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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 22 July 2020

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven 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

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Covid-19: BAME Communities

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): What steps her Department has taken to help tackle the disproportionate effect of the covid-19 outbreak on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. [905149]

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): What steps the Equality Hub is taking to better understand the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on black and minority ethnic people. [905155]

The Minister for Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): We are concerned that covid-19 is disproportionately impacting ethnic minority communities, which is why the Government have put in place measures to reduce the spread of the virus, especially for people who may be at higher risk. In addition to a raft of specific targeted interventions, I am working with the Race Disparity Unit and the Department of Health and Social Care to act on the findings of the Public Health England review of disparities in risks and outcomes of covid-19. That work will enable us to take appropriate, evidence-based action to address the highlighted disparities.

Stephen Morgan: In the light of the latest evidence from the TUC on racism and risk in the workplace, what steps will the Minister take to tackle the entrenched discrimination faced by black, Asian and minority ethnic people at work?

Kemi Badenoch: The Government are doing all they can to address racial disparities across all sectors. The hon. Gentleman may be aware of the commission that the Prime Minister has set up, with the commissioners announced last week, which will look at continued disparities across the board, including in the workplace.

Felicity Buchan: My constituency of Kensington has a substantial BAME population. Can my hon. Friend reassure me that her follow-up work on the PHE report will take into account how comorbidities and occupations affect the outcomes of coronavirus?

Kemi Badenoch: My hon. Friend is completely right. It is important to remember that the PHE review findings did not take into account comorbidities or other factors such as occupations. I agree with her that it is imperative for us to understand the key drivers of these disparities, the relationships between the risk factors, and what we can do to close the gap in the evidence that the review highlighted.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): The recommendations in the Marmot review and the Marmot review 10 years on would be a good place to start when addressing health inequalities impacting BAME communities. Is 10 years enough time to consider the recommendations of the original review, and how long will it be before we see the recommendations of either implemented?

Kemi Badenoch: I had a meeting with Professor Marmot just last month, and we discussed the recommendations of his review. If my right hon. Friend has seen the report, she will know that many of the recommendations are at a very high level. For instance, the first recommendation says that we should give every child the best start in life. I am sure that that was something she took forward when she was a Minister. This Government believe that it is important, and it is reflected in all our policies across education and communities.

Transgender People: Discrimination

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to tackle discrimination against transgender people. [905150]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): We are committed to tackling discrimination against transgender people. We have invested £4 million for schools to tackle anti-LGBT bullying, and we have addressed homophobic hate crime in the hate crime action plan.

Nadia Whittome: Successive Conservative Equalities Ministers have repeatedly stalled on publishing the results of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 consultation. Leaked reports of a potential roll-back on trans rights have understandably caused alarm. With hate crimes against trans people up nearly 40% on last year, does the Minister agree that her quibbling on this issue is fanning the flames of populist hate towards an already marginalised group?

Elizabeth Truss: As the Prime Minister said, we will respond to the consultation over the summer. Let me be absolutely clear: we will not be rolling back the rights of transgender people. It is important that transgender people are able to live their lives as they wish, without fear, and we will make sure that that is the case.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab) [V]: In July 2018, the Government announced that they were seeking views on how best to reform the Gender Recognition Act 2004 in a consultation that closed in October 2018. Nearly two years later, the Government have still not published their response. Trans rights are human rights, and updating the GRA will help to improve the lives of trans people. Today the House will rise, and the Minister

has previously stated that the Government would publish their response. When will she finally publish the Government's response and their plans for reform?

Elizabeth Truss: As I said, we will respond to the consultation over the summer—the Prime Minister committed to that earlier this week—and I assure the hon. Lady that I am very keen to get on with that response.

Hate Crimes: South and East Asian Communities

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to tackle the level of reported hate crime against south and east Asian communities during the covid-19 pandemic. [905151]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins) [V]: We have heard these concerns from the police and charities, and we are working with them to ensure that police forces are reassuring affected communities and encouraging reporting of hate crimes during the pandemic. The Government are clear that there is no place for hate crime in modern Britain. These crimes destabilise our communities and there are no excuses for them.

Sarah Owen [V]: A petition recently created by Viv Yau has nearly 3,000 signatures already. It calls on the UK Government and media outlets to stop using stock imagery of south-east and east Asian people when talking about covid-19. The disproportionate use of images of Chinese, south-east and east Asian people in masks during the pandemic perpetuates the notion that all of us carry the virus, and it plays a significant role in the recent trebling of racist attacks, stereotyping and abuse. Will the Minister commit to working with Government and public bodies on the use of these images, and meet me to discuss the increase in hate crime during the pandemic?

Victoria Atkins: The perpetrators of hate crimes targeting south and east Asian communities, and others, in relation to covid-19 are being punished. We know from the Crown Prosecution Service that it has prosecuted a number of cases involving racist abuse on the basis of perceived Chinese ethnicity. But of course the Government are always willing to work with interested parties to ensure that we are stopping hate crime, and I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady to do that.

Covid-19: Women Born in the 1950s

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): What assessment the Government have made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the financial circumstances of women born in the 1950s. [R] [905152]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): The Government have introduced significant measures to help mitigate the financial impact of covid-19. We are committed to providing financial support for people when they need it throughout their lives, including when they are near to or reach retirement. The welfare system will continue to support men and women who are unable to work, on a low income, or under state pension age.

Liz Twist: Research by think-tank the Women's Budget Group shows that women are at greater risk from the economic crisis caused by the covid-19 pandemic. The current crisis is pushing more and more women, including those born in the 1950s, into poverty. What practical steps will the Minister take to relieve the impact on 1950s-born women, who are already disadvantaged by the rise in the state pension age—and may I, Mr Speaker, declare an interest as a 1950s-born woman?

Mims Davies: The Government recognise the importance of supporting adults to effectively plan for the future. We do recognise that this is a challenging time for everyone, and we aim to support older workers, including women who may be out of work because of covid-19. Through the summer Budget, the Chancellor announced a number of initiatives that will support all claimants, including older women. The hon. Lady will be aware that there is a live Court of Appeal case as of yesterday, and I cannot comment further on this live litigation.

Covid-19: Protection of Young Workers

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): What steps the Government are taking to help ensure that young workers are protected during the covid-19 outbreak. [905153]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): We have supported people to make a claim for universal credit if they have lost their jobs. We are strengthening our youth offer for 18 to 24-year-olds. This includes introducing a tailored 13-week programme, new youth hubs, and DWP specialist youth employability work coaches. Meanwhile, young people can be referred to apprenticeships or work-related training at any stage.

Chris Stephens: I thank the Minister for that answer. However, Glasgow South West constituent Caitlyn Lee, who has worked for the Blythswood Square hotel for five years, will receive only £580 in redundancy pay, which barely covers one month's rent, because, under statutory redundancy pay law, young workers under the age of 22 are entitled to half a week's pay whereas workers over 40 get one and a half weeks' pay. Will the Government address this discrimination, and what will they do to mitigate the mass redundancies of young workers so that they are not disadvantaged any further?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. Young people can be at a particular disadvantage, perhaps due to their limited work experience, and they might potentially have a lower skills level. I am concerned to hear about this issue. Our jobcentres are already talking to claimants about the support they can give to young people and signposting them to places that can support them into employment, such as the National Careers Service, in giving advice on how they can look for further work. We have also announced our new kickstart scheme for Great Britain—a £2 billion fund to support young people at risk of long-term unemployment.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP) [V]: My fantastic god-daughter, Toniann, is 17. During lockdown, instead of studying, or even watching boxsets, she became a key worker and helped to keep the economy going. For that, she was paid £4.55 per hour. Does the Minister think that Toniann and other people her age

are worth any more than that, and if so, will she stand up for the young people of these islands and urge the Chancellor to make it compulsory for employers using the kickstart scheme to top up this frankly insulting and free—to them—wage?

Mims Davies: I am passionate about supporting our young people to get the opportunities they need, and for this, the kickstart programme is vital. My officials are engaging with the devolved authorities about how we can make the eligibility criteria attractive and wide-ranging. We are looking at the detail and will set it out so that everyone can understand how to get involved and get these opportunities at the start of August.

Domestic Abuse

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab) [V]: The Domestic Abuse Bill still does not include critical measures to protect migrant women and girls, which is a necessity for compliance with the Istanbul convention. How do the Government intend to protect vulnerable women regardless of their ethnicity, sexual orientation or immigration status if they continue to fail to ratify the convention?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins) [V]: The hon. Lady knows that we already protect the rights of victims of domestic abuse and other survivors through a range of measures, not just those in the Domestic Abuse Bill, but I am delighted that she raises the Bill, which is a groundbreaking piece of legislation. Alongside it, we will this year launch a pilot project to understand and measure the need of migrant women who have no recourse to public funds, because the Government are clear that they must be treated as victims first and foremost.

Socio-economic Inequality: Equality Hub

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): What plans she has for the Equality Hub to tackle geographical and socio-economic inequality. [905156]

James Grundy (Leigh) (Con): What plans she has for the Equality Hub to tackle geographical and socio-economic inequality. [905160]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): The Prime Minister has set out his vision to level up and spread opportunity across the country, and the Equality Hub will play an important part in realising that vision by rigorously analysing where the real inequality in Britain is today. It will focus in particular on areas such as geography and social background.

Jerome Mayhew: Rural poverty is easy to overlook in picturesque areas that other people associate with holidays and a slower pace of life, but it is every bit as hard and destructive for those affected. Can my right hon. Friend advise the House on what action the Government are taking to address rural deprivation?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We want everybody across the country to benefit from our levelling-up agenda of investing more in transport infrastructure and dealing with educational inequality. We recognise that deprived rural areas can face additional barriers to opportunity. The Equality Hub will analyse

the data and look at where that inequality of opportunity is, so that Departments can take measures to address them.

James Grundy: How might northern constituencies, such as my constituency of Leigh, which according to some measures is in the top 20% most deprived constituencies in the country, benefit from the plans my right hon. Friend mentioned earlier?

Elizabeth Truss: We want to make sure that no part of our country feels forgotten about, particularly towns and cities in the north and the midlands, such as my hon. Friend's constituency. I can assure him that we will do everything we can to look at the roots of that geographical inequality and to make sure his constituents have the best opportunities in life.

Racial Injustices: Race Disparity Unit

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): What discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on steps that the Race Disparity Unit is taking to help tackle racial injustices in society. [905158]

The Minister for Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): The Government are committed to tackling racial disparities and levelling up the country, which is why the Race Disparity Unit continues to work across Departments and their agencies to identify and address adverse variances in outcomes across education, healthcare, criminal justice and the economy. It is also why the Prime Minister announced the new Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, the terms of reference and membership of which were announced last week.

Naz Shah [V]: The Baroness McGregor-Smith review in 2017 found that the economy could be boosted by £24 billion if BAME disparities were eradicated. I am sure the Minister would agree that that boost would be really helpful to the economy right now. Will she tell me explicitly what the Government and her Department are doing directly to tackle structural racism in the workplace?

Kemi Badenoch: The hon. Lady references Baroness McGregor-Smith's review, which was an industry-led review with recommendations that were mostly for the private sector to consider. Following that review, we ran a consultation on ethnicity pay reporting and received more than 300 detailed responses, which we are currently analysing. This is one of the things that the commission will look into: it will look at a broad range of issues and some of the findings will help to address the issues that the hon. Lady has just raised.

Low-income Families: Equity of Opportunity

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to help ensure equity of opportunity for people from low-income families. [905159]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): The Government are committed to helping individuals from low-income families to progress at work and to a system to increase their incomes and level up opportunities. The aforementioned baroness, Ruby McGregor-Smith, is leading our DWP in-work progression commission, which is identifying

challenges that individuals might face and finding practical solutions to help them to overcome the barriers faced across all communities.

Ben Bradley: Most likely to drop out of school with no qualifications, most likely to commit suicide and already falling behind in terms of attainment compared with all their peers by the age of five—the plight of white working-class boys still seems to be an unfashionable one, but although these young men have some of the worst life chances of any group anywhere in our country, the Equality Act 2010 does not touch on socioeconomic disparity or poverty. It seems like every other group in society, apart from these boys, has some kind of positive action in place. What can my hon. Friend do to ensure that this is the last generation of lost boys from places such as Mansfield who do not have the same opportunity in life as their peers?

Mims Davies: The evidence is understood that early language and learning skills have a fundamental impact on a child's education and future life chances. The Government are bringing in extra support for all disadvantaged children, including white working-class children—I know that my hon. Friend sees that as key to no area being left behind. The Department for Education has set up the Hungry Little Minds campaign, targeting low-income parents to support their child's early language development, which is key to help them to set up for school and boost their life chances.

Topical Questions

[905190] **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities. [R]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Elizabeth Truss): I have been clear that the Government are committed to tackling the abhorrent practice of so-called gay conversion therapy in the UK. As the Prime Minister reiterated earlier this week, this practice has no place in civilised society. Our action will be determined by research looking at how best to define conversion therapy, the scale of the issue, where it is happening and who it is happening to. When that research is complete, I will bring forward proposals to ban conversion therapy, making sure that our measures are effective so that no innocent people have to endure such tortuous practices.

Dr Evans [V]: As we approach the summer holiday recess, it looks like we all need it. With that in mind, what steps are the Government taking to tackle the effects of body-image issues on young people? Will the Minister meet me to consider the merits of a law that requires a logo to be displayed if an image of a human body or body part has been digitally altered in its proportions?

