the longer-term impact on regional economies such as mine. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on sustainable aviation, I believe passionately in the importance of a strong and stable aviation sector.

Newcastle airport has ambitious plans to become a net zero emissions airport by 2035. However, demand for new aircraft will take years to recover from its expected drop, which could mean manufacturing job losses and a decline in this strategic industry at a time when we need more investment in cleaner and greener aviation technology, not less.

The industry is asking for greater understanding and support in the difficult months ahead. It needs air bridges to be arranged as soon as possible. Twelve months of business rates relief, as has been provided to airports in Scotland and Northern Ireland, would level the playing field and support businesses through this period. A temporary suspension of air passenger duty is requested while aviation demand recovers, particularly when it comes to regional air connectivity. We urgently need action so that the industry can prepare and protect jobs.

I turn to the many smaller businesses in my constituency that face so much uncertainty about their future. We have a world-leading performing arts sector, which has been brought to its knees by this crisis. We could see devastation of the cultural and entertainment scene in so many communities. One of my constituents who works in the industry said:

“Over the recent period of lockdown I have watched as theatre after theatre has closed down, unable to remain afloat due to the incredible lack of funding already present within the industry and have watched so many of my friends and colleagues being made redundant.”

So many venues do not know when they will be able to reopen and are fighting for survival. I was contacted by a dance school that just wants to know when it might be able to reopen. We have seen what has happened to tourism businesses, self-employed people—I could go on; there are so many.

As Britain cautiously emerges from lockdown and some level of normal returns, we cannot allow those who have lost out most from this crisis to continue to be forgotten. We must do everything we can to make sure that as many as possible get through this crisis and continue to provide their services in the future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am afraid that we will have to move to a three-minute limit if we are to have any chance of getting as many people in as possible.

3.34 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The circumstances in which we find ourselves are unprecedented, and unprecedented times call for unprecedented action. What may have seemed unthinkable to this Government a few short months ago is now not only thinkable but absolutely essential to support UK industries.

The Government's actions to save jobs through the job retention scheme by allowing workers to be furloughed was universally welcomed, although there were too many gaps in it, which was deeply unfair to workers who fell through those cracks. But the current plan to reduce support for furloughed workers and self-employed people is sending unemployment soaring. The plans to cut back on furlough support has seen tens of thousands of jobs lost before our eyes: 9,000 jobs at Rolls-Royce; 10,000 jobs at BP; 5,000 jobs at Centrica; 10,000 jobs at British Airways; more than 3,000 jobs at Virgin Atlantic; 2,600 jobs at OVO Energy; 2,500 jobs at Travis Perkins—I literally do not have time to go through the thousands of jobs that are being lost.

The whole point of the job retention scheme was to save jobs—an aim that we can all support—but if the furlough support is withdrawn too early, it will have failed in that goal. In addition, Government loans need to be converted into grants to save our businesses. I first petitioned the Chancellor on this issue on 15 April in a letter to which I still await a response. The guiding principle here must be to save businesses, jobs and our economy. We are very far from “job done”.

The Bank of England has said that the UK Government should treat the debt that has been incurred as war debt. That is absolutely correct. It should not lead to greater austerity, because that will only compound the challenges that we currently face. A war has indeed been fought—a war on our health and our economy—and the Government must continue to throw every mechanism and tool at their disposal at securing victory as we face the worst economic depression in more than 300 years.

UK Government borrowing will reach £340 billion and quantitative easing will reach £645 billion this year, so why has Scotland been allocated a relatively meagre

£10 billion? While the UK Government borrow and Scotland is sold short, the powers, levers and financial flexibility that Scotland has are insufficient to manage Scotland's response to the host of challenges that we face. With the requisite powers in Scotland, we could do it better for ourselves, as we always do. The current powers do not allow us to do that. We need to be armed to face the economic tsunami that is heading our way at great speed. If this Government will not do more, we in Scotland need more power to do it for ourselves.

3.37 pm

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): My constituency of Ynys Môn is an island of vast economic potential; however, over the past two decades the people of Ynys Môn have endured an economic decline that should never have been allowed to happen. Many large employers have closed and thousands of well-paid jobs are being lost. This has been hugely detrimental to the island's precious Welsh culture and the sustainability of the language, as so many have had to travel away to be successful in their careers.

As I am sure Members from all parties who represent coastal constituencies can attest, the tourism and hospitality sector is often most crucial in economically disadvantaged areas. That is certainly the case on Ynys Môn, where the sector supports roughly 4,000 jobs and contributes more than £300 million to the local economy. The lockdown was, of course, the right thing to do: it helped to prevent our precious NHS from being overrun and it helped to save lives. I know that I speak for many businesses and self-employed people from across Ynys Môn—including many of those operating in the tourism sector and the supply chain that supports it—in saying that although the lockdown has been unimaginably difficult to endure, the packages of financial support provided by the Government have been both invaluable and hugely appreciated. That financial support will give the sector a fighting chance to recover and to thrive once again.

In April, it was announced that the parent company of two of the island's favourite pubs—the Oyster Catcher in Rhosneigr and the White Eagle in Rhoscolyn—had entered into administration. It was feared and likely that at a time when our island cannot afford to lose a single job, more than 100 jobs across both sites would be lost. However, due to the coronavirus job retention scheme, both pubs were identified as being viable and have now been rescued. I thank the Timpson Group for once again displaying confidence in the amazing workforce of Ynys Môn. I wish both pubs and their employees a long and successful future.

Ynys Môn is the most dependent local authority in the UK on tourism, and this crisis has highlighted more than ever that this needs to change and we must diversify. Our coastal waters have some of the strongest tides in the British Isles, and companies such as Minesto are looking to use tidal power. We have a nuclear power station, Wylfa Newydd, which will create thousands of jobs and help to reduce our carbon emissions. Ynys Môn has the opportunity to play a leading role in developing these technologies, with unparalleled economic opportunities for the people of the island.

3.39 pm

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): Support for our industries as we emerge from the first phase of the covid-19 crisis is absolutely essential so that our economy

can recover as quickly as possible. However, this needs to be done responsibly and cannot be prioritised ahead of people's health.

The north-west region, which I represent, continues to have the highest R rate in the country, currently standing at between 0.7 and 1, as revealed today in a leaked report by Public Health England. That is why last week Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham launched the "Safely Reopening Greater Manchester" campaign, an initiative to ensure that the region's economy can reopen safely from the covid-19 lockdown. That includes supporting employers and employees to take precautions such as working from home where possible and utilising alternative methods of travel to work, such as walking or cycling, instead of risking infection on public transport.

Small businesses, which underpin our economy, have undoubtedly been hit the hardest in this crisis. In my constituency, Stockport's market hall traders have raised particular concerns that they have faced as a result of the lockdown, which has created immediate hardship for them. They have further fears such as shoppers staying away when the lockdown is eased, coupled with social distancing measures that will result in less footfall. The market hall and our independent traders are an asset to Stockport and a key part of its unique character, but without support they will be unable to survive in the current economic climate. Rent holidays would put the traders in a much stronger position to bounce back when the current restrictions are lifted.

Robinsons brewery in my constituency is a further example of a successful local business that must be supported throughout this crisis. Robinsons is a family-run, award-winning brewery founded in 1849, and a member of the Society of Independent Brewers. Sales by independent breweries dropped by 82% when pubs closed in March, yet they have not received the same financial support as pubs, such as the business rate holiday or the £25,000 grant. That situation is made worse by the fact that almost half of independent brewers require two to four weeks to brew beer and prepare, meaning that there will be a further lag once the lockdown is over. I urge the Government to consider measures such as direct support that is already provided to pubs and the hospitality sector, which should be extended so that small breweries receive business rate relief and grants. This will help to protect and secure jobs in independent companies such as Robinsons.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Navendu Mishra: I will, briefly, with the permission of the Chair. [*Interruption.*] Oh, we are running out of time—I apologise.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority, led by Mayor Burnham, is already looking at initiatives such as a regional brokering scheme to match people who are at risk of being made redundant when the furlough scheme ends with parts of the economy where there are opportunities, as well as exploring initiatives such as a future jobs fund. I urge the Minister to take action.

3.42 pm

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): Having spoken to businesses across my constituency, where some 11,900 people have been furloughed and 4,300 people have been in receipt of the self-employed income support

[Greg Smith]

scheme, it is clear to me that many jobs have been saved—livelihoods, as well as businesses that have been built up with dedication and passion over years and decades. That is all due to the unprecedented support made available by this Government.

However, as the numbers of signatures on the petitions we are debating today show, some sectors do remain in need of particular support. In the time available, I cannot cover them all, but as someone who has previously been a trustee of a theatre and an arts centre, I know how difficult the current situation is for everyone in the arts, and I very much hope we can find a way to assure the future of British theatre and music.

It would be remiss of me, as a member of the Transport Committee, not to mention aviation. It is imperative for the very survival of our airlines, airports and the businesses that support them, and the thousands of jobs that depend on them, that we are able to get aviation up and running again soon. I will not repeat the findings of the Committee's recent report, but I will briefly mention freight. With 40% of air freight going in the belly hold of passenger aircraft, if the passenger planes are not flying, the freight is not flying either. As the UK recovery depends, to a large part, on new free trade deals around the globe, we need aviation. I encourage the Government to focus on freight, as well, as part of the recovery plan.

From the perspective of the events sector, I wish to focus particularly on the coach industry.

I have spoken to coach operators in my constituency, such as Masons in Cheddington. The sector at large employs 42,000 people and contributes nearly £7 billion to the leisure sector. The drop in income that the coach sector has seen during lockdown, with six-figure losses, is unprecedented. The reduction in social distancing is very positive, but coach companies tell me that with 1 metre-plus, they can only get 25 people on a 53-seater coach and that is not viable. To put it bluntly, with that capacity they will barely cover the fuel to keep the wheels rolling.

Loans have been good news, but with many operators having spent considerable money through debt on ensuring their fleet complies with the regulations on public service vehicle accessibility earlier this year, they are left financially exposed to taking on further debt. If we want to get people back to the tourism locations and museums and to help people who have been isolated for so long get about again, my plea to the Government is that we need support for the coach sector, to help it bounce back.

3.45 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Forty years ago, manufacturing accounted for 30% of GDP in this country. It now stands at barely 9%. If there is to be any serious agenda for levelling up in this country, we need a modern manufacturing renaissance to close the gap between the regions, to rebalance between services and manufacturing and to be a country that is actually exporting again, which has a massive impact on our balance of trade. We need steel to be at the heart of that modern manufacturing renaissance.

Steel is the backbone of manufacturing. It is in the cars that we drive, the offices we work in, even in the cutlery we use to eat our meals. It is at the heart of our aerospace and automotive sectors. It is absolutely vital as a foundation industry.

The Port Talbot steelworkers in my constituency make the best steel that money can buy. It is green steel. Imagine relying on steel from China, which has some of the dirtiest steel production processes in the world. Allowing our steel sector to collapse would be the definition of a false economy, in terms of the need for a proper industrial strategy and the reduction of our dependence on China.