Elizabeth Truss: We are working closely with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the issue of body image and its impact on young people. I would be happy to organise a meeting, possibly with those Ministers who are leading on the issue. I also welcome the work that the Women and Equalities Committee is doing on the subject.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab) [V]: Last week, the Government published details of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities and announced its chair, who has previously said:

“Much of the supposed evidence of institutional racism is flimsy.”

Yet we know that black workers with degrees earn on average 23% less than their white counterparts. The need for action is urgent. Inaction is costing members of the black, Asian and minority ethnic communities both their livelihoods and their lives. What assurances can the Minister give the House today that her Government are serious about finally ending institutional racism?

The Minister for Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): It is important to clarify that Dr Sewell who chairs the commission has not denied that structural racism exists. However, he understands that disparities have a variety of causes, such as class and geography, which the commission will be examining in closer detail, and it is the findings of this commission that will address the issues that the hon. Lady rightly says are urgent and need addressing.

[905193] **Claire Coutinho** (East Surrey) (Con): May I welcome the race disparity commission, and as someone who has worked alongside many brilliant organisations to root out entrenched disadvantage, can my hon. Friend assure me that the work being done will build the evidence base so that the policy is based on outcomes, not outrage?

Kemi Badenoch: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The national conversation on race has been distorted by some seeking to exploit racial tensions without any recognition of the progress that we have made as a multi-ethnic democracy and society. Guided by the evidence, this commission will improve and inform the conversation. It will use data to look at complex and interdependent factors in the round to better understand why disparities exist and what action can be taken to reduce them. The commission will be producing evidence-based recommendations.

[905191] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) [V]: The new report of the Federation of Small Businesses, “Unlocking Opportunity”, identifies a number of barriers faced by ethnic minority-led businesses, which contribute more than £25 billion to the UK economy. Will the Minister raise the report's key recommendations with colleagues at the Treasury—in particular, the setting up of a dedicated scheme to help EMBs access external finance, helping them to flourish and our local economies to thrive?

Kemi Badenoch: Yes, as a Treasury Minister, I will be considering the findings of that report, so I thank the hon. Lady for raising that matter.

[905194] **Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): Gender pay gap reporting has been suspended because of the coronavirus crisis. As the economic downturn is likely to disproportionately affect women, does the Secretary of State agree that it is important that gender pay gap reporting starts again immediately?

Elizabeth Truss: The key priority during the coronavirus crisis is to make sure that we keep women in jobs, and that has been our No. 1 focus as a Government. Of course, it is vital that we address the issues that cause the gender pay gap, and we continue to help more girls study maths and science, which I talked about earlier, and we also continue to address discrimination in the workplace.

[905197] **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP) [V]: Last year, the UK Government consulted on extending—[*Inaudible.*] By 2019, the UK Government committed to improving redundancy protection. However, no legislation—[*Inaudible.*] Will the Minister provide an update on what progress has been made or is it, as I fear, that there has not been any?

Mr Speaker: If the Minister can answer anything, it would be good, but if not, I understand.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): How about: I will take the hon. Lady's question and give her a full response?

Mr Speaker: Excellent.

[905204] **Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to ask a question of the Minister. There are strong links between alcohol and domestic violence. Covid-19 shone a spotlight on the high levels of domestic violence in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. There is a real risk that the ongoing economic crisis will lead to a surge in high-risk alcohol consumption. In that context, what steps is she able to take to prevent alcohol-related domestic violence?

Kemi Badenoch: We are absolutely clear that alcohol is no excuse for domestic abuse or any other kind of abusive behaviour. We are acutely aware of the need to put victims at the heart of our approach to tackling domestic abuse at this time. We are working closely with domestic abuse charities, the domestic abuse commissioner and the police to understand the needs of victims of this type of abuse and how we can best support them.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked— Engagements

[905209] **Gareth Davies** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 22 July.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall have further such meetings later today.

Gareth Davies: Can I start by congratulating the Prime Minister on his one-year anniversary as Conservative party leader? As we look at our long-term economic recovery, can he assure me that Lincolnshire will receive the required funding to boost digital connectivity for all the people of Grantham, Stamford, Bourne and our local villages?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed I can, which is why we have pledged not only £5 billion in funding for gigabit-capable broadband across the country, including the hardest-to-reach areas, but additionally a £34 million package for Lincolnshire superfast broadband, helping 135,000 households to benefit from gigabit-capable speeds.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): May I start by welcoming reports this week of significant progress in the vaccine trials in Oxford? We all know that there is a long way to go, but I want to record my thanks and admiration for everyone involved in this huge effort.

Under my leadership, national security will also be the top priority for Labour, so I want to ask the Prime Minister about the extremely serious report by the Intelligence and Security Committee, which concludes that Russia poses

“an immediate and urgent threat”

to our national security, and is engaged in a range of activities that include espionage, interfering in democratic processes, and serious crime. The Prime Minister received that report 10 months ago. Given that the threat is described as “immediate and urgent”, why on earth did he sit on it for so long?

The Prime Minister: Actually, when I was Foreign Secretary, and for the period I have been in office, we have been taking the strongest possible action against Russian wrongdoing, orchestrating, I seem to remember, the expulsion of 130—153—Russian diplomats around the world, while the right hon. and learned Gentleman sat on his hands and said nothing while the Labour party parroted the line of the Kremlin, when people in this country were poisoned on the orders of Vladimir Putin.

Keir Starmer: I stood up and condemned what happened in Salisbury, and I supported the then Prime Minister on record. I would ask the Prime Minister to check the record and withdraw that—I was very, very clear. The report was very clear that until recently the Government badly underestimated the Russian threat and the response that it required. They are still playing catch-up. The Government have taken their eye off the ball—arguably, they were not even on the pitch. After the Government have been in power for 10 years, how does the Prime Minister explain that?

The Prime Minister: I think the right hon. and learned Gentleman's questions are absolutely absurd. There is no country in the western world that is more vigilant in protecting the interests of this country or those of the international community from Russian interference. In fact, we are going further now, introducing new legislation to protect critical national infrastructure and our intellectual property. I think that he will find if he goes to any international body or gathering around the world that it is the UK that leads the world in caution about Russian interference. I do not wish to contradict him, but he sat on his hands and said nothing. The previous Leader of the Opposition parroted the line of the Kremlin that the UK should supply—[*Interruption.*] I did not hear him criticise the previous Leader of the Opposition. If he did so, now is the time for him to set the record straight.

Keir Starmer: I was absolutely clear in condemning what happened in Salisbury, not least because I was involved in bringing proceedings against Russia on behalf

of the Litvinenko family—that is why I was so strong about it. I spent five years as Director of Public Prosecutions, working on live operations with the security and intelligence services, so I am not going to take lectures from the Prime Minister about national security. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I think someone wants to go for a cup of tea—we do not want an early bath. Keir Starmer.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister says that he will introduce new legislation. I want to make it clear to him that we will support that legislation and work with the Government. It is not before time. The Prime Minister says that the Government are vigilant. Eighteen months ago, the then Home Secretary said that we did not have all the powers yet to tackle the Russian threat. He said that the Official Secrets Acts were completely out of date. Other legislation has been introduced in that 18-month period. This is about national security. Why have the Government delayed so long in introducing that legislation?

The Prime Minister: This Government are bringing forward legislation—not only a new espionage Act and new laws to protect against theft of our intellectual property, but a Magnitsky Act directly to counter individuals in Russia or elsewhere who transgress human rights. Let us be in no doubt what this is really all about: this is about pressure from the Islingtonian remainers who have seized on this report to try to give the impression that Russian interference was somehow responsible for Brexit. That is what this is all about. The people of this country did not vote to leave the EU because of pressure from Russia or Russian interference; they voted because they wanted to take back control of our money, of our trade policy, of our laws. The simple fact is that, after campaigning for remain, after wanting to overturn the people's referendum day in day out, in all the period when the right hon. and learned Gentleman was sitting on the Labour Front Bench, he simply cannot bring himself to accept that.

Mr Speaker: Can I just gently say to the Prime Minister, as I did last time, he may have to go to Specsavers? The Chair is this way, not that way. If he could address me, we would be a lot better.

Keir Starmer: I see the Prime Minister is already on his pre-prepared lines. This is a serious question of national security. He sat on this report for 10 months and failed to plug a gap in our law on national security for a year and a half. One of the starkest conclusions in the report is that the

“UK is clearly a target for Russia's disinformation campaigns”.

The report also highlights that this is being met with a fragmented response across Whitehall and across the Government. The report refers to this as a “hot potato” with no one organisation recognising itself as having the overall lead. That is a serious gap in our defences. This is not about powers; it is about responsibility, Prime Minister. So, how is he going to address that gap and make sure the UK meets this threat with the joined-up, robust response it deserves?

The Prime Minister: There is no other Government in the world who take more robust steps to protect our democracy, to protect our critical national infrastructure and to protect our intellectual property, as I have said,

from interference by Russia or by anyone else. Frankly, I think that everybody understands that these criticisms are motivated by a desire to undermine the referendum on membership of the European Union that took place in 2016, the result of which the right hon. and learned Gentleman simply cannot bring himself to accept.

Keir Starmer: There is a serious gap in our Official Secrets Act, laying bare for 18 months, and that is all the Prime Minister has to say about it. One way the Government could seek to clamp down on Russian influence is to prevent the spread of Kremlin-backed disinformation. Obviously, social media companies have a big role to play, but the report also highlights “serious distortions in the coverage provided by Russian state-owned international broadcasters such as RT”.

The High Court has ruled that Russia Today broadcasts pose actual and potential harm. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is time to look again at the licensing for Russia Today to operate in the UK?

The Prime Minister: I think this would come more credibly from the Leader of the Opposition had he called out the former Leader of the Opposition when he took money for appearing on Russia Today. He protested neither against the former Leader of the Opposition's stance on Salisbury nor against his willingness to take money from Russia Today. The right hon. and learned Gentleman flip-flops from day to day. One day he is in favour of staying in the EU; the next day he is willing to accept Brexit. The Leader of the Opposition has more flip-flops than Bournemouth beach.

[905210] **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): Last week, the Labour party bravely abstained on a vote that attempted to tie us into the EU indefinitely, further highlighting the increasing detachment of Labour from its old heartlands, such as Rother Valley. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister confirm that we on this side of the House remain fully committed to delivering our promises to the British people and to restoring our full economic independence on 1 January, so that people in Thurcroft, Maltby, Dinnington and across Rother Valley get the Brexit bonanza and level-up that we so deserve?

The Prime Minister: I certainly can give my hon. Friend that assurance. That is what the people voted for and that is what we will deliver.

Mr Speaker: I am going to bring Keir Starmer back for one more question. Keir Starmer.

Keir Starmer: Pre-prepared gags on flip-flops. This is the former columnist who wrote two versions of every article ever published! In case the Prime Minister has not noticed, the Labour party is under new management. No Front Bencher of this party has appeared on Russia Today since I have been leading this party.

Finally, I want to ask the Prime Minister about the appalling persecution of the Uyghur Muslims in China. We have all seen the footage of the Uyghurs being herded on to trains and heard the heartbreaking stories of forced sterilisation, murder and imprisonment. We support the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister and the Government in their strong and clear condemnation of China for that in recent weeks. What further steps will the Prime Minister take? In particular, will he

consider targeted sanctions against those responsible? Will he lead a concerted diplomatic action with our international partners to make it clear that this simply cannot be allowed to stand in the 21st century?

The Prime Minister: That is why the Foreign Secretary, only this week, condemned the treatment of the Uyghurs. That is why this Government, for the first time, have brought in targeted sanctions against those who abuse human rights in the form of the Magnitsky Act. I am delighted that the right hon. and learned Gentleman now supports the Government, but last week, of course, he did not support the Government. I am glad he is with us this week. I do not know how many more questions he has got since you allowed him to come back, Mr Speaker, throughout this session.

We have been getting on consistently with delivering on our agenda. A year ago, this was a Leader of the Opposition who was supporting an antisemitism-condoning Labour party and wanted to repeal Brexit. I represent a Government who were getting on with delivering on the people's priorities: 40 new hospitals, 20,000 more police, 50,000 more nurses. And, by the way, we have already recruited 12,000 more nurses, 6,000 more doctors and 4,000 more police. We are delivering on the people's priorities. We are the people's Government. And, by the way, we are the Government who support the workers of this country as well, with the biggest ever increase in the living wage.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP) [V]: Yesterday, the Tory party held a political Cabinet, with the Prime Minister in a panic about the majority and increasing support for Scottish independence. Apparently, their great strategy amounts to more UK Cabinet Ministers coming to Scotland. Can I tell the Prime Minister that the more Scotland sees of this UK Government, the more convinced it is of the need for Scotland's independence? A far better plan for the Tories would be to listen to the will of the Scottish people. Before his visit tomorrow, will the Prime Minister call a halt to his Government's full-frontal attack on devolution?

The Prime Minister: I really do not know what the right hon. Gentleman is talking about. The only Bill I can think of that is before the House, or will be coming before the House, and which I know enjoys cross-party support, is the UK Internal Market Bill. Although that is a massively devolutionary Bill, which gives huge powers straight back from Brussels to Scotland, its principal purpose is to protect jobs and protect growth throughout the entire United Kingdom to stop pointless barriers to trade between all four parts of our country. Anybody sensible would support it.