Steel is the beating heart of the economy and community, with 4,000 well-paid steelworkers in my Aberavon constituency. Some say that steel is a sunset industry. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is vital in photovoltaic cell production, and the vast majority of the alloys that are used in steel these days did not even exist 10 years ago. It is at the cutting edge of innovation.

Tata Steel is in the midst of a cash-flow crisis because of the impact of covid-19, which has caused demand for steel to fall off a cliff. It needs Government-backed loan support. I do not care whether that is a loan or Project Birch; it does not matter. We need support from Government so that the steel industry can weather the storm and help us to build back better.

There can be no post-pandemic economic recovery without a strong and healthy steel industry. Imagine the cost of doing nothing—4,000 well-paid workers going on to benefits. The capital expenditure costs of decommissioning the Port Talbot steelworks would be astronomical. The loan would be far better value for the taxpayer than the cost of doing nothing.

I urge the Government to step up to the plate. I urge the Government to take the long view and put in place an industrial strategy that includes energy prices, business rates and a proper trade defence mechanism, so we stop the dumping of Chinese steel. All that needs to happen and it needs to happen now—but first, we need that loan from the Government, and we need it today.

3.49 pm

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): I make specific reference to my register of interests; I am associated with a business that has received a CBIL.

Faced with a profound crisis, the Government responded magnificently with a suite of measures of emergency loan schemes to support businesses badly affected by covid-19, in particular CBIL and the bounce-back loan scheme. Put together at great speed, the schemes shovelled money from lending banks into viable businesses to support their cash flow in the short term, with capital sums repayable over five or six years—a vital support to large sectors of our economy and one that we will look back on with awe.

As we come out the other side of the initial crisis, the requirement to repay those debts in just five to six years will, in its turn, damage our ability to grow the economy. Just when we need businesses to be investing in growth and creating employment, they will have to focus on repaying their covid debt, in addition to any other pre-crisis leverage repayment plans. Just when we want banks to lend money to support employment-enhancing growth, they will have swollen covid-19 balance sheets and so be less likely to lend more. That is the opposite of what we need to happen.

There is a simple-ish solution: if we take the covid loan books of the banks and place the loans in a special purpose vehicle, turning them into covid loan-backed securities with varying maturities of up to 30 years, we

could transform our economic recovery at a stroke and reduce capital repayments by a factor of six. We would free up whole swathes of the economy from zombie status, releasing funds for investment in growth. It would reduce business failures and increase the market for investment debt as effective business debt ratios are reduced.

At the same time, it would increase the banks' lending appetite, since their current covid loan books would have been sold to institutional investors, so reflatting their balance sheets. It would create the long-term, very low-risk, fixed income investment sought after by pension funds, particularly if the coupon were tax-free. The risk, after all, would be made up of businesses that were confident that they could repay sums over five or six years now doing so over 30 years, with individual risk further softened by their amalgamation.

Finally, it would create a whole new sector in finance in which the City could excel. I cannot think of a single policy that could do so much to re-establish our growth businesses so quickly, and all without significant recourse to the taxpayer. Does that sound too good to be true? Well, like any complex financial product, there are risks that will need to be explored both by the Treasury and by the Bank of England, but my earnest hope is that this proposal will be given the serious and immediate consideration it deserves.

3.52 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I am going to make two points. The first is one that other Members have touched on. There are 3 million small limited companies, from taxi drivers to people in the creative industries, who still are being excluded from Government rescue measures. Many of those are not eligible for universal credit, so I add my plea to that of others: please, please, can the Government try to help those people?

The second point I want to make is about tourism. It occurs to me that I shall be repeating myself, inasmuch as I talked about this very subject some two or three weeks ago, although, now I think about it, I was up on the screens all around the Chamber—not a very pleasant sight, I fancy, so perhaps I should take the opportunity to apologise for any trauma I caused to right hon. and hon. Members.

It has been an incredibly long winter in the highlands of Scotland, and it is not over yet. We hope that the tourism businesses will go back in business on 15 July, but they are by their very nature seasonal. They make their money during the tourism season to survive the winter. That is the fat that they live on to see them through to the next tourism season, and I fear very much that many of the tourism businesses in my constituency, even starting on 15 July, will not put enough cash in the bank to see them through.

Of course, if they go down and they fail, the following year we have a reduced tourism product to offer people to bring them back to the highlands of Scotland. The same is true of Anglesey; it is true all over the UK. Our tourism product must be safeguarded and garnered and encouraged.

I know from what I have said in the past that I have the support of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of this House on this issue, and I am grateful for that. My hon. Friend and colleague the Member for

Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) has indeed been talking about this matter, and I support him. I also know that within the Scottish Government Fergus Ewing, the Minister responsible, is big on this as well.

I guess my plea is this: I believe, as does my hon. Friend, that we will have to have some specially tailored package, based on the measures that the Government have rightly put in place at the moment, to try to help the tourism industry through the longer period. I do not know what the answer is, but there are very many clever people who work in Her Majesty's Treasury, and perhaps something could be thought up about that.

I hope there will be discussions between the Scottish Government and Fergus Ewing, and Her Majesty's Treasury and appropriate Ministers. I would be deeply grateful if this issue was taken seriously, because if tourism goes down the tubes in my constituency, frankly, the economy will be damaged irreparably. That means people will lose their livelihoods and the curse of the highland clearances could come back to haunt us yet again.

3.55 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): I declare an interest as my company has used the furlough scheme.

The furlough scheme and the self-employment income support scheme have been absolute wonders, and the loans of all different sizes and flexibility have been extremely well received. In fact, in my first ever webinar with Doncaster chambers of commerce, which of course I believe is the best in the country, a poll was carried out where all 30 delegates said that the Government had done an excellent job—high praise, but deservedly so. As a businessman, I know full well that it has been a tough time, so much so that even after all the monumental efforts from the Government things will look decidedly different post covid. I have no doubt that that genuinely frightens many people, but the longer we stay off work the harder it is for us to go back.

Let us take the building industry, for example. I have worked in this sector for many years and it is physically tough. When you have not been doing it for a while, it is hard to go back to. My ask is this: I want large firms, with furloughed employees that are waiting for another initiative while sitting on huge bank balances, to make the first move—not to use social distancing as an excuse not to go to work, but now as an excuse to go to work. We need those building companies to start finishing the houses they started pre-covid, get the footings dug for the next phase, press suppliers to make sure materials are there, pay everyone a little earlier and get confidence back in business. We can wait on Government initiatives and we can blame covid, or we can get stuck in and build our way out of this recession. Or we can all wait to see who moves first—by doing that, we will fail. Let us all start today, not on Monday or a week on Monday. Let us start now. It is imperative. I tell the building firms and all the other big companies that their workforces will thank them for it.

I also ask the Treasury to use whatever it has at its disposal to get this country back to work. I urge the Minister to consider how measures, such as reducing VAT, a reduction in national insurance contributions or scrapping stamp duty, would help to get our great businesses moving again. We cannot rely on support schemes for ever. We need to get back to work. I therefore urge every

[Nick Fletcher]

cash-rich company to do its bit and put its best foot forward and do everything it can. I ask the people of this country to do the same and our Government to consider my suggestions. We are all stakeholders in our future. We are all in this together. We will all win together, or we will all lose together. It is going to be tough, but I will do my bit. Will the risk-takers out there do theirs? If they do, our country will take its rightful place as the envy of the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The next Member for the Opposition has withdrawn, so we go straight to Sally-Ann Hart.

3.58 pm

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): Exceptional public health decisions required to squash this virus have needed exceptional economic interventions. That is what the Government have provided through the vast economic package of support given to businesses and individuals. One email I received yesterday from a constituent, who owns Rock a Nore Kitchen, said: "As small business owners, my husband and I have both been helped by the Government. You have really looked after us and we will not forget it. The grants and furlough scheme have enabled us to keep our businesses, keep our staff, generate money into the economy and keep the high streets alive. We will recover and it is down to you all."

Beautiful Hastings and Rye is particularly dependent on the tourism and hospitality sectors, so I was delighted to hear the Prime Minister earlier this week announce the reopening of those sectors from 4 July. This is a much needed boost to our local economy, which we desperately need. However, we also have an amazing cultural and arts sector, which has, unfortunately, largely missed out on the remarkable economic packages provided by the Government, which have helped to support over 11,000 jobs and over 5,000 self-employed people in my constituency. Now we must look to the future and see what more we can do to continue levelling up our country and turbo-charging our local economies as we recover from the health crisis.

The Government provided economic support to businesses and individuals at a critical time. Now we all have a role to play in getting out and supporting our local businesses by finding our collective confidence to do so. Together we have gripped control of this virus and together we can come out of this pandemic stronger—team UK! In encouraging visitors to our tourist attractions, shops and hospitality venues, local authorities also have a role to play in marketing our areas and banging the drum to encourage domestic tourism. With greater footfall will come more support and an energetic boost to our local businesses.

Looking to the future, we need to put rocket boosters under our creative and performing arts sector, which is the bedrock of much of the soul of Hastings and Rye, through supporting venues in my constituency from St Mary in the Castle and Hastings Contemporary to pubs such as the Crown in Hastings old town, the Piper in St Leonards and the Standard Inn in Rye—I could keep going. There are so many people who are dependent on this industry getting off the ground again. I am

asking the Government to put forward a clear plan for the strategy to drive up domestic tourism, so that we can support our hospitality and cultural sectors and allow constituencies such as Hastings and Rye to bounce back after this period of lockdown. Furthermore, it would be fantastic to get reassurances from the Government that our cultural, tourism and hospitality businesses in particular will have additional measures of support to get them through the equivalent of three winters.

4.1 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Coronavirus has discriminated. The poorest communities have been hardest hit, with the highest mortality rates. Between March and May this year, County Durham had the third highest mortality rate in the UK. The biggest economic impact of coronavirus will be felt in the poorest communities. In the north-east, according to the North East England chamber of commerce, manufacturing is down 54% and the service sector is down 63%. In my constituency, unemployment is now 12% above the national average, and we all know from talking to local businesses that this is going to get worse as furlough ends and companies lay off workers. I fear that, without direct Government action, the north-east of England will return to the bad old days of the 1980s, with unemployment deprivation on that scale.

There are two sectors that we need to target. The first immediate measure that needs to be taken is to support small and medium-sized enterprises—tourism businesses and others—whether through rate relief or direct support. Secondly, the Government need to bring forward those Government projects that are now ready to go. Chester-le-Street railway station could be one of those projects. Likewise, Government contracts, nationally and in the region, need to be looked at to see which firms can become involved. Departments also need to put business directly into the regions. BAE Systems in the north-east, for example, could benefit in that regard. We have a Government who are committed to levelling up, so I am disappointed that when they have the opportunity to put investment into the north-east, they do not do it. It was disappointing that the vaccine manufacturing and innovation centre went to Oxford. The second place on the shortlist was the north-east, but they chose Oxford above the north-east of England.

The longer-term strategic aim is to establish a Government taskforce for the north-east, with a Minister in charge of it—someone who will be an advocate for the region. We also need to ensure that the so-called shared prosperity fund, which will replace European investment in the north-east, is brought forward, because that involves £134 million for Teesside and County Durham. Housing projects need to be brought forward on a regional basis, and innovation and training are a must. We should also have a guaranteed job or training scheme for the under-25s. Without this direct action, I fear that the north-east will go back to those dark days of the 1980s, which was a hard time for our region. We cannot have a repeat of the lost generation that we had then, when we know what is coming.