Ian Blackford: Anybody sensible would realise from that answer that the Prime Minister simply does not get Scotland. In 2014, the people of Scotland were promised devolution-max, near federalism and the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world. Instead, we got a Tory Trade Bill that threatens our NHS, an Immigration Bill that will devastate our economy, and a power grab that will dismantle devolution. Scotland's powers grabbed by Westminster, workers' rights attacked, the rape clause and the bedroom tax, our NHS up for sale—the overwhelming majority in Scotland's Parliament, its MPs and its people oppose all those measures. How can

the Prime Minister claim that this is a Union of equal partners when his damaging policies will all be imposed upon Scotland against its will?

The Prime Minister: I hesitate to accuse the right hon. Gentleman of failing to listen to my last answer, but it is clear that the UK Internal Market Bill is massively devolutionary, with 70 powers passed from Brussels to Scotland. It is quite incredible. Of course, its purpose is very sensible, which is to protect jobs and growth throughout the entire UK, but just on a political level it seems bizarre that the Scottish nationalist party actually wants to reverse that process and hand those powers back to unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats in Brussels. Is that really the policy? I do not think it is sensible.

[905213] **Tom Randall** (Gedling) (Con): I welcome the Health Secretary's call for a review of the reporting of coronavirus deaths, as I raised this point recently with the national statistician at a Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee evidence session. He said that the numbers themselves would not change the policy, but does the Prime Minister agree that having the true numbers will help improve confidence in the policy? As the Royal College of Pathologists has pointed out, determining the difference between dying with and dying of covid-19 is key to understanding and getting better information about this disease.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. As I have said repeatedly at this Dispatch Box, it is very important that we wait until the conclusion of this epidemic and have a proper statistical assessment of where we are. That is the course I would recommend to him.

[905211] **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): I was the first Member of this House to raise concerns about Russian interference in our democracy, four years ago. By blocking the publication of the Russia report before the election, on grounds that the Intelligence and Security Committee has said were spurious, and then trying to fix the Committee, is it not abundantly clear that this Prime Minister has knowingly and repeatedly put his own personal and party interests before the national security of our country?

The Prime Minister: No, and I think that is a pretty lamentable way of looking at it—it is a lamentable question. If the right hon. Gentleman thought there was genuinely something in the ISC report that showed that, for instance, the Brexit referendum had been undermined by Russia, he would now be saying it, but that does not appear. I am afraid that what we have here, as I have told the House several times, is the rage and fury of the remainder elite finding that there is in fact nothing in this report—no smoking gun whatever, after all that froth and fury. Suddenly, all those who want to remain in the EU find that they had no argument to stand on. They should simply move on.

[905214] **Paul Bristow** (Peterborough) (Con): I have visited nine schools in Peterborough in recent weeks. Heads, teachers and support staff are doing brilliant work facilitating e-learning and looking after vulnerable families, but their huge effort is no substitute for classroom learning. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is vital that we get children back where they belong, in the classroom, from September?

The Prime Minister: I do indeed agree with that. It would be a fantastic thing to hear the Labour party stand up to their friends in the unions and issue the same instruction—that would be a wonderful thing.

[905212] **Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): The Social Market Foundation report identified Hull as the area facing the worst economic hit and the slowest recovery from covid-19. I have stood here in this place and called on the Government for support for our caravan manufacturing, Hull Trains, The Deep, Hull City Council, excluded young entrepreneurs and many others. I received an inadequate response from the Government, which fails to address the gravity of the situation Hull faces. What the Prime Minister needs to recognise is that you cannot level up by shutting down, so what new support will he give to prevent job losses in Hull West and Hessle?

The Prime Minister: We have already given the East Riding of Yorkshire more than £21 million to deal with the pressures of coronavirus. We have supported 90% of caravan manufacturers, whom the hon. Lady rightly supports, with the furlough scheme. As she knows, we have not only the £2 billion kickstarter fund to help young people into work, but the furlough bonus scheme to retain people in their jobs, as part of a massive package—£640 billion overall—to get our country moving again and make sure that we bounce back stronger than ever.

[905215] **Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): Schools in Buckinghamshire have done a tremendous job in recent months, balancing online learning with physical classes for the children of key workers. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the teachers of the Aylesbury constituency, and does he agree that it is right to have increased funding for schools, providing more money for all pupils and giving them the best prospects for their future?

The Prime Minister: Yes, and I am proud that we have fulfilled our manifesto promise. We are levelling up school funding across the country so that every primary school pupil receives at least £4,000 per head and every secondary school pupil £5,150, and I pay tribute to all the teachers and all the schools in my hon. Friend's constituency for the excellent work that they have done in the last few months.

[905216] **Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): Face coverings will become mandatory on public transport in Wales next Monday. A zero VAT rating has been applied to most PPE since 1 May but at present it does not apply to non-medical face coverings. Will the Prime Minister therefore extend the zero rating to these items so that members of the public, especially those on low incomes, are not financially penalised for following the rules?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his question. As he knows, we have removed VAT from all PPE, including VAT on face masks that, as everybody knows, can protect from infection. That removed the burden of VAT in care homes, NHS trusts and for key workers. For home-made face masks, those that meet the Public Health England guidance will be

covered, and will continue to be covered, by the zero rate, but I am happy to ask the relevant Minister to write to him to clarify the entire position.

[905218] **Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): Friday is the first anniversary of my right hon. Friend becoming Prime Minister and, over the last 12 months, his focus on record funding for the NHS, boosted funding for every schoolchild in England and great progress on recruiting more police officers has all enabled us to start to address some of the ingrained regional inequalities in our country. Can my right hon. Friend ensure that levelling up remains central to his vision for our country for every single year of his premiership?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend, and I can absolutely give her that guarantee. In the current circumstances, now is the time to double down on levelling up and that is what we are going to do. That is why we are rolling out a colossal programme of investment in infrastructure, massive investments in our public services and fantastic new technology, because that is the way to give every part of our country the opportunity to realise its potential.

[905217] **Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): On 10 July, the Prime Minister met Bethany from Crewe during the "People's Prime Minister's Questions", when she took the opportunity to raise the campaign for the extension of maternity leave as a direct consequence of covid-19. During that session, the Prime Minister not only undertook to look at the petition, but understood the significant ramifications that lockdown has had on mums and parents who have missed out on childcare support, health visitor access, and the availability of building bonds with wider family members and the community. Ten days later, I ask the Prime Minister: has he considered that petition, and with recess fast approaching, can he give an indication as to when the Government will respond to the necessary request to get this precious time back for mothers and families?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I will remember Bethany and her question, and I know how difficult this problem is for many people. I can certainly commit to him to look at it in detail and see what we can do, and I will write back to him.

[905219] **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): My right hon. Friend knows better than most that covid has an unequal impact on the black, Asian and minority ethnic community, on the elderly, on men and, indeed, on the overweight. Can he please update the House on the steps being taken across Government to empower people away from fat-shaming and away from an over-reliance on body mass index, which we all know is an inaccurate measure for individual wellbeing, and let us know what he is doing to enable people to take back control of their own wellbeing?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for the extreme tact with which she expressed her question. She makes a very important point, because I am afraid

that there are significant comorbidities associated with covid, and we do need as a country to address obesity and the sad fact that we are, I am afraid, considerably fatter than most other European nations apart from the Maltese, as far as I can tell—no disrespect to Malta; that is what the statistics told me—and we will be bringing forward a strategy, which I hope will conform to my right hon. Friend's strictures.

[905220] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I do not know whether the Prime Minister has had a chance yet to read the report commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the standard of homes delivered under permitted development. The report found properties with no windows, that three quarters of the properties did not meet the national space standards, and

“studio flats of just 16m² each were found in a number of different PD schemes”.

To put this in context for the Prime Minister, 16 square metres is just about the size of the base of the ministerial limousine that he gets driven around in each day. Will he now change the rules and ensure that we never again allow slums to be built and people to be asked to live in a space as small as his ministerial car?

The Prime Minister: I was proud as Mayor of London to change the London plan to ensure that we went for Parker Morris plus 10% for our space standards. We will ensure that we not only build back better and more beautifully, but that we give people the space they need to live and grow in the homes that we will build.

[905221] **Ms Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): As the Prime Minister takes a well-earned staycation, does he mind if I suggest some holiday reading? “How Innovation Works” by Matt Ridley will give new ideas for how we can recover from covid. “The Happiness of Blond People” by my dear friend Elif Shafak is about our stories of immigration and the fragility of belonging. Finally, as the MP for the Hundred Acre Wood, may I suggest that it is never too early to read “Winnie-the-Pooh” to Wilfred? As Pooh says:

“You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.”

That is sage advice, from Wealden, to children everywhere.

The Prime Minister: That is wonderful advice, which I will take to heart. I look forward to joining my hon. Friend for a game of Poohsticks in the Hundred Acre Wood. Would it not be a wonderful thing if the Labour party abandoned the spirit of Eeyore that currently seems to envelop it?

[905222] **Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab): Tonight I will be supporting Luton Town FC, who are fighting for their life in the championship, as are businesses across Luton South. If Luton needs to go back into lockdown, will the Government introduce targeted financial support so that local people can afford to adhere to health guidance?

The Prime Minister: Yes indeed. I thank the local authorities and people of Luton, who are obviously working very hard to ensure that they contain the epidemic, as are other local authorities around the country. We are supporting them, as the hon. Lady knows, with £3.7 billion of investment, as well as

£600 million for the infection fund and a further £300 million to support local track and trace. Of course, if local communities do have to go back into lockdown, we will take steps to support them as well.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): I wholeheartedly support this Government's plans to level up our country and build, build, build. Many of my constituents are concerned, however, about a proposed housing development in Chorleywood. Although it is important that we build more affordable homes, this cannot come at the expense of our beautiful countryside. Can the Prime Minister tell me how the Government will balance local authority obligations to build housing under local plans with protection for the green belt?

The Prime Minister: Of course, and I thank my hon. Friend very much for his question because it allows me to point out that there is massive opportunity to build back better on brownfield sites. That is what we should prioritise, and that is certainly what we will be telling local authorities.

Mr Speaker: Let us head to Scotland, to the deputy SNP leader, who is audio only.

[905223] **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP) [V]: Parliament will return after the summer recess to what manufacturing group Make UK describes as a “jobs bloodbath” because the Chancellor is ending the furlough scheme. We can see the impact on jobs and livelihoods coming over the horizon because of that furlough cliff edge. A meal deal does not cut it. What will the Prime Minister do to support strategic sectors and prevent unemployment from reaching 1980s levels?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady knows, we already have in place the job retention scheme and the bonus of £1,000 for employers keeping on furloughed workers. She also knows about the £2 billion kickstarter fund that we have instituted, the “eat out to help out” programme, the VAT cut and the many other things that we have done, on top of the £160 billion that we have invested in incomes, jobs and livelihoods throughout this crisis. But of course we will continue to do more as the economic ramifications of covid unfold; of course we are preparing for that. As the Chancellor has said, we must be clear with the country that we cannot protect every job, but no one will be left without hope or opportunity, and this country will bounce back stronger than ever before.

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): St Mawes in my constituency was recently placed first in the Which? survey of the best coastal destinations in the UK and the coastal town of Falmouth constantly punches above its weight with very little. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government are looking at further financial measures to help the coastal towns that have been hardest hit in their time of need?

The Prime Minister: Indeed I can. We are funding 178 projects throughout England through our £180 million coastal communities fund, and Truro will receive at least £500,000 from the towns fund this year to support the high street and local community.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I chair the new all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, and we are leading a cross-party rapid inquiry to ensure that we have learnt the lessons from the UK Government's handling of this pandemic before a second wave. We have had over 900 submissions so far, including from bereaved families, from people who have long covid and from professional bodies such as the British Medical

Association and the NHS Confederation. We will be releasing recommendations as we go, throughout the recess. I simply ask: will the Prime Minister take our recommendations seriously, with a view to acting on them when we come back in September?

The Prime Minister: Of course, I would be very happy to look at whatever the hon. Lady's group produces.

Speaker's Statement

12.31 pm

Mr Speaker: I have a short statement to make about Select Committees. On Tuesday 24 March, the House passed an order allowing for virtual participation in Select Committee meetings, and giving Chairs associated powers to make reports. I was given a power under the order to extend it if necessary. On Monday 8 June, I announced an extension until Thursday 17 September. I can notify the House today that I am now further extending the order until Friday 30 October.

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.

12.32 pm

Sitting suspended.

Intelligence and Security Committee: Russia Report

12.35 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make a statement on the Intelligence and Security Committee's report into Russia.

The Minister for Security (James Brokenshire) [V]: This Government will not tolerate any foreign interference in the running of our sovereign state. We have long recognised the threat posed by the Russian state, including from conventional military capabilities, espionage, cyber-attacks, covert interference and illicit finance. We have been clear that Russia must desist from its attacks on the UK and our allies, and we have been resolute in defending our country, our democracy and our values. We categorically reject any suggestion that the UK actively avoided investigating Russia.

The UK has a record of taking strong action against Russian wrongdoing. This is demonstrated by our responses to the Salisbury attack, the ongoing illegal annexation of Crimea and, just last week, cyber-attacks on research and development facilities in the US, the UK and Canada. Our world-class intelligence and security agencies continue to produce regular assessments of the threats posed by hostile state activity, including any potential interference in past or current UK democratic processes. Our 30-year Russia strategy is designed to move us to a point where Russia chooses to work alongside the international community.

Since the Committee took evidence in January 2019, much more has been done. We have established the Defending Democracy programme and strengthened our cross-Government counter-disinformation capability. In March, we formally avowed the existence of the joint state threats assessment team. Earlier this month, we launched the UK global human rights sanctions regime to target serious human rights abuses, with 25 Russian Government officials already sanctioned.