4.4 pm

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Nearly six months ago, I gave my maiden speech, in which I spoke of the international events that Brecon and

Radnorshire is home to. They include the Hay-on-Wye literary festival, the Brecon jazz festival, the Green Man festival and even the international bog snorkelling championships in Llanwrtyd Wells. Sadly, all these have been cancelled this year. Cancelling the Green Man festival in Glanusk deprives us of more than just great music. The festival employs hundreds of seasonal workers and attracts thousands of visitors, all of whom spend money in our pubs, restaurants and local shops. Some events have been able to move online. For example, the Hay-on-Wye literary festival showcased virtual events, involving more than 100 award-winning writers, policy-makers and innovators. This was a huge undertaking, and I congratulate the organisers once again on delivering Hay-on-wifi, as the Prime Minister christened it.

With my passion for farming and agriculture, I have to say that I am gutted by the cancellation of the Royal Welsh Show. This world-renowned agricultural event, the largest agricultural show in Europe, attracts visitors from far and wide, generating up to £45 million for our economy in the process. The Royal Welsh is more than just a show. It is a celebration of Wales itself. For many in the farming community, it is the highlight of the year. The social aspect of the show cannot be underestimated, particularly when one considers the isolation that so often comes with rural life—a point reinforced to me during a meeting with my local branch of Mind, the mental health charity, this week.

Having spoken to the Royal Welsh this week, I know that the team in Builth Wells are working hard to try to deliver the Royal Welsh Winter Fair in November this year, and I am pleased that the UK Government and the Secretary of State for Wales are supporting them all we can, but they need support from both our Governments. The Welsh Government have provided some support to key events such as the Eisteddfodau, our Welsh language celebrations, but nothing so far for the Royal Welsh Show.

In England, outdoor theatres can now open and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is working closely with the arts and culture sector on when indoor theatres can reopen. In Wales, we have no clarity on that. Yesterday, I received an email from Theatr Brycheiniog in Brecon. Since the lockdown, all performances have been cancelled and audiences have stayed away. The theatre staff told me yesterday that they have no idea when they can reopen. This could provide some optimism to the thousands of self-employed artists and performers who do not know when they will be able to return to work. Their counterparts in England have visibility, while we in Wales are left in the dark.

I have much to thank this Government for, not least the 10,000 employed and self-employed jobs that have been saved in Brecon and Radnorshire. Of course, there will always be more to do—more cause to go further—to keep on writing cheques, but the harsh reality is that the cake only cuts so many ways. This Government have dug deep to provide an unprecedented level of support in finance and guidance. If only we could say the same in Wales.

4.7 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Many of my constituents have signed the petitions triggering this debate and, in particular, are calling for a dedicated programme of support for our events, cultural and creative industries. Anyone who knows Brighton and Hove cannot fail to be aware that we are home to some

of the country's most vibrant, creative and successful festivals. We lead the way nationally as well in widening access to the arts and unleashing the creative lives as yet un-lived in excluded communities. Failing to directly support the creative sector puts 16,000 jobs at risk in our city alone and £1.5 billion in turnover. The consequences for the UK as a whole will be equally devastating, including for our sense of identity as a nation, which is inextricably bound up with cultural innovation from Chaucer to Banksy.

I call on Ministers to introduce urgent life support measures as other European countries have done. Germany, for example, has invested in a €50 billion rescue package. We need a similar cultural sector hardship relief fund to save live music venues, grassroots theatres, arts centres, community pubs and any space that is a vital hub of culture and social interaction in our communities. Live music venues in my constituency are particularly at risk, and face a cliff edge when furlough ends. As one, Komedia, wrote to me,

“A world without grassroots venues is a world where the future's talent never get the opportunity they deserve”.

I urge Ministers not to stand by and watch them go to the wall.

Those working in the events and creative industries are often self-employed and need their incomes protecting, too. Yet the self-employed scheme falls far short, failing to recognise the reality of self-employment today, penalising those who combine self-employment with PAYE work, PAYE freelancers, new start-ups and the recently self-employed, women who have taken time out for maternity leave and childcare, and anyone earning £50,000 and over. It is also a kick in the teeth for the nation's small limited companies whose directors take all or part of their income in dividends. Therefore, as well as expanding access to the self-employed scheme, the Government must immediately extend its duration. The self-employed are still only protected until August, and that is not equivalent to the job retention scheme and it is not enough.

This must also be a green recovery in more than name, because of the accelerating climate emergency—it is currently 45 degrees in the Arctic—and because it makes economic sense as well. Plenty of evidence shows that green projects create more jobs, deliver higher returns on investment and lead to increased long-term cost savings. A green new deal recovery should invest only in industries willing and prepared to adapt to the net zero imperative. If public money is being used to bail out a company, there should be green and social conditions attached. We should not be handing over £600 million to easyJet with no questions asked. We should not be bailing out BA when it is treating its workers so appallingly.

Finally, a green recovery requires rethinking our entire economy, so that its primary purpose is human and planetary wellbeing, rather than the endless pursuit of indiscriminate GDP growth, which is destroying our planet and undermining the livelihoods of millions of people.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): It should be obvious to the House that we do not have very long left. I estimate that eight more people will be called to speak. As you all have the speaking list, you will be able to work out who those eight are. If you are not among them, it is only fair that I warn you now.

4.10 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Before the pandemic, pubs and hospitality employed more than 3 million people, which is 11% of UK employment, and contributed 7% of national GDP. Since the outbreak, three quarters of sites have been closed, 2.8 million people have been furloughed and 400,000 more could not be furloughed.

The Government have already done much to support businesses and pubs, through hospitality grants, discretionary payments and business rate holidays. Those measures have been vital in allowing businesses and jobs to survive this far, but hospitality will need further support as it rebuilds. That is particularly true for industries that depend on hospitality but have not qualified for grants and business rate holidays, such as breweries, and those in related sectors such as events, festivals, theatres and music venues.

To thrive post covid, we need a successful and growing economy. That means consumers and businesses having confidence to spend and invest. Dudley South and the west midlands are rightly famous for world-beating advanced manufacturing and engineering, but we also have great businesses, large and small, innovating in creative industries, construction and technological solutions for a green economy. They must play a central role in rebuilding our economy, and the Government can help. Ministers will, by now, be familiar with the excellent recovery plan for the west midlands drawn up by our fabulous Mayor, Andy Street. His “Repowering the Black Country” programme comes with a relatively modest price tag of £30 million and is a very sound investment. The Black Country is one of seven clusters working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy industrial cluster decarbonisation programme. Investing now will deliver accelerated green growth, by creating 2,550 jobs and safeguarding a further 2,200. It will re-shore manufacturing jobs and ensure that £14.8 billion in gross value added growth over 10 years is clean, net zero carbon. It will unlock £400 million of private sector funding, creating the world’s first zero-carbon industrial cluster by 2030. Black Country firms are working hard to recover after covid-19, to protect jobs and to generate the prosperity that my constituents rely on. Coronavirus is, above all, a public health crisis. We must do all we can to prevent that human tragedy being followed by a prolonged and deep crash that would limit people’s life chances for years to come.

4.13 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I welcome the chance to debate the support we provide to industries and the many sectors hit hard by this pandemic. We are braced for the worst economic downturn for many decades, if not centuries. Many thousands of jobs are at risk of being lost or are likely to be lost, including at Centrica, Nissan, British Airways and Virgin Atlantic. We are talking about plans to cut some 12,000 jobs. At Rolls-Royce and many other companies all over the country, many of our constituents will be affected. Some 10% of the population could face unemployment; 1 million young people are likely to face unemployment by the end of the year.

This also needs to be considered in the context of what kind of deal might be agreed, and how much friction there might be, with the European Union; the risk of a no-deal Brexit causing huge disruption; and

the possibility of a second wave of the pandemic. So the risks are huge, both economically and in terms of health and our relationship with our biggest trading partner. That is why it is important that our Government focus on ensuring that there is a clear and coherent economic plan to protect the jobs that have been retained with the help of the job retention scheme. It is important that employers who are not in a position to make the contribution that they will soon have to are not forced to do so, because that will lead to more job losses. It is also vital that the Government heed the recommendations of the Treasury Committee report to provide support to the over 1 million people who did not benefit. Many of them work in the sectors that we have been talking about today, including in freelance jobs in the theatre, the music industry and creative industries in constituencies like mine—more than 1 million of them need help, including the new starters and those in the hospitality sector who have been neglected.

I hope that the Government will have a clear response to support the younger generation. We cannot afford another lost generation. It is vital that we have a credible economic plan that is ambitious, bold and inclusive, and protects everyone in our country. The Government must create a new settlement genuinely to tackle the inequalities that exist in our country and to ensure that no one is left behind, particularly those who have already faced hardship.

4.16 pm

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I should declare an interest: my wife’s business has taken advantage of some of the Government support.

During the pandemic, we have rightly paid tribute to the workers of the NHS and others who have looked after us at this time. I also pay tribute to the workers in the private sector who have been at the forefront of the economic crisis.

I have been involved with small businesses for a long time in my life. I can tell Members of the absolute terror that many people have felt in my constituency, seeing their business collapse and losing 100% of their income overnight. They are desperately trying to reorganise their business to save jobs, to survive and to pull through this pandemic. That is what I have been spending my lockdown doing.

Those businesses are also being incredibly versatile. The Chequers pub in Fowlmere, the village I grew up in, was one of the first in the country to turn itself into a takeaway. In my constituency is the headquarters of AstraZeneca, which now leads the world on producing the much hoped for vaccine. It said it will do it at cost and produce 1 billion doses. We all keep our fingers crossed that it will work.

I do not need to pay tribute to the Government support in all this because across the House we have been doing that, but I have been in awe of its scale and speed. The Government—in particular, the Treasury and HMRC—have been doing years of work in weeks. My constituents have been very grateful for that support. I have heard a lot of thanks and that people have only been able to keep their companies going because of the various different Government support schemes.

Yes, as we have heard, there are gaps. I am well aware of gaps in particular sectors and that some people fall through. I am on the Treasury Committee as well, and we have taken evidence about those gaps, but almost

everyone can get some form of support. There is a reason why the schemes are designed as they are. There is a trade-off between complexity and speed. Had the Government made the schemes more complex, consulting on their detail and design, they could not have been rolled out at that record pace, helping all those different businesses.

The Government have been very flexible, such as with the CBILs. When the banks were not getting those loans out quickly enough, because they had to do affordability checks, the Government introduced the bounce-back loans, which enabled them to roll out support far more quickly. However, I urge the Government to keep under review—as I am sure they will—their support schemes over the rest of the crisis.

The best way to help businesses is to get the economy going again. We should have three priorities: growth, growth and growth. Private enterprise has taken the brunt of this recession and private enterprise will lead us out of it. I urge us all to unite in supporting businesses as we move forwards.