We have committed to bring forward legislation to counter hostile state activity and espionage. This will modernise existing offences to deal more effectively with the espionage threat, and consider what new offences and powers are needed. This includes reviewing the Official Secrets Acts and considering whether to follow our allies in adopting a form of foreign agent registration.

We are taking action at every level. We have stepped up our response to illicit finance through the introduction of new powers by the Criminal Finances Act 2017, including unexplained wealth orders, and the establishment of the multi-agency national economic crime centre within the National Crime Agency. The rules on investment visas have already been tightened, but we will continue to consider whether any further changes are required to ensure that they cannot be abused. Let there be no doubt: we are unafraid to act wherever necessary to protect the UK and our allies from any state threat.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I thank the ISC past and present and all involved in producing the Russia report: "until recently, the Government had badly underestimated the Russian threat and the response it required."

Not my words, but the damning indictment of deep systemic failings in the Government's approach to security that the Russia report sets out. It is not so much that the

[*Nick Thomas-Symonds*]

Government studied what was happening and missed the signs. The truth is that they took a conscious decision not to look at all, as in the case of the 2016 referendum. If there is any doubt about the failure of Ministers to look, let me tell the House what the report says:

“The written evidence provided to us appeared to suggest that HMG had not seen or sought evidence of successful interference in UK democratic processes”.

Who provided the written evidence? If we check the footnote, it was the Government themselves. No wonder the Government were so desperate to delay the publication of the report. Sitting on it for months and blocking its publication before a general election was a dereliction of duty.

We have no issue with the Russian people. It is the Russian state that is involved in a litany of hostile activity, cyber-warfare, interference in democratic processes, illicit finance and acts of violence on UK soil. The report finds a failure of security departments to engage with this issue to the extent that the UK now faces a threat from Russia within its own borders. Does the Minister accept that that is in a situation when the UK is, as the report says, a top target for the Russian regime? Does he also accept, on defending the UK’s democratic processes and discourse, that no single organisation was offering leadership in government? Instead, it was, in the words of the report, “a hot potato” passed from one to another, with no body taking overall responsibility.

I thank our security services for the work they do, but they need help, and the report makes it clear that they have not received the strategic support, the legislative tools or the resources necessary to defend our interests. The report concludes that

“recent changes in resourcing to counter Russian Hostile State Activity are not (or not only) due to a continuing escalation of the threat—but appear to be an indicator of playing catch-up.”

When will the Government stop playing catch up? Anyone who saw the Prime Minister’s failure to engage on this at Prime Minister’s questions will be extremely worried. When will the Government treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves, act on the findings of the report and put the security of our country first?

James Brokenshire: The one thing I agree with in what the hon. Gentleman said is the threat we face from Russia, as I made clear in my opening statement, in terms of all the different varieties in which that threat presents itself. We recognise and have always recognised the enduring and significant threat posed by Russia, and Russia remains a top national security priority for this country. However, in terms of the other assertions that he makes, I reject them. It is a bit rich for those on the Labour Front Bench to lecture this Government on our stance in relation to Russia, given that the shadow Foreign Secretary herself even said at the weekend that the Labour party had got its position wrong.

The hon. Gentleman highlighted the issue of strategy, and again I point to the Russia strategy that was implemented in 2017. Indeed, a cross-Government Russia unit is focused on all this and brings things together across Government with accountability through the National Security Council. He highlights the issue of

the protection of our democracy. Unlike the Labour party, I am proud that we stood on a Conservative manifesto that committed to defend our democracy, highlighting that we will protect the integrity of our democracy by introducing identification to vote at the polling station and stopping postal vote harvesting, and through measures to prevent any foreign interference in elections. I look forward to the Labour party supporting those measures, which it did not in its own manifesto at the last general election.

Our approach to the threat Russia poses is clear-eyed. That is why we have taken the steps that we have, and, as I outlined, all the different measures we have implemented over the last months and years. Indeed, we have set out the message to Russia that, while we want to maintain a dialogue with it, there can be no normalisation of our bilateral relationship until Russia ends the destabilising activity that threatens the UK and our allies and undermines the safety of our citizens and our collective security.

We take the issue of our national security incredibly seriously. As I have said, I will take no lectures from the Opposition on putting the interests of this country first.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Ind): Given that the Minister has so much to say on this subject, it is really rather sad that it is having to be said in the context of an urgent question rather than a voluntary statement by the Government.

The Russia report could not have been produced to this high standard without the dedication, the expertise and, above all, the objectivity of the ISC’s brilliant staff, some of whom I have worked with previously, yet according to the journalist Tim Walker some people within Government tried to sack the secretariat and make political appointments. Will my right hon. Friend, as I still regard him, resist the temptation to fob us off with clichés about not believing everything we read in the media and give this House now a categorical commitment that no party political special advisers will be allowed anywhere near the ISC?

James Brokenshire: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments on the work of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament. He will recall that he and I served on the Bill Committee establishing the ISC so he will know the weight and consideration I give to it, and indeed to the work of its officials and those who work to support its activities, inquiries and investigations. He can certainly have my assurances on the weight and support I give to his Committee.

I commend the work of the previous Committee, which produced the report that is the subject of this urgent question. I also commend all members of the Committee for the robust and rigorous work that I know they will do in the course of this Parliament.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Unlike the Minister, I will at least have the grace to congratulate the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) on his election to the chairmanship of the Intelligence and Security Committee, and he will have our backing in making sure he stays there because he is an independent-minded person and the right person to chair that Committee. Like him, I thank the Committee for publication of the report.

There is a lot of stuff in the report; this is a cow that is going to give us a lot of milk for quite some time, and it deserves to be taken seriously and considered objectively. The issues it raises in relation to actively looking the other way on interference in the Brexit referendum need to be addressed objectively by both Government and the Opposition.

That also applies to what the report has to say about the Scottish referendum. I have banged on more about this than any other MP or politician in Scotland; in fact in Scotland, my party has a stronger record on this than any other political party. So let us have the inquiry into Brexit and the 2014 referendum campaign; let us bring that forward, and be clear that that is something only the United Kingdom Government can do—and if they do, the Minister will have my support in that.

When do the Government intend to bring forward the legislation that the Minister mentioned, for example on foreign agents, and can he clarify that there will be ample time to debate the rather confused and obscure effort across Government to counter this threat seriously?

James Brokenshire: We have produced our response to the Committee's report, and I commend it to the hon. Gentleman. He highlights the issue about an inquiry, which underlines the fact that it is the work of the intelligence and security agencies to assess any new evidence as it emerges. Given that long-standing approach, we do not believe that it is necessary to hold a specific retrospective inquiry. If evidence were available to be found, it would emerge through our existing processes. We have seen no evidence of successful interference in the way that has been described by some. Indeed, that leads many people to think that it is more about re-arguing some of the issues of the Brexit referendum, not respecting and reflecting the outcome of that referendum. We are working at pace on the legislation and I am sure that there will be plenty of opportunities in the House to debate that, as well as other issues related to the report.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): The report highlights concerning aspects of Russian interference in UK affairs with a sinister combination of 21st-century technology and tactics that are reminiscent of the cold war. Much of the report is redacted for obvious reasons, but can the Minister assure the House that he is satisfied that, where mistakes were made or threats were underestimated, they are already being put right to ensure that our democracy and economy are protected from nefarious influence, now and in future?

James Brokenshire: We keep all of our response under review, which is why I have highlighted all the different measures and steps that are in place to guard against the risk from action, interference or espionage by any hostile state or hostile state activity and what that requires. That is why, for example, in 2017, we established the NSC-endorsed Russia strategy. My hon. Friend has my assurance on the steps that we have taken and will continue to take to guard our national security. We will ensure that it is absolutely at the forefront.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It was not lost on the House that the Minister did not answer the question of the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee. Will he do so now, please?

James Brokenshire: I was clear about the weight and importance of the independent scrutiny that the ISC provides and why, from my perspective and the Government's perspective, we will always examine and reflect carefully on its incredibly important work. I was also clear about the importance of that being conducted in the independent way in which it has always fulfilled its role and responsibility. I am quite clear that that will continue into the future.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): The ISC report suggests that the SNP has questions to answer about Russian interference. Does the Minister agree that, given that Scotland and the independence referendum are at the centre of the allegations, it is right that the SNP explains what it knew about the issue and when?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend has made her point clearly and firmly. We wait to see how the SNP responds to the various points that have been flagged. Obviously, our priority is the national security of our whole United Kingdom, and the Government firmly continue to do that work.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I wish that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon), or the special adviser who wrote that question, had actually read the report, because clearly she has not.

One of the Committee's main recommendations was the need for a Bill to reform the Official Secrets Act and for an espionage Act. I welcome what the Minister has announced today and, more broadly and more informatively, what was in *The Times* this morning. The former director of MI5 and the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) when he gave evidence to the Committee supported that.

In 2017, the Law Commissioners set off a consultation process about that, which is yet to report. I ask the Minister when it will report. I also urge him to make sure that we get the legislation in place, because it is needed. Let us hope that it is not just some spin to take the headlines the day after the report was announced. Let us get it into action.

James Brokenshire: I agree with what the right hon. Gentleman said about legislation. He will note that in the Queen's Speech, we committed to introduce legislation to counter hostile state activity and espionage. It is right that we put in place steps that reflect things like the foreign agent registration-type processes that exist in other countries, as well as receiving the Law Commission report on the Official Secrets Act. I can say to the right hon. Gentleman that the commitment of this Government is to act at pace and speed to get this right, to ensure that we do our utmost to strengthen powers where they need to be strengthened and, in the interim, to take all necessary action to call out and highlight Russian activity and take further action as appropriate.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): As a Select Committee Chair, may I welcome this report? Scrutiny is good. It helps to raise the bar and it is healthy for democracy. However, for those who follow such events, it has long been recognised that Russia poses a national security threat. It regularly buzzes our airspace with its MiGs, and the Foreign Affairs Committee "Moscow's Gold" report highlighted many of the same issues as this report. Does the Security Minister agree

[*Mr Tobias Ellwood*]

that Russia's cyber and disinformation actions are a reflection of the changing character of conflict, with calibrated state-sponsored attacks designed to interfere with our politics and economy, but beneath the threshold of any military response? Does he agree that we need to adapt quickly to that new form of political competition?

James Brokenshire: I agree with my right hon. Friend. I commend the ISC and his Committee for their work, for their reports, and for the way in which they have put this into focus. I hope to assure him that offensive cyber capabilities are now a critical part of our work, and we will ensure that we integrate that within our military and in some of our broader response to the issues as well—appropriately bounded, obviously, by legal and policy oversight. He is right to highlight the changing nature of conflict and activities against states, and that is why, through our National Cyber Security Centre and other initiatives, we continue to enhance and be vigilant against the threat outlined.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I have been warning about Putin's Russia for 19 years now, and calling for the Magnitsky sanctions for 10 years. What mystifies me is that Government Ministers still give out golden visas to dodgy Russian oligarchs, that Government Ministers still grant exemptions to dodgy Russian oligarchs so that they can hide their ownership of businesses in this country, and that Government Ministers still take millions of pounds from dodgy Russian oligarchs. We have to clean up our act, and it has to start with the Government.

James Brokenshire: I recognise the work of the hon. Gentleman over a number of years on Magnitsky sanction-type regimes, as he rightly pointed out, and I hope that he will recognise and welcome the steps that have been taken in that regard. Equally, I highlight our work to tighten tier 1 visas and the retrospective examination that continues of visas granted before 2015. I assure him of our continued review of and vigilance about the abuse of our immigration system and, if further action is required, we will carry it out. I also assure him of the transparency of the workings of support for politics, which the Government underlined with their manifesto commitment.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I fully accept what the Minister says about this Government acting, and I give credit where credit is due. I have met folks in the Russia unit, and I thank them for their work. However, from 2007 to at least 2014, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said so eloquently, we were hugely complacent and it damaged us. My question is about a foreign agent registration process, because I am unclear about it. Is the Minister talking about spies—making it illegal for the GRU to have people here—or is he talking about foreign lobbying? I have been calling for a foreign lobbying Act for two years now, and the foreign agent registration process in the US is about foreign lobbying, on which we badly need new and updated laws.

James Brokenshire: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. We have been examining the laws in different countries that govern foreign agent registration.

We are drawing that together into something that will be effective from a UK standpoint, learning whether that has been effective and applying that to our law as we prepare for the introduction of legislation countering espionage and hostile state activity. I look forward to continuing that discussion with him.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I declare my interest as the chair of the new all-party group on technology and national security and as a member of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy. The remarkable insight from this report was the lack of horizon scanning, understanding, mitigation and response to modern threats in the technological frontier from hostile states. On the assumption that the Minister agrees that we need to invest in and enhance our capabilities in this technological frontier, when does he intend to come to the House with the Government's strategy to secure our national security?

James Brokenshire: Members will have heard what I said in my opening statement about the various steps that have been taken, including on countering illicit finance, dealing with the potential abuse of visas and investing through our national cyber-security strategy to counter cyber being exploited against us in so many different ways. That work continues. We also continue to work with those involved in the internet and social media on our online harms legislation, which we remain committed to. That underlines the breadth of our response.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My right hon. Friend may be aware that I have done more than most to try to stop the return of Russia to the Council of Europe, so I recognise the enduring threat that it poses. Does he share my belief that the Russia report largely underplays the bigger picture and that there is a distinct risk to the UK through the international institutions to which we jointly belong?