4.19 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): Thank you for allowing me to speak in this important debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The full effect of the coronavirus pandemic has yet to be felt, but we have already seen the impact that this invisible disease is having on my city of Coventry and on the United Kingdom. Sadly, in the months to June, as many as 270 people lost their lives to the virus in my city, according to the Office for National Statistics. Our normal way of life has changed, and some of us have mourned the loss of friends and family.

We have seen lay-offs in companies large and small. According to the Library, in Coventry North West there were 4,630 claimants for unemployment benefit; a further 3,200 claims were made to the self-employment income support scheme, which is equivalent to 71% of the potentially eligible population; and there are currently 13,100 jobs on furlough through the job retention scheme. Although the Government's support package is commendable, my fear is that it may mask the true extent of the crisis in our jobs market, and these figures do not show those without recourse to public funds, who may be eligible for the Government's covid-19 support package, but are unable readily to claim vital welfare benefits. I will briefly highlight causes for concern in my patch and businesses that have been affected by this crisis.

Let me turn first to the job losses at Rolls-Royce in Ansty. The UK's aerospace sector is world-leading, supporting hundreds of jobs directly in my constituency through the supply chain. Rolls-Royce's announcement to cut 65 jobs from its workforce of 167 at Ansty is hugely disappointing. The site is renowned for its expertise, being the only one that can weld the vanes of plane propellers. From my conversations with staff and union reps at the site, I understand that they fear the company is using coronavirus as an excuse to ship jobs outside the UK and to rehire staff on worse contracts here and abroad. There are also concerns that this move has been in the works, as their pensions will also change. Is this what the Government meant by global Britain—allowing companies such as Rolls-Royce to receive research and development funding, and job retention money, while they ship British jobs overseas?

The arts are also under threat. The brilliant Belgrade theatre in Coventry is losing income. Small businesses such as Exhibit 3Sixty have also been in touch with my office. Exhibit 3Sixty is an award-winning and successful exhibition stand design and build company based in Coventry with six permanent employees and 12 self-employed tradesmen and women. My office has been supporting Alan Craner, the managing director, who has applied for the retail, hospitality and leisure grant fund, but has been refused. Despite the Chancellor's statement on 17 March, when he appeared to say that the exhibition sector was eligible for the same help that is available to businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector, it seems that there is no special support for companies like Mr Craner's. Will the Minister meet me—virtually, of course—so that I can present my cases and he can provide clarity on the support available?

4.22 pm

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I thank the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for their remarkable support for businesses in the UK, and specifically in Kensington. The Treasury put together a remarkable series of measures—really extraordinary when one thinks of the size, scale and speed of their delivery. However, I would say never let a good crisis go to waste. It is incumbent on us to learn the lessons of the crisis and to use them to formulate a new business and industrial strategy post Brexit.

One of the key takeaways from the crisis is that we need more high-tech manufacturing and engineering capacity in the UK. We had a remarkable response to the call to action on ventilators, and I am delighted to hear that 7,500 ventilators have been provided to the NHS by UK industry. However, manufacturing capacity should already have been in place. The same issue exists with our supply chains. There is no point in having high-tech capacity in the UK if we are dependent on imports for basic components from Asia. We need an industrial strategy that focuses on our high-tech industries, whether telecommunications, artificial intelligence and technology, or energy.

These issues are not going to go away. I hear all the time from constituents who are concerned about Huawei's involvement, for instance, in 5G. I hear their concerns about the involvement of China General Nuclear Power in Hinkley Point C. We also need a strategy that defends our companies from hostile foreign takeovers if they endanger our national security. I am delighted with the Government's response, but let us see this as an opportunity to develop a strong post-Brexit industrial strategy for the UK.

4.25 pm

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): London Luton airport is the fifth busiest airport in the UK, and its operation plays a central role in both Luton's economy and the regional economy. Last year, it delivered £160 million in air passenger duty to Her Majesty's Treasury. It was therefore no surprise to me, and probably will not be to the Minister, that the petition on support for the aviation industry had the highest number of Luton South signatories. I have also received many emails from cabin crew and pilots, from those working in security, retail and hospitality and from those in the wider holiday and tourism sector who work at companies

[Rachel Hopkins]

such as TUI. The whole aviation ecosystem has been impacted by the crisis and they are all worried about their livelihoods.

Luton airport is not only a key jobs provider; because the airport is owned by Luton Council, each year an annual dividend is paid directly to the council to fund local council services. Covid-19 has caused passenger numbers at Luton airport to plummet by 98% and as the airport dividend is based on a per-passenger basis, that dividend has all but disappeared, too. The loss of such a vital commercial income stream into Luton Council means that it is being forced into making £22 million of in-year cuts to balance the budget. That will be devastating for services in our town and is likely to cause nearly 400 job losses at the council.

I have spoken to a number of employers and organisations linked to Luton airport's operations and supply chain, and the common theme is that the Government's decision not to introduce a sector-specific financial support package for aviation has deepened the sector's economic crisis. The sector is interdependent: if one part falters, they all suffer.

We know for sure that the number of flights will not return to 2019 levels for the foreseeable future, that public health regulations will restrict day-to-day business for a long time and that the economic implications will hamper aviation's development towards net zero. A failure to introduce a tailored package that supports the industry in respect of each of these long-term problems will devastate the whole sector. The removal of the job retention scheme before the sector has returned to business as usual and passenger confidence has returned will lead to rising unemployment, slashed wages and, in some cases, attacks on workers' rights. In Luton South, nearly 20% of our workforce has been furloughed, and because of the aviation sector's uncertain future, jobs at easyJet, Swissport and Luton airport are already at risk of being cut.

There is a clear option for the way forward: a new package should include the protection of jobs and salaries, with a commitment to workers' rights and a clear commitment to tackling climate change for the industry, using cleaner fuels and low or zero-emission technologies. Companies in receipt of money must ensure that their tax base is in the UK; no dividends should be paid until the company has been proven to be commercially viable; and a commitment to pay UK-based suppliers must be a priority. There must be an aviation-wide bail-out package and it must be tied to social and environmental expectations.

4.28 pm

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): There is no doubt that the period that we are living through has been one of the most unusual that we will ever have. It has been a tremendous challenge for us all, filled with fear and the unknown. These unprecedented times have been met with unprecedented actions when it comes to this Government: 11,200 people in my constituency have benefited from the job retention scheme and 3,100 people have benefited from the self-employment scheme. These are families and individuals who have felt more secure and safer during these incredibly challenging times.

The Government have not stopped there: from the small business grant fund, the retail, hospitality and leisure grant, and the business interruption loan scheme, through to the bounce-back loans and the deferral of VAT payments and self-assessment payments—I fear I could spend my entire three minutes outlining the amazing actions that the Government have taken over the past three months. What I will say is that I am incredibly proud to support a Government who have put ordinary workers and families first.

As we enter a new stage, I find myself in the unusual position of agreeing with the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) in saying that it is vital that we put green concerns at the heart of our strategy. I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) that we need to unleash our private sector and continue to support it, because it will be at the heart of everything that is good. It has had a very difficult time, and we need to support it.

My constituency is beautiful—it is, as I have previously mentioned, the most beautiful constituency in the entire country—and has tremendous tourism potential. We have talked about those who have unfortunately slipped through the cracks in the Government's various schemes. One example is Creswell Crags in my constituency, which is a wonderful tourism destination. The Minister is almost certainly rolling his eyes, because he is bored of me mentioning this, but I will once again put on record that we need to continue to support that wonderful attraction and the many others in Bolsover, because our tourism potential is unlimited.

I conclude by saying once again that I am incredibly proud of everything we have done. We have a long way to go to get out of this crisis, but I believe that we are showing the leadership to get through it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am afraid that the next speaker will be the last person called from the Back Benches this afternoon. I call Sarah Olney.

4.31 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; I appreciate you giving me time to speak in this really important debate. My constituents have been in touch with me about this issue more than any other during the crisis. The crisis has revealed the complexity of the UK economy. It is a feature of our country's creativity, energy and innovativeness that we host such a vast array of industries and businesses within our island nation. That is reflected in the myriad ways that people earn a living.

I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee, and we were taken aback at a recent hearing to find that the Government's preparation for a pandemic did not include preparation for its economic impact. That left the Treasury with the huge task of devising and delivering its economic rescue plans when the lockdown started, and I pay tribute to it for what it was able to achieve in such a short period. As many Members on both sides of the House have pointed out, the job retention scheme—the furlough scheme—has been invaluable in supporting household incomes during this extremely difficult time. But it is clear that support was focused on those who earn salaries and pay mortgages, and, tragically, many sectors and workers were missed out. I urge the Minister

to consider the lessons for future lockdown planning, although we all hope that this will not be necessary in the immediate future. The biggest tragedy is that many of those who missed out are the ones who will be most instrumental in rebuilding the economy in the months to come—our small businesses, our entrepreneurs, our freelancers, those who have taken a risk on a new business idea or taken on a new job. The Government must focus their investment on our key industries and those that will take the longest to recover.

I spoke earlier today in this place about the necessity of supporting theatres, and I extend that to the whole creative sector. Not only are they a huge earner for us abroad, but they reflect British values across the globe and are instrumental in so many ways. Beyond that, for all of us who have spent months staring at our laptop screens, it will be essential to enjoy live music and live theatre again. I spoke earlier about the necessity of using education programmes, which theatre companies and other parts of the creative sector are so good at, to engage our young people once again.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) spoke passionately about the tourism and hospitality sector, and it is essential that we support all these industries through the next few months. We do not just need to support our workers in these industries; we need to plot out a strategy for their survival and recovery. If the right people get the right help now, they will be ready to revive the economy as soon as they are able to.

4.34 pm

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): This is a timely debate that has not just highlighted the concerns of those who have put their names to these petitions but will have widespread resonance far beyond them. We have heard many excellent contributions this afternoon, with concerns raised covering a wide spectrum of sectors, including arts, tourism, childcare, events, aviation and steel—a full sweep of the economy—and enterprises of all sizes.

The UK Government package, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) said, was put together at speed, and as we have heard, many significant gaps have been identified. On the furlough scheme, for example, I need not dwell on the pivotal date of 19 March, which has left far too many people reliant on the good will of former employers if they are to benefit from it. The self-employed support scheme, which was unveiled after this House had broken up for the Easter recess, missed out those who were newly self-employed. Directors also missed out if they were remunerated through dividends. This makes the case, I think, for a universal basic income in that we know who everyone is, and if we give them the money to get through, then nobody, by definition, will have fallen through the cracks.

Much of the support has been based on the rateable values of business enterprises, and I can understand exactly why that is. It is clear and it is simple for local authorities to administer, but it has still left too many businesses missing out, because they were outside the relevant rateable value bands or they were not in the relevant sector, or because they were small businesses operating out of people's homes and were therefore not on the business valuation roll.

The Scottish Government have certainly done all they can to try to plug those gaps in support with a £2.3 billion package of support. That has meant relief to the fish processing sector and to airports, support for the creative sector, plugging that gap in support for the newly self-employed, £78 million for construction and £51 million to support early-stage, high-potential companies. In all, the response amounts to over £4 billion for tackling this, when we have had £3.8 billion coming through the normal Treasury route.

However, it is important to note that the Scottish Government cannot do everything, and in trying to do more, they are finding themselves seriously constrained not only by the resource available, but by the constitutional limits placed on devolution, which have been particularly exposed in this crisis, and no more so than over borrowing powers. The borrowing powers that the Scottish Parliament has are designed to deal with cash-flow mismatches from year to year; they are not there to deal with serious amounts of investment for the future. I understand that the Finance Secretary in Scotland, Kate Forbes, has written today to the Chancellor to ask for greater flexibility around that. I hope she gets a reply that is not only swift but favourable.

This has also shown the limitations of the so-called Barnett consequential. Too often, colleagues in Edinburgh have been left waiting to find out exactly how much is going to come through from spending decisions that have been taken in this place, occasionally finding that the money they thought was coming through was then not. It would be much better if the devolved Governments were able to decide what response they wanted to make and muster the resources at their disposal in the shortest possible time by simply having the powers to do so without reference to anywhere else.

I appreciate that we are short of time this afternoon, but I will say that borrowing powers were one of the key items identified in the report created by the Scottish Government's advisory group on economic recovery, led by Benny Higgins. Borrowing powers were part of that, as was a series of 25 recommendations including a full review of the fiscal framework, jobs guarantees for the under-25s, prioritising a green recovery and a revised partnership between business and government. These are all important structural changes in the economy that we absolutely need to have if we are going to make sure that the new normal is better than the old normal.

In the time remaining, let me just make a plea for the energy sector. Oil, gas and energy are absolutely crucial not just for jobs in the north-east of Scotland, but right across the UK. They are crucial if we are to maintain our energy security and effect the transition to net zero, but it is an industry on the brink of thousands upon thousands of job losses. The Scottish Government have invested £62 million to do what they can to assist in that. We desperately need a sector deal. Together with my hon. Friends the Members for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), I have made a plea to the Chancellor for just such a sector deal. Again, we hope for a swift and favourable response.

In conclusion, the support to date from the UK Government has been very welcome where it has landed, but desperately missed where it has not. All too often, it has failed to land. The economic challenges we face as the crisis evolves give us a new landscape. The challenges

[Richard Thomson]

change, but are no less urgent and much remains to be done. I say to the Minister that if the UK Government are not willing to use the powers they have to address those shortcomings and to tackle the additional issues that need to be tackled, they should devolve those powers to Governments elsewhere in these islands who will use them.

4.40 pm

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to respond to this wide-ranging and well-subscribed debate on behalf of the Opposition. I start by thanking all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in the debate today, and the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) for opening it. I also pay tribute to the initiators of each of the petitions under consideration and, by my calculation, the nearly three quarters of a million people who collectively signed them for making today's debate possible.

As numerous right hon. and hon. Members referred to in their remarks, the debate takes place in the midst of a pandemic that is taking a severe toll on our economy. Barring a second wave of the virus, the worst may now be behind us, but the fiscal impact wrought, the dramatic rise in the unemployment rate and the prospect of many sectors continuing to operate at reduced capacity for some time point to the trials that lie ahead.

Let me underline for the record that the Opposition welcomed the unprecedented measures that the Government took, in essence, to put our economy on life support in the face of a near total shutdown. The fact that we are here today debating urgent petitions signed by hundreds of thousands of people working in a range of industries is testament to the need to further refine those measures and build on them where necessary to protect as many people's incomes, jobs and businesses as we can.

In the time available to me, I will pick up on three points that have been prominent during the debate. The first is the need for further improvements to the measures already introduced to support businesses and individuals. The second is the need for support packages for certain UK industries, tailored to their needs. The third is the need for a more strategic approach to the recovery than that which defined the rescue.

On the first of those points, the House needs no reminding that it is people who are the bedrock of the productive capacity that firms, and thereby industries, will need to bounce back now that the immediate crisis is subsiding. That is why we must continue to do what is necessary to protect their livelihoods, their jobs and their businesses through this difficult period. That is why we continue to press the Government to fix the gaps and deficiencies in the various financial support schemes that have already been established. There is still time to do so.

There is still time for the Government to revise the job retention scheme to cover employees currently shut out from it, and still time to revise the self-employment income support scheme to help those it currently excludes. There is still time to further reform the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme, so that more companies can access finance and liquidity easily to make it through the crisis, as well as access more patient capital.

There is still time—this brings me to my second point—to revisit the one-size-fits-all approach that has underpinned the design of many of those schemes and appears to be dictating the Government's approach to sectors and industries across the board. The various case studies raised by right hon. and hon. Members from all parts of the House are vivid illustrations that the pandemic's economic impact has not been felt uniformly across different sectors, but also that the rate at which sectors can reopen and restart will differ markedly. If we are to successfully navigate the next phase of this crisis, logic dictates that a more differentiated approach is needed.

Such an approach will undoubtedly pose challenges for the Government, but if Ministers do not concede that established schemes will have to be redesigned so that they can enable a flexible sector-by-sector response, and if they do not concede that targeted support packages will be needed for the industries most in need, we risk many more firms going under and many more jobs being lost. There is, however, no real sense that the Government have accepted as much.

Taking three of the industries whose plight is the focus of the petitions we are considering today, the early years sector is under huge pressure, with many providers on the verge of ruin. As a report released this morning by the Early Years Alliance and Ceeda makes clear, the impact of collapsing relevant revenues from significantly reduced demand and the increased costs that come with making establishments covid-safe are falling on a sector that was already struggling financially before the pandemic took hold. It looks set to lead to significant funding shortfalls and mass closures. The industry needs more help.

As many hon. Members referred to in their speeches, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), the arts and creative industries, as well as the sectors heavily dependent on them, have been hit particularly hard. That sector will be one of the last to reopen because of the difficulty—in many cases, the impossibility—of operating theatres, live music, festivals and other events and performance in line with social-distancing measures. The Culture Secretary told the *Evening Standard* on 8 June that a package of support was “imminent”, yet weeks later nothing has materialised. That industry desperately needs more help.

In powerful contributions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) and for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) highlighted the fact that the aviation sector stands on the brink of devastation as a result of the pandemic, and several airlines have already announced plans for significant redundancies. Research from the New Economics Foundation and the TUC earlier this month warned that at least 70,000 jobs in the wider aviation industry are at risk before the end of the summer alone. The Opposition recognise that aviation must change to tackle runaway global heating, but current developments are chaotic and suggest the absence of any long-term strategy for the industry. It needs more help, as do so many others.

When the Minister stands up, I hope that he can give the House and all those watching our proceedings an indication of when sector-specific support packages,

including access to emergency funding, will be forthcoming for these industries and others that are crying out for help, including hospitality, aerospace, the motor industry and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) pointed out powerfully, steel. If the Minister is unable to do that, will he at least provide some reassurance that the Government recognise the urgency with which such tailored packages are required by the industries in question and that Ministers accept the need to make changes to existing schemes, such as the furlough, so that their phasing out mirrors the pace at which industry is able to return to some semblance of normality?

That brings me to my final point—I will be brief in making it, Madam Deputy Speaker. As we look to ensure that our industries get the ongoing support that they need, we must plan strategically for the future. That means support, yes, to ensure that our industries do not fall behind their international competitors in the years ahead, but also support that is designed to achieve other important national objectives, not least responding to the environment and climate emergency. Our European neighbours are using this crisis as an opportunity to do just that, and the Government should look to match and even surpass their ambition by coming forward with support that will retain and create jobs, accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy and address a range of regional and wider inequalities—a point made very powerfully by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali).

In conclusion, the Opposition recognise the scale of the challenge that the Government have had to confront, as well as the speed with which the current schemes had to be designed and implemented, but, as the OECD made clear, our country is on course to suffer the largest economic hit from the pandemic among major nations this year. In the face of such an emergency, we on this side of the House and the three quarters of a million people who signed these petitions are not demanding the impossible. We are simply asking the Government to act decisively and spend smartly to protect industries that contribute so much to our economy and our society, and on whom so many people rely.

4.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nigel Huddleston): It is a pleasure to contribute on the Government's behalf to this debate, which comes as countries across the world continue to battle one of the worst public health emergencies in our history. I thank Members on both sides of the House for their valuable contributions, both in this debate and in the months and weeks before, and their work to highlight issues that I know we all care very deeply about.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Huddleston: It would not be a debate without an intervention from the hon. Gentleman.

Jim Shannon: We discussed this this morning: may I request the Minister's help for Bombardier in Belfast and Newtownards in my constituency, where 600 manufacturing

jobs are under threat? Would he accept the letter from me with Bombardier's 16-point plan and be so kind as to arrange a response?

Nigel Huddleston: I would be happy to take the letter and ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets an appropriate response from the correct Minister.

The importance of this debate is demonstrated by the fact that hundreds of thousands of people signed the petitions. Of course, we are in an unprecedented global crisis, and this Government have provided an unprecedented, wide-ranging level of financial support in response to protect jobs, businesses and incomes across the country. Under the coronavirus job retention scheme, we have supported over 10 million people and at least 1 million businesses. We have supported 2.6 million self-employed people and given out £26 billion in bounce back loans alone, not to mention the support in the form of grants for small businesses and for those in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. Given the direct and acute impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on those latter sectors, the Government have also provided a business rates holiday for businesses in retail, hospitality and leisure, so that all eligible businesses will pay no business rates for 12 months. This support is worth almost £10 billion to those businesses.

Several Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers), asked about nurseries. We absolutely recognise the important role that nurseries play in young children's lives at the very start of their education. Recognising that, we made sure that nurseries were also on the list for the business rate holiday.

On the broader financial package, when it became clear that more help was needed, the Chancellor announced in May that the furlough scheme would continue until the end of October, and in its current form until the end of July, supporting furloughed workers as they gradually return to work.

The Government have provided a wide and unparalleled level of financial support during the pandemic to help workers in every sector and in every region of the UK, but we knew that as we entered lockdown, as part of our battle against this disease we would need a number of targeted interventions to protect jobs and businesses in some of our most beloved and hardest-hit sectors, including those identified in the petitions. We have had a good and thorough debate about those sectors today. Working groups have been set up by various Departments to work on the path to recovery and to identify what further support may be required, and discussions with the Treasury are taking place.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Will the Minister put it on the record that the creative industries contribute a huge amount to our economy and improve everybody's mental wellbeing? Will he recognise that, welcome though the support schemes were, many freelancers and directors of limited companies, particularly in the creative industries in my constituency, have been left—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order.

Nigel Huddleston: I thank the hon. Lady for her passion. That passion is shared by Ministers at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and elsewhere, and conversations are ongoing about further support.

[Nigel Huddleston]

Hon. Members will appreciate that, given the time constraints, I am unable to respond to many of the other specific points and questions that were raised today relating to multiple Departments and other bodies. However, I will make sure that relevant Ministers are aware of all the points that have been raised in this debate.

I cannot mention individually everyone who has contributed to today's debate, but I thank everybody for their thoughtful and constructive comments. In particular, I would like to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet; my hon. Friends the Members for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), for Buckingham (Greg Smith), for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart), for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones), for Dudley South (Mike Wood) and for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher); the right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami); and the hon. Members for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali), for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi), for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) and for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) for mentioning tourism, hospitality and leisure—and, of course, aviation. Obviously, that sector is very close to my heart.