James Brokenshire: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for all his work. Russia seeks to advance the sense of a state that supports the rules-based order, yet through all its other actions, we can see that there is a fundamentally different approach. I would underline his focus on the fact that we need to be clear-eyed about the threats and risks posed through multilateral organisations. I look forward to working with him and others as we continue to call that out and ensure that our interests are best reflected through those organisations in upholding the rules-based order.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Minister still has not answered the question posed by the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), who alleged that there was a political attempt to remove the secretariat of the ISC and replace it with political placemen or women. Was the Minister aware of that—yes or no?

James Brokenshire: I am happy to say that I do not have any knowledge of what the hon. Gentleman is saying; I do not recognise that at all. From my standpoint, it is important that the ISC is able to conduct its work and present its report to the House, given the mandate that this House provided it with through the legislation establishing it.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): I pay tribute to all those working in the British intelligence and security services who are putting their lives at risk

here and abroad, including my father, who spent 45 years working for the Government, facing the Soviet Union as the enemy during the cold war. This report highlights that, as we have always done, we need to adjust and adapt to a new battlefield. Can the Minister assure me that the intelligence services and the armed forces will get every resource and piece of legislation they need to be effective?

James Brokenshire: Like my hon. Friend, I pay tribute to the work of our world-leading and incredible intelligence and security agencies and the steps they take day in, day out to assure our security. We should all be proud and supportive of their actions. My hon. Friend will know that an integrated review and a spending review are ongoing and can be assured of the importance and emphasis we give to our national security. That will be reflected in this process. We will protect and guard our future against the range of threats out there from those looking to undermine this country. We stand firm against that.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab) [V]: For years, when I was campaigning for an infected blood inquiry, I was familiar with the “nothing to see here” response from Whitehall, until it was decided that there was something to see. If a chief constable played down a spate of local muggings because police chose not to investigate, any MP worth their salt would not accept that. It should not be any different when it comes to properly investigating and taking action to protect our national security and democratic institutions from those who wish to subvert those institutions, weaken or divide our country and break up our alliances. Should not any welcome measures taken to strengthen national security be taken in the full knowledge of what those weaknesses are by having an inquiry into Russian interference in 2016?

James Brokenshire: Our work is informed by regular assessments by our security and intelligence agencies to ensure that dynamic response, hence the reason we are not persuaded by this call for a separate inquiry. We have seen the ISC report and responded to it, but in defending our democracy, we are vigilant against the threats and challenges. Indeed, we have a defending democracy programme looking at further steps and legislation to underpin that. The hon. Member certainly has the Government’s commitment to standing firm on those issues and to the security work that continues to inform all our actions.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I want to pick up on the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood). Russia poses a serious threat to this country and is changing that threat, so can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will continue to work with NATO and our other international allies to tackle this threat and that we will be resolute in defending our country, our democracy and our values from a hostile state?

James Brokenshire: I can give that assurance to my hon. Friend. I recognise very clearly the importance of NATO, especially its work on cyber and other support. In that context, I would cite the example of the steps we continue to take to support our allies in the Baltic with

the challenges that remain there. The strength of NATO and how that guards our security remain so important to our future policy.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Committee said that Ministers did not want to know or ask about Russian interference in elections and referendums. It seems they did not want to ask either about dark money funnelled into the Brexit referendum through the Democratic Unionist party by a former Scottish Tory vice-chair, Richard Cook. How will the right hon. Member stop foreign donations polluting our elections?

James Brokenshire: It seems as if again the issue is about trying to rerun the Brexit referendum, but I would say on the hon. Member’s broader point that through the defending democracy programme, we are taking further steps to safeguard our voting system and democracy. I hope that she supports that and all the measures I identified earlier—for example, on individual voter ID. She will also know how transparent we are. We do not accept foreign donations and are stepping up our response to illicit finance through the National Crime Agency.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I recommend to my right hon. Friend the report published yesterday by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee on misinformation during the pandemic. It makes clear that state campaigns, including those from Russia, lay at the heart of it. Does he agree that social media companies hold great power yet have been left unaccountable for their inaction, and does he have any general reflections on the ISC report generally, which has caused great interest in the House and certain parts of the country? Does he think it might be welcomed by President Putin in Russia?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend makes several relevant points on the role of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the need for social media companies to do more. They need to step up, which is why we are introducing legislation on online harms and looking into the further role required of them.

I recognise the point about disinformation. I am sure that the important work of the cross-Whitehall counter-disinformation unit is reflected in the report that my hon. Friend references, which I will certainly look at. The important message we need to send from this House in respect of the ISC report is about that sense of vigilance and being clear-eyed about the threats posed by Russia, but equally that we are not picking an issue with the Russian people. This is about the Russian state and the Russian Government, so we are looking to them to shift their position, which is what our strategy is all about.

Mr Speaker: In order to get everybody in, it would be helpful if we could speed up the questions and the answers.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) [V]: Further to the question from the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), and for absolute clarity for people watching at home, Russians who invest £2 million or more in the UK can get a visa and in five years can convert that visa

[Hywel Williams]

into citizenship. Does that not mean that restricting political donations to British citizens makes no real defence?

James Brokenshire: On the tier 1 investor visa, to which I think the hon. Gentleman refers, work is ongoing to review past visas and, indeed, to look at further changes as needs be. If that is required in our national interest, that is what we will do.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): In the context of this report, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is absolutely shameful that Alex Salmond, the former First Minister of Scotland, remains in the pay of the Kremlin as an apparatchik of Russia Today, and that so few nationalists condemn him for it?

James Brokenshire: My right hon. Friend has, in his customary and very powerful way, set out the position on Russia Today and those who have supported it and those who have been engaged in it. We all have firm questions, doubts and real concerns about the objectivity of Russia Today. It is right that we have Ofcom and other agencies that are there and the independence of Ofcom on its regulation and therefore the need to step up and make sure that that sense of—

Mr Speaker: Order.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister will be familiar with the four horsemen of the apocalypse; I believe that Russia is one of those horsemen and a real danger to the free world. Will the Minister further outline what lessons we have learned from the report that will help us to counteract the very real presence of Russian interference, especially in social media? How do we balance safety with our inalienable right to hold and express our political opinions?

James Brokenshire: The hon. Gentleman wrapped a few questions into that contribution. The point is that we are taking this issue forward in relation to our legislation on online harms and working with social media and other companies to ensure that information is valid and we do not have that sense of disinformation. We are being vigilant against the threats that are posed.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Mr Putin sees the potential weakening of our United Kingdom as a win for Russian interests and that our country is better defended, better protected and better together?

James Brokenshire: I absolutely endorse what my hon. Friend has said so succinctly and so clearly. It is in the interests of our United Kingdom to stand together and be united in that way, and we very firmly are better together.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) [V]: The ISC's report states that Russian influence in the UK has become the new normal. Individuals with close links to Putin are now well integrated into the UK's business and social scene and accepted because of their wealth. Surrounding these oligarchs is an industry of enablers who, wittingly or unwittingly, help to extend Russian influence and the nefarious interests of the Russian

state in the UK. What steps will the Minister now take to tackle the growth of this industry and the ability of wealthy individuals to influence British politicians and parties and our democracy?

James Brokenshire: Dirty money—money obtained through criminality or corruption—has no place in this country, and there should be no doubt that we will ensure that the full weight of the law enforcement regime bears down on those who look to use, move or hide the proceeds of crime. Our National Crime Agency is vigilant. We have introduced unexplained wealth orders. We will continue to enhance our legislation to ensure that corruption is rooted out, and that where dirty money is identified and seized, action is very firmly taken.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): As a former special adviser at the Ministry of Defence during both the Syrian and the Ukrainian conflicts, I am well aware of the threat that Russia continues to pose to the UK and our allies. Will my right hon. Friend clarify what immediate next steps the Government will be taking to counter the disinformation and cyber-attacks—including, at the moment, against the vital work on a coronavirus vaccine?

James Brokenshire: The disinformation point is a very relevant one. Our counter-disinformation unit is led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, bringing all this action together across Government to highlight and call out work with the social media companies over this important time. It does incredibly important work to guard against disinformation now, as it has done before. It will continue to do that, as well as leaning towards the online harms legislation that I have already spoken of.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Let's park the lines from Mr Cummings, shall we? The Conservative party takes money from the Russians, No. 10 suppressed the report, and the Prime Minister forgot that his first duty is the security of the British people. So will the Minister go away and tell the Prime Minister to investigate the Kremlin's role in undermining our democracy?

James Brokenshire: I will take no lectures from the Labour party, or indeed the Whips' question that the hon. Gentleman has asked me. This Government and my party are vigilant on issues of national security, and we will remain so. We will be clear-eyed as to the threat that Russia poses, and where further action needs to be taken, as I have said, we will do so.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP) [V]: The report said that it was surprisingly difficult to establish who has responsibility for what. That conclusion is supported by the Government's response, which alludes to the responsibilities of the Paymaster General, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, DCMS, the Home Office, the Defence Secretary, the Foreign Secretary, and the PM. At 10 am this morning, we still did not know who had drawn the short straw and would come to the House to defend the indefensible. Are not this report, the Government's delay in publishing it and their reaction to it just further examples of the incompetence and arrogance that we have come to expect of this Conservative and Unionist Government?

James Brokenshire: No. I am very comfortable in underlining the Government's commitment to defending our national security. As for the hon. Gentleman's point about structure, this is about having a whole-Government approach, ensuring that each part of Government is engaged and working, with the concept of fusion in drawing this together. That is what we do, with our National Security Council and the accountability through that to deliver.

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm for the people of Wolverhampton that our intelligence and security agencies are capable of identifying and dealing with any threat in this evolving battle space?

James Brokenshire: I can tell my hon. Friend of the support and resourcing that is given to our intelligence and security agencies and how we have such world-leading capabilities. We can be proud of the work they do for us—and therefore for his constituents in Wolverhampton, and indeed for constituents across the country—as we give them that support in defending our security.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab) [V]: The ISC stressed the need to ensure that our response to the threat from Russia is not solely focused on national events and organisations. So what does the Minister intend to do to protect our public sector—our NHS and local government services, which he knows all about—from malicious Russian cyber-intrusion once funding for the national cyber-security programme comes to an end in March next year?

James Brokenshire: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point, because our cyber-defences are something in which this Government have very clearly invested. He highlights the National Cyber Security Centre, and I know the work that it does with local government and the devolved Administrations in ensuring that they are vigilant against the threats. Indeed, only last week, it called out Russian activity against pharmaceutical companies and others to ensure that our knowledge remains here and that we guard it against attack.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): This morning, on the radio, Commissioner Cressida Dick said that people should be concerned about “the threat from Russia”. Will the Minister assure me that our security services will work with our police services to make sure that they have the data, the information and the resources to deal with any local threats?

James Brokenshire: There is strong join-up between our security and intelligence agencies as well as our police. Indeed, when looking at the work that I do each week, I see that join up and see that work, so my hon. Friend can absolutely have my assurance in that regard.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Minister has told us today that he is confident that there is no need for an investigation into any potential Russian interference in the EU referendum, because if there had been any, it would have been detected by existing processes. Given that this report sets out that there was Russian interference in other referendums and that the Russians continue to be involved in British politics, why does he think that the Russians chose to sit that one out?

James Brokenshire: Again, we are certainly hearing some questions that are about trying to refight the referendum. Actually, we should respect the referendum, and that is what this Government have done, and we have been elected on a mandate to deliver on the Brexit referendum. None the less, the hon. Lady certainly has my assurance that we are vigilant against that sense of intrusion and disinformation, and I have outlined the steps that we are taking to guard against that.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): It comes as no surprise to me that the Russian state seeks to infiltrate and influence so many aspects of our society, but I am particularly worried by Russian cyber-activity, especially attempts to steal our secrets, intellectual property and new technologies. I know that, in recent years, more resources have been given to the security and intelligence services, particularly GCHQ and the Army's 77th Brigade, but does my right hon. Friend agree that our offensive cyber-capabilities may well have to be enhanced further given the persistent and increasing threats from Russia?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend, with all of his experience, has highlighted a very important point about the need for offensive cyber-capabilities. We were the first NATO ally to offer offensive cyber-capabilities to the alliance. I am quite sure that this is an issue that will be of core interest and focus as we look at the integrated review. He sets out a compelling argument for further investment. I am quite sure that that will be reflected on very carefully.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Despite repeated requests and reminders from hon. and right hon. Members, this Government have dithered and delayed for 10 long months and tried their very best to suppress the Russia report, and now we all know why. Given the threat to our national security and the fact that it was about preserving and protecting our very democracy itself, how could this Government have been so incompetent, so asleep at the wheel, and not even asked the bare minimum obvious questions?

James Brokenshire: I do not recognise the hon. Gentleman's characterisation at all. I welcome the fact that, speedily after its creation, the ISC report was published, shining a light on the issue of Russia and the need for vigilance, which this Government continue to demonstrate. It is that approach that we take through from this rather than the political characterisation that he sought to proffer.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): The ISC report rightly thanks five Russia experts from outside the intelligence community, two of whom have done some great work with the Legatum Institute. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking those individuals, the institute and, indeed, its visionary founder, Christopher Chandler, for having the courage and the commitment to expend the resources and take the risks to oppose Russian wrongdoing from the private sector?