I would also like to thank those who have mentioned many other sectors, including my hon. Friends the Members for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew), for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher), for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne), and for Kensington (Felicity Buchan), and the hon. Members for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), for Stockport (Navendu Mishra), and for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), who raised issues about the arts, technology, zoos and many other important sectors.

Before I conclude, I want to praise my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Darren Henry), who made a very eloquent maiden speech. He talked with passion and pride about his work, about his West Indian heritage, about this land of opportunity and about his 26 years in the RAF. That is particularly timely this week, which is Armed Forces Week. He is rightly proud of his family, and he has done his family proud. His constituency can be equally proud to have an MP of his calibre as their representative in this place.

It has been a great pleasure to participate in today's debate, and I thank everybody for their contributions. This debate has been extraordinarily valuable, and I am sure that the dialogue will continue.

4.53 pm

Theresa Villiers: I thank the Backbench Business Committee for making possible these first debates from the Petitions Committee on the Floor of the House. I thank all who have contributed. Above all, I would like to thank once again those who created and supported the e-petitions. The e-petitions were started by Matthew Rakowski-Goreta, Miles Croxford, Oliver Tooley, Evgenia Galinskaya and Anand Limbachia, who can all be assured that their voices have been heard by the Government in the support package and by Members in this House this afternoon.

As others have done, I commend the Government for a package of support that has saved the livelihoods of so many millions of people. It was delivered at phenomenal

speed. My experience in government makes me think that it is so difficult to get even the smallest thing done at speed. The speed of the reaction was essential. I ask the Government to reflect on those gaps in provision that have been identified, particularly by the Treasury Committee: the newly employed, the newly self-employed, directors of limited companies and freelancers on short-term contracts. I also echo the strong points that were made about securing the future of aviation and, of course, of the performing arts and culture, where the need for support and for a plan for reopening is urgent.

I close by echoing the comments, praise and thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Darren Henry). It was a great honour that he made his maiden speech in the debate for us all to hear. It was a heart-warming story, and I wish him well with his tenure in the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): This is rather extraordinary, because we are ending a couple of minutes early. We all encouraged people to speak so quickly and to be so brief that those who spoke latterly were so disciplined in the way they did it that we end up with a couple of minutes, as it were, to spare. But there is never time to spare; there is always something else to do in this House, so I shall put the Question.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petitions relating to support for UK industries in response to covid-19.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am very happy that in these couple of minutes that remain before 5 o'clock, I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Birmingham Commonwealth Games Act 2020

Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020

Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020.

I do not think that I need to suspend the House in order to allow people to leave and other Members to come in safely. I think that if I simply filibuster from the Chair for a moment or two, all Members who are currently in the Chamber might be able to leave towards the Bar of the House and those who are about to take part in the next proceedings can appear from behind the Chair.

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Business and Planning Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—(*Mr Rees-Mogg.*)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

BANKS AND BANKING

That the draft Northern Ireland Banknote (Designation of Authorised Bank) Regulations 2020, which were laid before this House on 6 May, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

Question agreed to.

De La Rue: Gateshead

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)

5 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): I am glad to have secured this debate on the Government response to job losses at the De La Rue site in Gateshead. I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, take a particular interest in this debate, as you have a De La Rue site in your constituency of Epping Forest. I thank you for the concern you have expressed for the staff in Gateshead.

On 25 March 2018, I stood in this Chamber as a fairly new MP to ask an urgent question of the Home Office about the awarding of the contract to produce UK passports to Franco-Dutch company Gemalto rather than to De La Rue, which produced the passports at Team Valley in my constituency.

The De La Rue site, which quite literally prints money as well as producing passports, is one of the industrial jewels in the Gateshead crown. It produces high-quality, nationally important projects with great skill and in highly secure conditions. The staff are highly skilled and trained and well paid. These are quality jobs and staff are proud of the work they do. They do not just come from my constituency; they travel from a wide area around. Hon. Members from across the north-east will also have constituents who work at the site.

In 2018, despite huge public support for keeping passport production in the north-east and in the UK, despite newspaper campaigns and despite meetings with Ministers, the contract was eventually awarded to Gemalto. UK passport production was to be offshored, with blank books—a highly valuable commodity—being produced overseas and the personalisation being done in the UK.

Decisions were based primarily on cost in the procurement process that started in 2017. In my view, the Government should have taken a more strategic view from the start, as some other EU countries have done, believing that passport production is essentially a part of the integrity of our security system.

I do not absolve De La Rue's senior management at the time for getting the price wrong, but my concern is for the staff who worked so hard and with such great pride to produce a secure quality passport for Great Britain. We must learn those lessons for the future when we reconsider the passport contract, but meanwhile, De La Rue employees are bearing the after-effects of that decision.

The loss of the passport contract meant the loss of 200 jobs as the contract came to an end, with a start date for the new contract of July 2019, but more job losses were to follow. In June 2019, a further 170 jobs were lost at Gateshead, from the currency production side. One of the two currency production lines printing banknotes was closed down as the company looked to reduce costs in the aftermath of the loss of their passport contract. Work was again transferred from Gateshead to the company's other sites, including those in Gibraltar and Kenya.

To add insult to injury, chief executive Martin Sutherland stood down with a bonus worth more than 30% of his executive pay of £197,000, as staff pay was frozen, 48% of shareholders voted against De La Rue's remuneration

[Liz Twist]

report in June 2019 and the future of the company looked very uncertain. Staff at the Gateshead site were facing redundancy. *The Guardian* wrote in November 2019:

“The farewell bonus for Sutherland, who finally departed last month, now looks like a wretched joke about a licence to print money.”

Sadly, it is not a joke for the staff who actually printed the money for De La Rue.

Each time I visited the site, I talked to staff, who are incredibly proud of the work they do and the responsibility that they carry. I talked to the union Unite about trying to save those jobs. Each time, top management told them that they would be looking to bring more work to Gateshead to replace the passport contract. None materialised.

Last week, as the company financial reports were released, news came of the proposal to end production of currency at Gateshead, with the loss of 255 jobs, leaving only 90 jobs in highly specialised functions at a site that just a few years ago had more than 600 jobs. For many staff not on shift when the stock markets opened, the news first reached them via the *Chronicle* website, social media, a text from friends or local TV and radio news. The staff deserve better than that.

Once again, work previously done in Gateshead will be moved to De La Rue’s other sites in the UK or overseas. There is a direct link between the decision to award the passport contract to Gemalto and the job losses across the Gateshead site. Because of the number of redundancies, there is now a consultation period of 45 days, so I will be working with Unite and echoing its call for this decision to be reversed and for work to be kept at the Gateshead site. Last week, I spoke to the current chief executive and chairman to let them know my anger at the decision and to support Unite’s call for it to be reversed. I will keep on pushing hard for that throughout the consultation period.

However, the Government have a responsibility in this, too, and I am asking the Minister to help me and my colleagues to retain these skilled, high-quality jobs in the north-east. I want to know what the Government are going to do to ensure that jobs such as these are retained in the north-east. We simply cannot afford to lose them. These highly-skilled, well-paid jobs will help to stimulate our regional economy. We need sustainable jobs in the north-east. The Government say that they want to level up the north of England, so they must take practical and decisive action to keep those jobs and to secure more of them for our workers.

Behind those numbers are individuals, families and livelihoods. With the loss of those jobs comes a loss of security, of safety, of hope and of aspiration. Many will be shaken and shattered by this news, and those affected will emerge from the current pandemic even more uncertain about their futures. I join with Unite, the staff trade union, in calling for the company to reverse its plans and maintain production at its Gateshead site.

As I have already said, in 2018 and 2019 the previous management of De La Rue told staff at Gateshead that they would work to bring new work to the site and that the site was important to the company. Those promises were not delivered. Empty words mean nothing to people in my constituency, so I urge the Government to

act now. They can start by ensuring that De La Rue’s site is maintained and that the contract to produce passports is returned to the UK as a matter of urgency. They can also help by taking action now to help me to keep those jobs in Gateshead. We must act with immediacy not only to protect local quality jobs, but to safeguard our local economy and strengthen our place in a rapidly changing world. The staff of De La Rue Gateshead deserve no less.

I will finish with one final irony. Today, almost one full year after the new contractor was due to take on the passport contract, some passports are still being produced by De La Rue staff on the Gateshead site in Team Valley in my constituency. That work is due to end at the end of June, just a few days from now. The remaining 80 passport staff will lose their jobs and passport production will cease on the site. I thank those staff and all the staff at the Gateshead site, and end with the hope that we will see a resurgence of the high-skilled, high-quality jobs we so need in the north-east.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Lady for graciously mentioning that I share her concerns, as De La Rue is a major employer in my Epping Forest constituency.

5.8 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) on securing this debate. As she eloquently said in her speech, the workers from the site come from across the north-east, and I have quite a number in my constituency.

People might say, “Well, 255 is a small number.” No, it is not, because of the type of jobs that we are talking about. They are high-quality, well-paid jobs. The individuals who work there have worked there for many years, in some cases. They have dedicated their lives to producing top-quality banknotes, and latterly passports. It is quite ironic that, in withdrawing from the European Union, the Government said much about how great it was that we were going to get the blue passports back—although when I look at them, they seem more black than blue—but we then find that they are going to be printed abroad.

In the past few days, people have been saying that the reason the Government have done this is European procurement processes. That is complete nonsense, because no other European country has done this. They have, quite rightly, seen the integrity of the passport system as critical national infrastructure and as part of their key manufacturing capability. That is what should have happened with this contract. I share some of my hon. Friend’s concerns about some of the management at De La Rue over the years.

In the north-east, we are going through dark times at the moment with the pandemic. I spoke about that in the previous debate. Unfortunately, it is going to get a lot worse, not only in terms of the pandemic affecting the north-east and the higher rates of mortality than in other areas, but the massive economic impact. So this is a further blow to the north-east economy. We should be looking at this decision and seeing how we can reverse it. In the coming months and years, the Government have to step in and direct contracts and support to those regions such as the north-east that need that support.

Without that, we will be in a situation where, as I said in the previous debate, we will return to the dark days of the 1980s in the north-east, where unemployment will be at record levels and the lost generation that we saw in the '80s will be repeated again. We cannot afford to do that.

These are high-quality and very sought-after jobs. Anybody who works there will say that they are proud of working for De La Rue, because the jobs are not only well paid but highly skilled, and the terms and conditions are good. We do not lose those types of jobs in the north-east easily—they will not be easily replaced. I hear a lot from the Prime Minister about levelling up and investment in the regions. Well, he could do something about that now by reversing the decision on the passports. The north-east went through a terrible time in the 1980s and '90s. We have turned the corner in some areas, but we are not going to do it in this current climate without some direct Government support.

It saddened me this week, for example, when I learned of the Government's decision to award the vaccines manufacturing and innovation centre to Oxford. Why Oxford? My right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) asked where the other potential site was. It was in the north-east. So where the Government can actually help the north-east, they are clearly still not doing it. This has to be changed. We cannot have a situation whereby jobs are going to be lost, but also what should be retained in the UK in terms of manufacturing should be retained in the north-east. This was a Government decision—they cannot get away from that fact—and it needs revisiting. Without that, the Government have to step in somehow to ensure that the types of jobs that are being lost are going to be replaced.

5.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Nadhim Zahawi): It is customary to congratulate an hon. Member on securing a debate, but I think “congratulate” is the wrong word in this case, so I am going to commend the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist). It is nothing to congratulate anyone about given the job losses that we are discussing. I know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you take a special interest in this because of the De La Rue presence in Epping Forest, and I am grateful to the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) for his customary courtesy in letting me know that he was going to speak in this important debate. It is also appropriate to take the opportunity to thank the hon. Lady and other Members, and, importantly, all public, private, community and voluntary sector partners across Tyneside and the north-east, for their outstanding work and support during these challenging times.

Tyneside and the broader north-east is a major industrial and manufacturing hub for the United Kingdom. It is a critical centre for the UK automotive industry, with the region typically producing over 500,000 cars a year. It is also a centre for producing medicines and healthcare products—the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the vaccine manufacturing and innovation centre in Oxford. There is much more work to do, and I am absolutely passionate and focused on working with the north-east on the future of the life sciences sector in that region.

Mr Kevan Jones: There were two shortlisted sites, according to the response given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar): Oxford and the north-east. If the Minister really wants to level up and actually put investment into the north-east, why did he not insist on putting it in the north-east?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. The VMIC project had already been awarded and was already happening. All I did was bring it forward by 12 months so we can have it ready by summer next year, not the year after. But I am grateful for his passion and for quite rightly holding the Government to account on what we will do in the north-east, which is also a key region for developing offshore and renewable energy technology.

We are committed to ensuring that Tyneside and the north-east remain a key manufacturing development hub. The right hon. Gentleman speaks of life sciences development. Of the £3.4 billion that the Government have committed to growth deals across the northern powerhouse, £379.6 million—almost £380 million—has been allocated to the North East local enterprise partnership area. I am pleased to say that Gateshead has benefited directly from that investment, including just under £1 million for PROTO, a state-of-the-art research and development facility for emerging digital technologies, and £5 million for the development of a new 12,500-seat arena, conference and exhibition centre on a 10-acre site at Gateshead Quays.

I would like to acknowledge the work done by the North East local enterprise partnership. Skills, employment and economic inclusion are at the heart of the North East local enterprise partnership's strategic economic plan, which was refreshed in 2019.

Liz Twist: I thank the Minister for his comments about the PROTO development, which I am familiar with, and the Gateshead quayside development. We are enormously pleased with and proud of both of them, with the councils working in partnership with others. However, we also need to look at our manufacturing base and ensure that those traditional jobs are not left to slide because of new developments. Will the Minister address what can be done to assist on that point?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. She is absolutely right. We need to make sure that those traditional jobs are maintained, but also see where we can reskill and upskill into some of the growth industries, such as offshore wind. I know there is a big skills agenda that my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary is taking forward.

The LEP has co-ordinated £18.4 million of capital investment across eight projects, with a further £28.5 million from public and private funding. I thought I should just mention a few of those projects. They include addressing the hon. Lady's skills challenge to the Government, the successful delivery of the Gatsby good careers guidance benchmark and the launch of the North East Ambition programme, supporting 170 schools and colleges. Still these are unprecedented times for businesses and communities across the country. I am grateful to have had the opportunity recently to reflect on the challenges faced by the manufacturing sector, to which the hon. Lady quite rightly refers, with trade union representatives, where we discussed what more the Government can do to support the manufacturing sector.

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

I share the hon. Lady's disappointment at the news that about 250 jobs will be lost at the De La Rue currency and passport printing facility in Gateshead. I take this opportunity to express my sympathies to those workers and their families who will be impacted. Furthermore, I call on De La Rue to act responsibly in how it approaches the forthcoming redundancies. It is very worrying that, as the hon. Lady mentioned, staff only learned the news from the *Chronicle* and social media. That is not the way a responsible employer would act.

I understand that there has been much speculation about the decision of Her Majesty's Passport Office not to grant De La Rue the contract to produce the new British passport. To set the scene, between March 2017 and April 2018, the Passport Office undertook a rigorous, fair and open competition to identify the bidder that will be best able to meet the needs of its passport service and customers until 2029. That included in-depth due diligence to ensure that any bidder was capable of delivering the contract within the quality standards set out. The new contract was awarded to Thales and will deliver significant savings of approximately £140 million compared with the contract awarded in 2009 to De La Rue, which will ensure value for money for the taxpayer.

Since 2009, a proportion of blank passports have been produced in Europe, with no reason why overseas production should not continue. Thales will manufacture passports from multiple secure locations. De La Rue historically operated a blank book passport assembly facility in Malta, to supplement its Gateshead operation. All passports produced by Thales will continue to be personalised with the passport holder's personal details, such as a named photograph, in the United Kingdom. That continues to ensure that no personal data will leave the United Kingdom.

It also extends Thales's already significant presence in this country. Thales's digital identity and security division operates from five sites in the UK and employs over 500 staff in this country. Since the contract was awarded in April 2018, Thales has increased its UK workforce by over 90 posts. Furthermore, it is not outsourcing the manufacturing of the British passport to a third party.

I strongly believe that it was the correct choice to decide the next UK passport provider through free and fair competition, to ensure the best value for money for the British taxpayer. I also recognise that this year has been especially challenging for De La Rue. In November last year, the company reported that its half-year results had underperformed against market expectations, due primarily to reduced volumes and a reduction in margins in its currency business. That underperformance prompted the board to suspend future dividend payments and to push forward with a turnaround strategy. While we can acknowledge that the loss of the passport contract was disappointing for the business, it is clear that this alone does not account for the challenges that the business has faced.

In response to a challenging and competitive market environment, De La Rue published details of that turnaround plan in February this year. Unfortunately, that plan involved a degree of cost reduction and a concentration on its core currency and authentication divisions. In June last year, De La Rue exited the passporting and identification business by announcing

the sale of its identity products division to HID Corporation Ltd. The UK passport contract was not part of the sale, but by this period, De La Rue was aware that it had not won the renewal of said contract.

Unfortunately, as part of its cost-saving programme, De La Rue announced a consultation to reduce the number of roles at the company's headquarters and to cease all banknote printing and passport production at the Gateshead site. I note that De La Rue has said that it aims to preserve certain core services and roles at the site, and I urge De La Rue to ensure that it retains a presence in the Gateshead community. However, I recognise that this remains a tough and disappointing time for the employees of De La Rue who face redundancy, and I can assure them that the Government will do all we can to support them in this challenging period.

Owing to the challenges of operating in the covid-19 environment, the Department for Work and Pensions rapid response service has adapted to ensure that we can continue to support those facing redundancy. People will be able to access redundancy help and job search advice on the Department's new job help campaign website. There is also information on gov.uk, and updated information packages are provided to employers to help them signpost employees to the support that is available.

Liz Twist: I note the reference to the increased speed of Government agencies being able to help people, but will the Minister also acknowledge that the situation with companies such as Debenhams, where a couple of hundred staff have lost their jobs with the closure of the Metrocentre store, is adding to the pressure on the services, and what we need is real support and real action, and real opportunities for all those staff?

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that we need real support. There are three chapters to this challenge of covid. Chapter one was wrapping our arms around the economy and jobs, with schemes such as the furlough scheme and the bounce-back loans. Chapter two is now supporting businesses to restart and reopen; retail reopened in the middle of this month. Of course chapter three is about what stimulus we can inject into the economy, whether fiscal or non-fiscal—and the Chancellor will be saying more about this. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has conducted a deep dive with business and organisations representing business through a recovery taskforce, because we want to make sure that chapter three, which is about the recovery, is as robust and dynamic as we can make it. I assure the hon. Lady that the north-east will be very much a part of that.

The support for those losing their jobs includes connecting people to jobs in the local labour market in the north-east by helping them with job searches, including CV writing, interview skills and where to find jobs and how to apply for them. We will also help to identify transferable skills and skills gaps linked to the local labour market, along with advice on what benefits people may get and how to claim them.

Furthermore, I can confirm that the Gateshead local authority is in touch with the company and stands ready to work with the Department for Work and Pensions, the Jobcentre Plus rapid response team and the National Careers Service to provide a package of support for any impacted employee. As I said earlier,

the Government will do what we can to support these people and their families, and I believe that the Government can be proud of our record and how we have supported businesses across the north-east during the covid pandemic.

Through the coronavirus job retention scheme, we have so far protected 8.9 million workers and almost 1.1 million businesses; 24,200 people have been supported by the scheme in Gateshead alone, and due to the Chancellor's announcement to extend the scheme back in May, we can continue to support businesses and employees as they return to work over the coming months.

Furthermore, I am pleased to say that, through the various grant schemes the Government established to assist business, £36.8 million in grants has been paid out to 3,142 small businesses in the Gateshead local authority as of 21 June. We also recognise the importance of the Tyne and Wear metro to Gateshead, which the hon. Lady rightly mentioned, and the challenges it faces at present. That is why we have announced a further £7.6 million of support to keep it going on top of the £8.6 million announced on 1 May.

In the longer term, the Government have contributed £337 million of direct grants to provide a new fleet for this vital service. While I acknowledge that these are challenging times for all, I remain confident that there is a bright future ahead for Tyneside and north-east industries.

The Government recognise that this is a challenging time for all businesses. We have provided unprecedented levels of support to help business. For those De La Rue employees who, unfortunately, face redundancy, the Government will do what we can to ensure they receive the support they need.

Finally, I again thank the hon. Lady for securing this important debate, and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your patience; I know this subject is important to you, as it is to other Members of this House.

Question put and agreed to.

5.29 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 25 June 2020

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Offshore Wind Projects

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Kwasi Kwarteng): This statement concerns applications made by Orsted Hornsea Project Three (UK) Limited and Norfolk Vanguard Limited for development consent for the installation, operation and maintenance of, respectively, the proposed Hornsea Project Three and Norfolk Vanguard offshore wind farms, their related offshore infrastructure off the coast of Norfolk and their related onshore electrical connections within that county.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make a decision on an application within three months of the receipt of the examining authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) of the Act to set a new deadline. Where a new deadline is set, the Secretary of State must make a statement to Parliament to announce it. The statutory decision deadline for Hornsea Project Three offshore wind farm was re-set by written ministerial statements on 8 October 2019 and 23 January 2020. The deadline for the decision on the Norfolk Vanguard offshore wind farm was reset by written ministerial statement on 23 January 2020. The reset deadline for both applications was 1 June 2020.

The Secretary of State has decided to set a new deadline of 1 July 2020 for deciding these two applications to allow further consideration to be given to the environmental information received by the Secretary of State following consultation on both applications.

The decision to set the new deadlines for these applications is without prejudice to the decisions on whether to grant or refuse development consents for them.

[HCWS315]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Surveillance Camera Commissioner: Annual Report

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is today laying the 2018-19 annual report of the surveillance camera commissioner before the House, as required by section 35 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

The surveillance camera commissioner is an independent role appointed under section 34 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

The annual report covers the exercise of the surveillance camera commissioner's statutory functions over the year to 31 March 2019 and provides a comprehensive

update on the progress made against the national surveillance camera strategy for England and Wales, which the commissioner published in March 2017.