James Brokenshire: I commend Legatum and all those who have sought to assemble evidence of the impact and the effect. I think it has added to the report the ISC has produced. I look forward to that continuing as the ISC gets into its stride in this Session and I look forward to the contribution that so many people have to

[James Brokenshire]

offer to help ensure that the ISC does its job well and can work to ensure that our response to these national security issues is as well-informed as possible.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP) [V]: As if it was not bad enough that we have unelected peers making major decisions for Scotland, the report raises serious questions about several Members of the House of Lords, their links to business interests in Russia and the potential for those relationships to be exploited by the Russian state. Will the Government urgently support measures to enhance scrutiny of the incomes of the Lords to the same level as the rules for registering MPs' interests?

James Brokenshire: I agree that the transparency of information about political donations is incredibly important. I should say to the hon. Lady that the relevant code is the responsibility of the House itself and it is kept under review by the House of Lords Conduct Committee. I am confident that the Conduct Committee will give due consideration to the clear recommendations made in the ISC report.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): The people of Darlington voted to leave the EU in 2016. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the referendum accurately recorded the genuine will of the people, and that the Government were right to deliver on that mandate and take us out of the EU?

Mr Speaker: I am not quite sure that that fits in with our subject, so what I am going to do is move on to Yvette Cooper, the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I served on the ISC in the late '90s. We had a big Labour majority in Parliament and a Conservative Chair, the much-respected Tom King. There is a long tradition of Members of both Houses putting aside party politics to engage in independent scrutiny of the vital work that our intelligence agencies do and, crucially, to work in support of the national interest. The Government put that at risk at their peril, so can the Minister answer the question put by the current ISC Chair, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis)? Will he now rule out any attempt at Government interference in the work of the ISC, any political appointments to its secretariat and any special advisers to be appointed by him? Will he rule that out now, yes or no?

James Brokenshire: I am very clear, as I have been in response to previous questions, on the need for independence by the ISC. I do not want to see its independence questioned or drawn into any doubt. It is important that the ISC is independent and rigorous. The right hon. Lady can have my assurance on the steps that I take to uphold that.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Yes, Russia is attacking our democratic structures, and internationally Russia and others are also undermining our greatest assets, our alliances and multilaterals. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need a unit at the Foreign Office specifically focused on protecting our interests and upholding the democratic nature of elections of presidents and chairs of multilateral organisations?

James Brokenshire: I absolutely recognise the different threats and challenges. That is why we have the Government Russia unit, which brings together the diplomatic, intelligence and military capabilities to maximum effect. There is a specific lead official at the Foreign Office who is responsible for our work on Russia. Therefore, the important point my hon. Friend makes about vigilance and the need to draw that information together is absolutely in place. We will continue to ensure that the interests of this country are, through that work, at the forefront and that we defend our nation's security.

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.

1.28 pm

Sitting suspended.

1.31 pm

On resuming—

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: 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 and Measure:

Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) Act 2020
Finance Act 2020

Stamp Duty Land Tax (Temporary Relief) Act 2020

Business and Planning Act 2020

Channel Islands Measure 2020.

Rented Homes: End of Evictions Ban

1.32 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will make a statement on the implications of the end of the evictions ban for people renting their home.

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): As the Government take steps in the next phase of the response to coronavirus, it is right that we consider how to transition from the emergency measures put in place in March in the face of the then imminent public health emergency. On 13 May, the Government took decisive steps to unlock the housing market, enabling people, whether they own or rent, to move home safely if they need to. The end of the pause on possession proceedings on 23 August is another important step towards more normal life resuming and to ensuring all people—landlords and tenants—have access to justice. Prioritising cases is a matter for the judiciary, but I consider it important that cases such as those of serious antisocial behaviour are heard again.

During this period, we are working to provide appropriate support to those who have been particularly affected by coronavirus when possession proceedings start again. As part of this, we have been engaging with a working group convened by the Master of the Rolls. An early outcome of the group's work has been changes to the court rules of possession proceedings. These rules will apply within the current legislative framework from 23 August. They will require landlords seeking possession of their property to set out relevant information about a tenant's circumstances, including information on the effect of the pandemic. This encourages landlords to have the right conversations with tenants before seeking repossession. Through guidance, we are also encouraging landlords to agree to rent repayment plans or rent flexibilities, where possible. Landlords will need to follow strict procedures if they want to gain possession of their property. This includes, until at least 30 September, giving tenants a minimum of three months' notice of their intention to seek possession, as set out in the measures introduced in the Coronavirus Act 2020.

The Government have provided unprecedented financial support to renters through the job retention scheme, boosting the welfare safety net by more than £9 billion and increasing the local housing allowance rate to the 30th percentile. These measures will remain in place when the courts reopen. We are also committed to bringing forward reforms to provide greater security to tenants, alongside strengthening the rights of landlords who need to gain possession of their property when they have a valid reason to do so. Legislation will be brought forward in due course.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Minister for that response, but it really will not do, because he knows that his proposals are toothless. Eviction law remains intact, so extra information about the tenant will not prevent people from losing their home, and in the middle of a public health crisis. In a Government statement on 18 March, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government said:

“The Government is clear—no renter who has lost income due to coronavirus will be forced out of their home, nor will any landlord face unmanageable debts.”

Labour wants to hold him to this.

The evictions ban ends on 23 August. The Government have failed to plan for what happens next. That failure looks set to lead to evictions and homelessness this autumn. Data from Citizens Advice and others indicates millions of households are struggling with rent. Current law makes evictions mandatory, with no court discretion, if tenants are in two months' of arrears under ground 8, section 8 of the Housing Act 1988, and discretionary evictions can still be made under section 21, which the Government have promised to abolish but so far have not done so. They could have prevented people from falling into arrears by adjusting social security or bringing in emergency temporary legal changes, but they have chosen not to.

What assessment have the Government made of likely numbers of people facing homelessness? What consideration have they given to public health, with possibly thousands of households becoming homeless as we go into winter? What resources have they provided to councils for the cost of additional advisers and emergency and other accommodation? Will the Minister admit that yesterday's practice direction will make no material difference to the outcomes for tenants with arrears, as eviction laws remain unchanged?

The Government made a promise. This is not just affecting antisocial tenants; it is affecting people struggling now. Nobody benefits from renters becoming homeless, nor mortgage payers struggling with the end of the deferral scheme. We have called on the Government repeatedly to act. It is not too late to extend the ban and sort out the legal changes in September. For the sake of everyone whose home is at risk, and everyone who cares, I urge them to act now.

Christopher Pincher: The hon. Lady knows full well—the House knows full well—that this an unprecedented epidemic. In its face, we have brought forward unprecedented measures to help tenants in difficulty. We are protecting 8.6 million people as a result of the stay in court action, the moratorium on evictions and the three-month minimum notice period that landlords need to apply.

We have spent billions of pounds on the furlough scheme, which the shadow Chancellor has described as a lifeline, to make sure that people have an income and can help pay their rent. We have given local authorities £4.3 billion. We have given £500 million in council tax relief. We have spent £433 million on the Everyone In campaign to help with homelessness, which has resulted in 90% of homeless people being taken off the streets. We have committed to 6,000 new long-term homes—3,300 this year—to help anyone who suffers from homelessness. I think the House will agree that that is, by any measure, a real effort to help people who are in need.

But we are moving out of the worst of the epidemic, and we are moving through a transition phase. It is right that we normalise proceedings and procedures. To that effect, I have had conversations with the Master of the Rolls and with Sir Robin Knowles. They have been quite clear that they want to ensure that courts act properly to hear landlords' and tenants' concerns. They

[*Christopher Pincher*]

are also very clear that, should a landlord not provide requisite information to the courts about the effect of covid-19 on a tenant when the landlord brings forward an application, the courts will have power to adjourn the case, which will hit the landlord in the pocket—something that will focus the landlords' minds.

I have been told by many stakeholders and representatives, including the National Residential Landlords Association, that this will definitely be a wake-up call to landlords. It will also be of definite support to tenants, so I am convinced that we have struck the right balance between tenants' needs and the landlords' rights. I am convinced that we are supporting people to the best of our ability. I am pleased that we are now moving out of the epidemic and we are supporting people appropriately.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that landlords follow very strict procedures if they want to seek possession of their property? What is he doing more widely to increase security for tenants?

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for his question. As I said, we will bring forward the renters' reform Act, which will abolish section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, in due course, when we have stable terrain on which to do so. That will improve tenants' rights. We will also ensure that there is provision for a lifetime deposit scheme in that Bill. As I have described from my discussions with the Master of the Rolls, the courts have set out strict procedures that landlords will have to follow if they want to claim repossession of their properties. That is the right and balanced course, and I commend it.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): In the end, as I am sure the Minister will agree, we all want to get to a position where no tenant is evicted because of covid-related matters. I recognise that the Government have made efforts, through the statutory instrument and the guidance, to toughen up the pre-action protocol, but what happens if a landlord comes to the court with all the information about a tenant's circumstances but still wants to go for a section 21 eviction—they do not have to give any reasons—or for a ground 8 eviction, where simply rent arrears will do? If all the information is given to the court, does the court have any discretion to refuse the eviction request?

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to the Chairman of the Select Committee for that. First, the landlord will have to bring all the information that is required before the court. The courts want to sit in order that a duty solicitor will be present, but other interlocutors may be present to mediate, even at that late stage, between the landlord and the tenant to ensure that the right outcome can be achieved. Under the section 21 rules of the 1988 Act, the courts do not have discretion in that particular circumstance, but I am sure that in those cases where egregious rent arrears predate the covid emergency, where there is domestic abuse or where there is antisocial behaviour, we want to see the landlord have their right to bring forward their repossession case. That is what they are allowed to do under the law.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that effective communication is often the solution to many a problem. Will he assure the House that he will do everything he can to encourage landlords and tenants, who may be experiencing financial difficulties, to come together to work out flexible solutions?

Christopher Pincher: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. I have had several conversations with the NRLA, I have had conversations with the judiciary and I have also spoken to Baroness Kennedy of Generation Rent. I have made those points to them and I make them to the House.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I dread the autumn. Even before covid, my borough of Brent had the second highest level of evictions in London; a third of households live in poverty and more than 30% of employees earn below the living wage, and many face redundancy. This will mean that after paying their rent, the average family with three children in my constituency will be left with just £38.46 a week to feed and clothe all five people, and pay all their utility bills. The Minister may say that local authorities have been given £50 million to help families in hardship, but that works out at less than £1 million per constituency, and this is not about one-off hardship; it is about structural inequality and poverty. So will he increase housing benefit to cover the real cost of average rents and will he introduce fair rent controls so that the taxpayer is not paying out to chase ever-escalating rents and ever-rising property prices, which are distorting our economy?

Christopher Pincher: The best way to help the hon. Gentleman's constituents—and all our constituents—out of this crisis is to get the economy back on track and people into work so that they can pay their bills and enjoy their lives again. As for the specifics of his constituents' cases, in fact we have not given £50 million—we have given £500 million in council tax relief for the most egregious cases and £63 million for the non-shielded food vulnerable to help them. We have protected, as I have said, 8.6 million people as a result of the other changes that we have made. I am confident that we have done the right thing, and we continue to do the right thing—for example, by adding a further £40 million to discretionary housing payments, bringing the total to £180 million, to help the sort of people he talked about in his question.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): In my constituency, I have military families, returning from serving this country abroad, who are unable to regain access to their family homes because of the moratorium on evictions. I have neighbourhoods that are blighted because, despite the best action of local authorities to evict households that are a persistent source of antisocial behaviour, the moratorium means that those individuals are there, thumbing their noses at their neighbours and causing misery for many. May I encourage and invite the Minister to stick to his guns and ensure that we can still take robust action against those who abuse their position?

Christopher Pincher: I quite agree with my hon. Friend. Those who abuse their position make everyone's lives intolerable. Baroness Newlove, the Victims' Commissioner, has said that antisocial behaviour is an issue for local

authorities, the responsible agencies, Government—possibly even Opposition. People are being let down by antisocial behaviour, and antisocially behaving tenants need to be dealt with by the courts. I will stick to my guns—the Government will stick to their guns—and we will do the right thing by landlords and tenants.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): In my constituency of Erith and Thamesmead, 1,500 people have had to sign up for universal credit, and 12,000 have been furloughed, with the risk of job losses. I am extremely concerned about my constituents. One of them has written to me to say that they have no idea what to do when the ban on evictions is lifted, as their landlord has raised their rent to more than their universal credit payment during the crisis. What can the Minister say to the thousands of people facing job losses in my constituency in response to their concerns about being evicted?

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to the hon. Lady for her question. New and existing universal credit claimants who have been in work can claim a nine-month grace period from the cap on universal credit that they received. They can apply for discretionary housing payments, and we have made more money available for that particular situation. I would say to her, as I said to the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), that the best way to help her constituents is to get our economy back on track and her constituents back to work. We have created more jobs in the past 10 years than ever before. We have closed the gap between rich and poor. The actions that we have taken will support her constituents, and we will continue to do so as we leave the crisis.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) [V]: I welcome the measures that the Government have introduced to protect renters in Harlow during the pandemic. However, tenants living in permitted-development-rights office-block conversions in my constituency have had a rent rise from £612 a month—a little below the old housing allowance rate—to £718 this financial year, which is a little below the new local housing allowance rate and, after universal credit, that rent increase means that they are £13 a month over the benefit cap, which is recouped. While taxpayers pay more and private landlords earn more, tenants in those blocks end up £13 worse off. What steps will the Government take to ensure that landlords do not move the goalposts and that tenants get the benefit of local housing allowance rate increases?

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to my right hon. Friend for his question. He has brought the issue of office conversions to my attention before, and is a doughty campaigner on behalf of his constituents. As I said to the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare), new and existing universal credit claimants who had been in work can apply for the nine-month grace period on their welfare benefits being capped. There are exemptions for the most vulnerable, including the disabled, and they can apply to their local authority for discretionary housing payments, so there are tools available to help my right hon. Friend's constituents. The biggest tool of all, of course, is the tool of work, and that is what we will work exceptionally hard to provide to everybody who either has no job or fears losing theirs.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): We might or might not be out of the worst of this health crisis, but when it comes to unemployment and lost incomes, sadly there is very likely worse to come. Will the Minister at least admit that without changes in the law—for example, disapplying ground 8 of section 8 of the Housing Act 1988—landlords only need to follow procedures and renters who have lost income due to coronavirus will be forced out of their homes, quite possibly in their thousands? Why will he not give judges discretion to look at the facts of individual cases?

Christopher Pincher: I have had discussions with many stakeholders, including representatives of landlords, including the National Residential Landlords Association, which tells me that, according to its research, 90% of renters say that they have been able to meet their rent liabilities. Of the 10% remaining, who either have difficulty or fear difficulty, 75% have said that they have had a good response from their landlord in negotiating flexible repayments or other payment holidays. I think that the landlord community understands the challenge that the economy faces and that tenants face, and is working proactively to support them. We will continue to work proactively to support tenants through the measures that I have described.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): As the shadow Minister pointed out earlier, back in March, the Secretary of State said that no one would lose their home as a result of losing income due to covid. It is quite clear from what the Minister has said today that he cannot guarantee that, can he?

Christopher Pincher: We have protected those tenants from eviction through the actions that we have already taken—actions that I believe have been supported across the House. We are now moving into a new stage of this crisis, where we are trying to normalise our economy and society. Of course I cannot guarantee that every tenancy will be retained, but we have taken steps to ensure that tenants are supported. We will continue to take those steps.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: [*Inaudible.*] Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, can you hear me?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We can hear you now.

Bob Blackman: Ah, you can.

I thank the Minister for his answers thus far, but he will be aware of the dramatic increase in the number of people who have fallen into rent arrears during lockdown. The reality is that judges have no discretion whatever if a case is brought and a tenant is more than eight weeks in rent arrears; they have to order an eviction. Will my right hon. Friend, who is going to bring forward legislation in a major way in the autumn anyway, look at emergency legislation now to prevent unnecessary evictions and suffering on the part of people who are currently in desperate need because of their temporary rent arrears? The estimate is that this problem could affect up to half a million people by the time we come to the end of the moratorium on evictions.

Christopher Pincher: My hon. Friend is rarely silenced for long. I hear what he says and he has heard what I have said. We will bring forward the renters' reform Bill, which will be the biggest rent change and tenancy change in a generation, when it is appropriate. In the meantime, we will continue to support tenants and landlords through the measures that I have already outlined.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): We know that 9% of private renters have made a claim for universal credit during the crisis and, of course, we are expecting a massive spike in future universal credit claims in the months to come. Given that the local housing allowance barely covers local rents, particularly in Warwick and Leamington, where house prices and rents are so expensive, surely the Government should adhere to and honour their promise to renters back in March to protect them for the months to come.

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for his question. As I have already said, his constituents will be able to take advantage of a discretionary housing payment application to their local authority if they have need. We have given half a billion pounds to local authorities to apply council tax relief to their residents where it is appropriate. Of course, we will also continue to work hard. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made his Budget statement and a statement just a few weeks ago, and I am sure that he will make further financial announcements in due course that will be designed to stimulate the economy as we exit this crisis and to support all our people, including the hon. Gentleman's constituents, to get back to work.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The biggest cause of homelessness is the breakdown of a private sector tenancy. I am not talking about rough sleeping but the tens of thousands of households that are invisibly homeless, including the 120,000 children every year who live in temporary accommodation, and that was long before the covid crisis.

Will the Government commit to an infrastructure project, like road building, to build at least 100,000 new social homes for rent—that is social homes, not affordable homes—to address the homelessness crisis once and for all? We will not get rid of homelessness unless we have a public sector infrastructure project to build social homes for rent.

Christopher Pincher: The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his Budget statement and subsequently, has announced a raft of infrastructure measures that will stimulate our economy. He also, of course, announced the biggest injection of cash into affordable homes in 15 years, since the 2006 to 2011 period, through the affordable homes programme. We have also taken measures to allow local authorities to act more quickly and effectively to build social homes if they wish. From memory, I think that we have built something like 150,000 homes for social rent in the last few years, and of course more will be built. We have a plan to invest in our infrastructure that will support the hon. Lady's constituents and mine.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): The support that the Government have given to small councils, such as mine in north Devon, and fabulous homelessness charities, such as the Freedom Centre in Barnstaple, to

help people off the streets has been welcome. With the moratorium on evictions ending, however, can the Minister assure me that all that good work and support will be backed up by long-term plans to secure affordable and sustainable housing for my most vulnerable constituents?

Christopher Pincher: I commend my hon. Friend's constituents, and the Freedom Centre in particular, for all the work they have been doing for her constituents, their neighbours, during the emergency. I absolutely commit to her that, as I just said to the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), we will bring forward the biggest investment in affordable housing in the last 10 to 15 years between 2021 and 2026. That builds on the £9 billion that we have invested in the existing affordable homes programme, which has helped to build 241,000 homes in the last year. That is a signal achievement; we intend to go further.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: Lifting the evictions ban from 24 August is expected to put more than 200,000 people at risk of eviction, and changes introduced by the Lord Chancellor on Friday will have no teeth unless the court is given discretion in ground 8, section 8 cases. Does the Minister recognise that making a small change to introduce discretion could save many people, who have lost income due to covid, from losing their homes? Or, as my hon. Friend the shadow Minister has suggested, will he extend the ban and sort out the legal changes in September?

Christopher Pincher: I respectfully disagree with the hon. Lady. The evidence I have suggests that 90% of tenants—90% of renters—have managed to beat their rental liabilities, and the overwhelming majority of those who have not feel that their landlords have responded positively to ensure that they have more flexible repayment options. I do not see this tsunami that the hon. Lady seems to suggest. I am sure she will not mind me saying so, but when I spoke to Baroness Kennedy yesterday, she also said that she did not believe that a tsunami of evictions was at all likely. We need to be very careful with the language we use, and to not spread fear among potentially vulnerable people—tenants as well as landlords—where fear should not exist.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): I thank the Minister for all his Department has done to help the 8.6 million private renters during covid-19, including those in my constituency. What is the Department going to do in the future to help young professionals and working families get on the housing ladder, because owning your own home is a policy that our party believes in?

Christopher Pincher: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend's sentiments. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce our new First Homes policy very soon, which will provide discounts of at least 30% on the cost of buying a new home. That will help a new generation of first-time buyers to buy their own home. I am in constant contact with the lending community, to make sure that it is offering decent lending products—decent mortgages—that are affordable to the broad mass of people. I shall continue those efforts, to ensure that people who want to buy and own their own home can do so.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Where landlords and tenants can reach an agreement between them, that is clearly to be welcomed, but the point is that many cannot. Can the Minister confirm whether there is a duty on landlords to inquire as to whether tenants have a problem with their rent because of covid? If there is no duty, does that not mean, as has been pointed out on a number of occasions, that the landlord can, under section 21 or ground 8, seek possession of a property and that the courts have to go along with that and have no discretion whatsoever?

Christopher Pincher: I can confirm that landlords do have, or will have, a duty to assess the effect of covid-19 on their constituents, including the financial impact and their vulnerability, should they wish to bring an application before the court to seek possession of their property. If they do not do that, or if the information they provide is not appropriate, the courts will be well within their rights to adjourn the case, which will cost the landlord time and money, and certainly focus the landlord's mind. I am content with the thought that courts have always done what they can, and that they will continue to do so, to mediate in the execution of justice. They will also do what they can to help both parties in the case, including tenants. Landlords will have a duty as a result of the Lord Chancellor's statutory instrument, which he laid last Friday.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): I commend the Government for the support they have given to renters during a difficult pandemic, particularly protecting them from the minority of landlords who can be unreasonable at times. Of course, the future wellbeing of renters will depend on a vibrant rental market, so what plans does the Minister have to ensure that the rental market is vibrant?

Christopher Pincher: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: a vibrant rental market is important to our economy and to renters. We must not act in any way, either individually or cumulatively, to drive landlords out of the marketplace. That can only mean that there will be fewer properties available to rent, which is no good for tenants, and it may also mean, of course, that the properties vacated by good landlords are taken up by less scrupulous landlords, who will not give the same good experience to their tenants. We will bring forward the renters' reform Bill in due course, which will ensure that there is a proper balance of rights and responsibilities between landlords and tenants. The best thing we can do for landlords at the moment, however, is to make sure that renters pay their rent, because that will keep landlords in business.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Thank you. In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business—that is a cue for people to leave—and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I suspend the House for three minutes.

2.5 pm

Sitting suspended.

Counter-Daesh Update

2.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to give a counter-Daesh update.

I should like to begin my statement by paying tribute to the commitment and professionalism of our armed forces. They operate in a world of constant conflict in which the dangers posed by the likes of Daesh and rogue states are ever-present, but we sleep more soundly in our beds thanks to their tireless dedication and sacrifice.

Since the House was last updated on the campaign against Daesh in July 2019, RAF aircraft have continued to patrol the skies on an almost daily basis, conducting attacks on some 16 occasions, striking 40 terrorist targets. Those targets range from caves occupied by Daesh terrorists in remote areas of northern Iraq to weapons caches, bunkers and training camps, and included the destruction of two Daesh strongpoints engaged in close combat with Iraqi security forces.

With that in mind, I would like to salute the service of Lance Corporal Brodie Gillon, who was tragically killed in a rocket strike on Camp Taji on March 11 this year. Lance Corporal Gillon's entire career was dedicated to helping and saving lives. A sports physiotherapist in her civilian life, she joined the Reserves in 2015 and volunteered to be part of the Irish Guards battle group as a class one combat medical technician. At just 26 years of age, she was fulfilling a lifelong ambition to serve her country, and her commanding officer believes she was destined for great things. Lance Corporal Gillon remains a shining example of what our armed forces and Reserves stand for. Our thoughts are with her family, and I am sure the whole House will join me in remembering her exceptional life and condemning the cowardly attack that cut it short.

When the former Secretary of State for International Development last spoke to the House on this subject, he was able to report that Daesh had lost control of the territory they once held. Thanks to the continued pressure of the 82-member coalition and partner forces in Iraq and Syria, that remains the case, but the hard fight against Daesh is by no means done. Indeed, yesterday was the third anniversary of the liberation of Mosul from its grip. Its black flag no longer flies over the great cities of Iraq and Syria. Its leader, al-Baghdadi, no longer rallies his followers with calls to war. But the threat from Daesh, I am afraid, remains. Its poisonous ideology endures, and its pernicious influence continues to spread. Conflict, economic collapse and inequality are creating new opportunities that it will continue to exploit to grow and recruit. The prospect of its resurgence should concern us all. As long as it is able to operate over there, it can hit our citizens over here. Daesh retains its intent to carry out and inspire attacks against us and remains the most significant terrorist threat to the United Kingdom and our interests.

That is why our commitment to the Global Coalition against Daesh remains unwavering. The UK will continue to play a leading role in the coalition in the often unseen fight against Daesh's insidious propaganda. Our military support has proven highly effective, and I would like in particular to recognise the work of the Iraqi security forces.

[Mr Ben Wallace]

They have made huge sacrifices in the fight against Daesh and become a capable and robust fighting force. With support and training from the UK and our coalition partners, they are increasingly able to conduct independent operations. Last year more than 50,000 personnel from the Iraqi army, federal police, border guard, Kurdistan security forces and emergency response battalions completed training delivered by coalition troop-contributing countries. In 2020 so far, the ISF have conducted more than 1,200 missions to defeat Daesh.

But, as the ISF themselves acknowledge, they still require our enduring assistance to defeat the threat. That is why the UK will continue to provide training, mentoring and professional military education to the Iraqis through the coalition, NATO Mission Iraq and bilateral initiatives. That is also why we will continue to provide essential air support. The terrorists have nowhere to hide. We have destroyed bunkers and hidden bases. This is a long-running effort. Indeed, since the beginning of this year, I have authorised 10 strikes on Daesh.

As the Daesh threat changes, so the coalition response evolves. The campaign has now entered a new phase, with greater emphasis on helping the Iraqi Government to develop a strong security apparatus. The UK's commitment to Iraq's stability and sovereignty is for the long term. That is why I signed a memorandum of understanding on our future defence relationship with the Iraqi Defence Minister last year—the first such agreement with a western power since the territorial defeat of Daesh. I look forward to building on that work. It is also why the UK seeks to support Iraq to minimise the destabilising effects of economic crisis, which could provide an opportunity for Daesh to re-emerge. Through our funding and leadership alongside the World Bank's Iraq reform, recovery and reconstruction fund, we have managed to help build the Iraqi economy.

But, even as we seek to strengthen Iraq, there are others who seek to destabilise it. As I made clear to the House in the days following the US drone strike against General Soleimani on 2 January, malign activity by Iranian-aligned proxies only furthers the instability in which insurgents thrive. Meanwhile, rogue militia groups continue to conduct reprehensible attacks on diplomatic premises and bases hosting coalition personnel. We urge the Iraqi Government to protect coalition forces and foreign missions and to prosecute those responsible for the attacks. The coalition is in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi Government, to help defend Iraqis and others against the very real shared threat from Daesh. Without their efforts, Daesh will only be emboldened. The US and Iraq are engaged in an ongoing strategic dialogue to shape the coalition's future support to the Iraqis in continuing to degrade Daesh—efforts that the UK sincerely supports. The collective mission to crush Daesh remains paramount.