Copies of the report will be available from the Vote Office.

[HCWS314]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Planning: Online Access to Documentation

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I would like to make a statement on planning and access to documentation.

Responding to covid -19—temporary measures to ease restrictions on the planning system

Today the Government have introduced the Business and Planning Bill in Parliament. The Bill responds to the covid-19 emergency and brings forward temporary changes to the planning system to support economic recovery. This statement sets out supporting temporary measures that the Government propose to ensure the planning system continues to operate effectively.

Online inspection of documents

The effects of covid-19 mean that it is not possible for everyone to enter public buildings safely to access certain planning documents made available for inspection. The Government have made it clear (written ministerial statement, "Virtual working and planning—responding to covid-19 restrictions" *Official Report* 13 May 2020;12WS) that online inspection of documents should be the default position. It has already made secondary legislation providing temporary flexibility for consultation and publicity requirements for planning applications under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA) and for environmental impact assessment development under the TCPA in relation to environmental statements.

This statement makes clear, for the regimes addressed below, how the Government expect local authorities, applicants and the Mayor of London to meet the requirements for making documents available for inspection by the public whilst social distancing restrictions apply. Everyone involved in the planning process is expected to engage proactively in the move to online inspection of documents and to consider the practical measures needed to ensure fair participation. When it becomes possible for documents to be made available for inspection in public buildings again, then the Government expect this to be done as soon as practicable.

Compulsory purchase orders (CPOs)

There are requirements in the Acquisition of Land Act 1981 for newspaper and site notices to provide details of a place where copies of CPOs and associated maps can be inspected, both prior to submission of the CPO to the confirming authority and when it is confirmed. Provisions in secondary legislation requiring inspection of documents are similar, and in some cases require documents to be provided on request. It is the Government's view that these legislative requirements can be satisfied by the acquiring authority making a copy of the order and map available for inspection on a website. Hard

copies of documents should be provided by the acquiring authority on request. The Government have published updated planning guidance in relation to the compulsory purchase process which can be viewed at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-compulsory-purchase-guidance>.

Development consent orders (DCOs)

The Planning Act 2008, relating to nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIP), requires that at the pre-application stage the statement of community consultation must be made available for inspection. At the post-consent stage, where a development consent order grants authority to acquire compulsorily an interest in land, the Act requires that a copy of the DCO must be made available for inspection.

It is the Government's view that these requirements can be met by making documents available for inspection online. They expect applicants to take reasonable steps to ensure that anyone wishing to view the documentation can find these documents online. Hard copies should be made available by the applicant on request.

For the NSIP regime there are other provisions in secondary legislation relating to consultation and publicity requirements. The Government intend to bring forward secondary legislation shortly to replace temporarily the requirement for documents to be made available for inspection in a place, with a requirement for documents to be made available online.

Planning appeals

For planning appeals there are provisions in secondary legislation for consultation and publicity requirements, and the Government are considering whether these should be amended to enable more to be undertaken by digital processes, similar to the flexibilities already brought in for planning applications under the TCPA. The Government expect local planning authorities, appellants, the planning inspectorate and other parties to be proactive in their use of digital processes for consultation and publicity.

Local development documents

When preparing local development documents, local planning authorities are required to make certain documents available for inspection at their principal office, and other places that they consider appropriate, and provide copies of the plan or strategy to a person that requests one. In addition, local planning authorities must publish the document on their website. The Government intend to bring forward secondary legislation shortly to remove temporarily the requirement for local planning authorities to make these documents available for inspection at their offices and other places, as well as the requirement for these documents to be provided on request. Local planning authorities will need to ensure that these documents are made available on their website.

Spatial development strategies

The Business and Planning Bill amends the provisions in the Greater London Authority Act 1999 that require the Mayor of London to make the spatial development strategy (SDS) available for physical inspection at certain locations and to provide a copy on request.

The Bill will remove these requirements provided that the Mayor makes the current SDS available by appropriate electronic means. The Mayor will be required to have

regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State on arrangements that may be appropriate for those who do not have internet access.

There are also similar provisions in secondary legislation that apply for the Mayor of London and combined authorities who have been conferred the power to make a spatial development strategy. The Government intend to bring forward secondary legislation shortly to temporarily disapply requirements for these documents to be made available for inspection at their offices and enable them to be made available online.

Extending development consents

The Business and Planning Bill includes a provision to extend certain planning permissions and consents under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. There are already established routes to make changes to DCOs and it is the Government's view that these routes can be used to extend commencement periods in certain circumstances. Developers can submit applications for non-material or material changes to the relevant Secretary of State. The Secretary of State can also make a material change to a DCO in exceptional circumstances. The Government expect developers to take proactive steps to ensure that applications to extend DCOs are submitted in sufficient time and the Government will actively engage with any such applications.

[HCWS316]

JUSTICE

Expert Panel on Harm in the Family Courts and Implementation Plan

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): In May 2019, the Ministry of Justice established a panel of experts to lead a review into how the family courts deal with risk of harm to children and parents in private law children cases involving domestic abuse and other serious offences. The panel held a call for evidence over the summer of 2019, which received submissions from over 1,200 individuals and organisations with experience of the family justice system. As well as receiving testimonies through written submissions, the panel held a series of focus groups and roundtables across England and Wales. It is due to the wealth of evidence gathered that the panel took the necessary time to evaluate and discuss their findings, which I now present to the House.

I would first like to acknowledge the dedication of all those who work in the family justice system. I have seen first-hand how they have to make difficult decisions about the best interests of the child with the information available to them. It is a challenging job at the centre of an often painful dispute between two parents, and I hope that our implementation plan will reassure them that we value their commitment and will support them in their roles.

But there is more to do. I welcome the panel's report, and am incredibly grateful to all panel members for their time and expertise. I have carefully considered their conclusions and am determined to take action to improve the experience of survivors of domestic abuse in our family courts.

This report lays bare many hard truths about long-standing failings in the family justice system, especially in protecting the survivors of abuse and their children from harm. It is not a comfortable read. The testimonies in the report show that there are some fundamental issues that we must address in order to improve the experience and ensure the safety of all participants in the family justice system.

I want to make it clear that this is not acceptable, and that while these issues largely predate this Government, we have a strong and unwavering commitment to ensure domestic abuse survivors are better protected. This is not only to help those who have been directly affected, but also for their children, who should always be at the heart of any decision made in the family court.

The publication of this report provides a unique opportunity for the family justice system to reform how it manages cases involving children. The report is the springboard for the actions we will take to better protect and support children and domestic abuse victims throughout private family law proceedings.

The Domestic Abuse Bill will enable us to make some of the immediate changes called for in the panel's report, alongside other measures which will help to ensure that victims have the confidence to come forward and report their experiences. As recommended by the panel, we will use the Bill to extend automatic eligibility for special measures to victims of domestic abuse in the family courts. The Bill will also ban cross-examination by perpetrators of domestic abuse in the family courts.

We also have committed to investing more widely in support for victims of domestic abuse, including £35 million announced alongside the Bill to support victims and their children, and an additional £76 million of extra funding that we announced to support survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, modern slavery and vulnerable children and their families during the current pandemic.

However, we acknowledge that, in light of the panel's findings, this does not go far enough, and that is why we are publishing an implementation plan alongside this report. This details the first steps we will take across the family justice system to take forward the recommendations of the panel and make the changes that are needed.

In response to hearing that the adversarial nature of the family courts can contribute to further harm to victims of abuse or their children, I am pleased to announce that we will trial a different "investigative" approach within our forthcoming pilot of integrated domestic abuse courts. This approach will seek to ensure that all parties in proceedings are safe and able to provide evidence on an equal footing, without the retraumatising effects of being in court with an abusive ex-partner.

We are committed to making it easier for judges to apply "barring orders", under section 91(14) of the Children Act 1989, to prevent abusive ex-partners repeatedly dragging a victim back to court.

We will also look to improve how the family courts gather the wishes and feelings of the children at the heart of proceedings, to ensure no child is overlooked during the process. Alongside this, I acknowledge the panel's conclusion that the presumption of parental involvement can detract from the child's welfare and safety, and so will review this urgently.

Finally, we are working with colleagues across the family justice system to improve training on domestic abuse, to address gaps where appropriate, and to provide professionals with the tools to effectively support vulnerable parties.

The report is built upon the direct experiences of hundreds of victims of domestic abuse who responded to our call for evidence. There will be many others who were unable to speak out, and I want to thank each person who came forward and provided their testimony to the panel. Each had a unique experience, but together they showed that this is a problem that thousands of people experience. Thanks to them, we have a unique opportunity now to address these issues in a meaningful and long-lasting way.

The report and implementation plan can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/assessing-risk-of-harm-to-children-and-parents-in-private-law-children-cases>.

[HCWS313]

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 25 June 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CHURCH COMMISSIONERS	1447	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—	
Church Services: Covid-19	1447	<i>continued</i>	
Church Services: Live Streaming	1450	Topical Questions	1444
Covid-19: Financial Effect on Churches.....	1451	Trade Negotiations: North of England	
Smaller and Rural Churches: Covid-19	1450	Small-scale Farming	1438
Support for Family Life: Covid-19	1451	UK Farms: Productivity	1442
Transition Pathway Initiative	1453	UK Fishing Industry: Covid-19	1442
		Vulnerable People: Food Supplies	1444
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS.	1435	Waste: Reuse and Recycling	1440
Animal Welfare Standards	1439	Zoos: Covid-19	1437
British Food Producers	1441	HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION	1449
Countryside Stewardship: Water Quality	1440	House of Commons Apprenticeship Programme...	1449
Dairy Industry: Covid-19	1435	PARLIAMENTARY WORKS SPONSOR BODY	1452
Dual Tariff Proposals: British Food Standards.....	1435	Restoration and Renewal: Decant of Parliament ...	1452
Plastic Waste Increase: Covid-19.....	1443		

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 25 June 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL		HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL	
STRATEGY	53WS	GOVERNMENT	54WS
Offshore Wind Projects	53WS	Planning: Online Access to Documentation	54WS
HOME DEPARTMENT	53WS	JUSTICE	56WS
Surveillance Camera Commissioner: Annual		Expert Panel on Harm in the Family Courts and	
Report.....	53WS	Implementation Plan	56WS

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CONTENTS

Thursday 25 June 2020

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1435] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs
Church Commissioners
House of Commons Commission
Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body

Universal Credit: Court of Appeal Judgment [Col. 1455]

Answer to urgent question—(Will Quince)

Business of the House [Col. 1467]

Statement—(Mr Rees-Mogg)

Business and Planning [Col. 1486]

Bill presented, and read the First time

Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill [Col. 1487]

Lords amendments considered

Health and Social Care Workers: Recognition and Reward [Col. 1501]

Motion—(Catherine McKinnell)—agreed to

Covid-19: Support for UK Industries [Col. 1533]

Motion—(Theresa Villiers)—agreed to

De La Rue: Gateshead [Col. 1568]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 53WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