We should not forget that Daesh respects no borders, and as it moves between Iraq and Syria, so must our response. In Syria, Daesh continues to take advantage of a fractured and unstable country. Like the ISF in Iraq, the Syrian Democratic Forces have made huge sacrifices in the fight against Daesh, and we are deeply grateful to them. The coalition continues to support this fight through aerial missions, seeking out Daesh locations and striking when necessary.

We are also determined that those individuals who have fought for or supported Daesh, whatever their nationality, should pay for their crimes. This should occur under the most appropriate jurisdiction, often in the region where the crimes were committed. At the height of the conflict, over 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters answered Daesh's call and travelled to the region. Around 900 of those came from the United Kingdom. Of these, approximately 20% have been killed; 40% have returned to the United Kingdom, where they have been investigated, and the majority have been assessed now to pose no risk or a low security risk; and some 40% remain in the region, either at large or in facilities managed by the Syrian Democratic Forces or others.

We are working closely with international partners to establish an effective justice mechanism to make sure that all those who fought under Daesh's black flag are brought to justice. As part of this, we continue our strong support for the UN investigation teams, UNITAD and the IIM, building evidence of Daesh crimes in Iraq and Syria.

Syria is one of the world's largest humanitarian catastrophes, and the UK remains at the forefront of the response. The International Development Secretary has committed to at least £300 million of aid to Syria and neighbouring countries for 2020, bringing our aid spend to more than £3 billion since 2012 in the region. We are alleviating the burden of millions of people who have been displaced. We are providing food, water and healthcare. We are supporting the education and mental health of children scarred by Daesh occupation. We are providing grants for businesses to help them to grow and crops to farmers to restore their livelihoods.

In Iraq, 7.7 million Iraqi citizens were liberated from Daesh rule, but the damage inflicted by Daesh remains. Since 2014, the UK has committed £272 million in humanitarian support, providing millions of Iraqis with shelter, medical care and clean water. We have also provided £110 million putting basic utilities in education in place and enabling Iraqis to return to their homes.

We should take immense pride in our role as a leading member of the global coalition against Daesh—a coalition that has managed to degrade and bring this terrorist organisation to the point of weakness. Our challenge is now to hold our course, strengthening the grand and unprecedented coalition, denying Daesh every inch of comfort and every ounce of hope, addressing the poverty and lack of opportunities in communities that has helped Daesh to build its ranks, and finally, giving the Iraqi and Syrian people the security they deserve to rebuild their lives in peace. I commend this statement to the House.

2.17 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for making this statement and for advance sight of it. I hope that this marks the return to Ministers fulfilling the Government's commitment to provide the House with quarterly updates on Daesh. It has been a year and 20 days since the last statement and a lot has happened since, including that the last Secretary of State to make this statement is no longer a Member of this House or, indeed, the Conservative party.

I begin by paying tribute to the dedication of our armed forces and those from the multinational coalition, who continue the fight to counter the deadly threat

of Daesh. I also salute the service of Lance Corporal Brodie Gillon. Her death is the toughest possible reminder that our troops, both full-time and reservists, put their lives on the line to defend us. Today, I want to reaffirm the strength of the commitment of my party for the UN-sanctioned global coalition and the comprehensive international approach against Daesh.

The coalition's success so far is clear. Daesh no longer controls any territory, compared with its height six years ago, when it had sway over 8 million people and a land area the size of our own UK. However, it is also clear that Daesh is stepping up its insurgent attacks and must be at risk of gaining a foothold south of the Euphrates in the area controlled by the Syrian regime, backed by Iranian and Russian allies. The Secretary of State said this afternoon that the RAF has conducted 16 air attacks since July last year. Half of those have been in the past two months alone, so can the Secretary of State confirm how many air strikes have been carried out by the global coalition as a whole in the past two months, and is the number of such attacks rising?

In April, NATO agreed to an enhanced role against Daesh. Will the Secretary of State explain what this role will be, what additional activity will be conducted by NATO and what the UK contribution will be through NATO? In particular, will more NATO mean less US in Iraq and Syria?

A special concern arises from reports that Daesh foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq are relocating to join other jihadist frontlines around the world. Others—the Secretary of State's 40%—are detained in poorly defended prisons and detention centres in the region. With coalition Ministers set to discuss the emerging threat posed by Daesh and ISIS affiliates in west Africa and the Sahel, what role and commitment is the UK willing to consider as part of any coalition action?

Earlier, I talked about the Labour party's support for the comprehensive international approach against Daesh. With 1.6 million people still displaced within Iraq and 6.6 million within Syria, the need for substantial humanitarian and development aid is acute. The Government's Iraq stabilisation and resilience programme was set to end in March 2020. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether it has indeed ended and whether such support will be extended beyond this year, especially in the light of the abolition of the Department for International Development?

More than 3 million of those displaced in the region are refugee children, the blameless victims of conflict. Since the Government voted against the Dubs amendment, what steps have they taken to allow unaccompanied refugee children in Europe to be reunited with their families in the UK?

Finally, the protection of civilians and the upholding of international law through implementation of UN resolutions remain the foundation for the global coalition's actions further to degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh. Our challenge, as the Secretary of State said, is now indeed to see this through, so that the Iraqi people and the Syrian people may rebuild their lives and their country in peace.

Mr Wallace: I will do my best to answer all the questions. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support of the counter-Daesh actions.

The right hon. Gentleman asks whether the number of strikes has increased. I can write to him with the details of the total global coalition strikes, but I can say that United Kingdom strikes have increased in the past few months, although that is mainly a reflection of the functioning Government of Iraq and a better outcome that they are requiring and requesting in support. He might remember that the previous Government were in a state of paralysis and then on a number of occasions not functioning. The increase in strikes is mainly a reflection of what we have seen since then, but I am happy to write to him and clarify more the overall coalition responses.

On NATO and training, NATO has sought to see where it can step in and support specifically in the areas of training, security improvements, nation building and so on. It has not progressed as fast as needed, because of covid and the quietness at the beginning of the year, from both the threat and everything else. Also, many of the traditional partners we work with feel that their training has been completed. Therefore, we are working with NATO and the Iraqis to see where else we can assist. We stand ready to do more, and we are exploring more.

At the same time, in answer to the question whether more NATO means less US, the outcome of the US security dialogue will, I think, be the next stage where we will be able to understand what more we can do. We all recognise that the previous Iraqi Parliament passed a non-binding resolution asking the United States forces to leave. That only becomes binding if the Iraqi Government act on it. The new Iraqi Government have said they continue to require coalition support, and that is why the security dialogue is ongoing at the moment.

The right hon. Gentleman also asks about the dispersal of Daesh into other safe spaces. It is absolutely the case, as he rightly points out, that safe spaces have been identified by Daesh, such as the Chad basin in west Africa, and indeed we see Daesh active in Afghanistan and Somalia. There is definitely a terrorist threat in west Africa—not all Daesh, but certainly an extremist, radical, militant, Salafi-type threat. That is why the French mission in Mali is supported by a squadron of our Chinook helicopters. At the end of this year, 250 British soldiers will deploy as part of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali—MINUSMA—to improve the security situation in that part of the country. For us, it is not only about helping our allies, the French and other European nations there, but about ensuring that the knock-on effect of a destabilised west Africa does not end up on the shores of the Mediterranean and cause another immigration crisis, as we have seen in the past, and that is something we are working towards.

On the repatriation of child refugees, as the right hon. Gentleman will know, we took the path of identifying the most vulnerable in refugee camps—either surrounding Syria or where they were—and bringing them back and repatriating them to this country to give them the support they need. It is my understanding that we have done that for over 20,000 of them. As for his comments about Syrian children in Europe, I will have to get back to him about that. However, the Government have made our position clear that we felt the best way to help in that situation was to take refugees from in-theatre, and other European countries should stand by their obligations towards refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, the

[Mr Wallace]

Foreign Secretary has made it very clear that if children are identified in Syria, for example, who are vulnerable or orphaned and so on, we will explore in every case, on a case-by-case basis, what we can do to help those children as well—whether by bringing them back to this country or making sure they get the help they need.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement to the House. The Kurdish peshmerga and the Iraqi army united with the global coalition to help destroy the brutal Daesh caliphate, but Daesh is now regrouping in territories disputed between the Kurds and the Iraqis. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this underlines the vital importance of our actively helping Baghdad and Irbil resolve their differences in military and political matters?

Mr Wallace: It is vital, for all the people of Iraq and Syria, that we get as much stability as possible. It is incredibly important that we work with the Kurds and the Iraqis to ensure that, where there are differences, they are sorted out or negotiated. Indeed, we should work with both Turkey and Kurdish forces to make sure that they both accommodate each other and that they understand there is often a common need for them to work together, or certainly that it is in their common interest to defeat Daesh and al-Qaeda.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I, too, am grateful to the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. Like him, I would like to put on record our condolences to the family, friends and colleagues in uniform of the late Lance Corporal Brodie Gillon. He is right to say that she was identified as having had a stunning career so far, and it is sad that her best days in that career will no longer be realised.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to ask a few questions, if I may. First, is it the Government's intention, at some point after the recess, to lay before the House an updated threat assessment, following the statement that the Secretary of State came to give in January, after the drone strike by the United States that killed General Qasem Soleimani?

On cyber-recruitment, which has affected my own constituency, and Daesh funding, I appreciate that this setting is not the place for it, but, similarly, can we get a bit more information for the House—I am not sure, but perhaps through the Defence Committee—on exactly what the Government are doing to tackle online recruitment and to strangle off the funding mechanisms that keep them going? The whole House will be concerned to hear what the Secretary of State had to say about attacks on diplomatic personnel and diplomatic infrastructure. Again, at some point, it would be useful to get more information on that.

More broadly, on Syria, which of course continues to break all our hearts when we see the ongoing war there, I have asked the Government previously why they have not taken action to remove British citizenship from the first lady of Syria and members of the Assad family, some of whom are living here in the city of London. I know the Secretary of the State will get up at the Dispatch Box and say he cannot discuss individual cases—that is entirely right—but can he at least tell

us if, within the Government, serious consideration has been given to removing their British citizenship? I appreciate that that is not always simple, because sometimes having that citizenship can give us a judicial angle to pursue them in the courts.

Lastly—this is a more broad question—are we to take it that the integrated review is now fully back up and running, and when can we expect its publication?

Mr Wallace: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am happy to publish, probably in the autumn, a threat assessment—I will probably put it out as a written ministerial statement in the Library—to give him an update. If that is all right, I will do it for Iraq and the region as well, because I think it is in everyone's interests to get a sense of the threat that our allies, and also our troops, face.

On cyber and recruitment, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. This is the age when a terrorist in Syria can reach out to his constituents, radicalise them in their own bedrooms, and target them with everything from glamorous glossies to how to make bombs. We have, unfortunately, seen that unfold on our streets. That is why—this comes from my old days as Security Minister, so it may have changed its name; if so, I shall write to him—we set up RICU, or the research, information and communications unit, in the Home Office. Its job is potentially to spot this type of publication, working alongside the police and the counter-terrorism internet referral unit, and then go directly to the internet service providers and ask them to take down the material. If memory serves me right, it has taken down hundreds of thousands of pieces of material.

Daesh is definitely very, very clever at using that medium. That is why, some two to three years ago, one of the methods of the counter-Daesh military response that we were using in Iraq and Syria was to target the media operations as much as some of the actual fighters, because those media operations are used to radicalise people who have never been to Syria. It is also appalling that Daesh now often targets those who are the most vulnerable in our homes and our societies because they are all it can recruit. We see too many people who are displaying mental health issues as well.

On diplomatic infrastructure, it is no secret that forces linked to Iran are interested in destabilising Iraq and effectively poking the stick as provocation. That is why the Government believe that the best solution is absolutely to de-escalate the situation. We do not work with the Iraqi Government to try to escalate the problem; we work with them to try to bring people to justice. Only recently, the Iraqi Government did indeed follow up work that we had been doing, and the Americans had been doing, on some suspects, and made a considerable number of arrests. It is not straightforward for the Iraqi Government sometimes, but we do not blame them for that—we recognise that this is a difficult area. Certainly, our messaging to the wider regional actors is that destabilisation helps no one. We would definitely condemn any attacks on our diplomatic infrastructure, which is of course the same infrastructure that delivers international and foreign aid.

On the issue of Syria and citizenship, in every case that I ever dealt with in taking away citizenships, I found, first of all, that it is nearly always a last resort. It is done where we cannot find another way of bringing

someone to justice, or where they pose such a threat at a certain threshold. Every case is looked at based on a whole combination of factors, including the intelligence case, the threat and so on. In a sense we are agnostic. It would not just be about people posing a threat from Daesh, but people who pose a threat around a range of characters. Sometimes it is possible to keep them out of the country through an immigration bar—by just saying, “You can’t come here.” It is sometimes necessary to strip someone of their citizenship in order to keep us safe. I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that when I was in the Home Office, it was, in effect, based purely on the threat that appeared before us, whether or not it was from a regime or from a terrorist organisation. The factors in that were balanced.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): I, too, salute the service of Lance Corporal Brodie Gillon. May I also pay tribute to the commitment and professionalism of all our armed forces? Will the Secretary of State confirm that this Government will continue to provide our armed forces with all the support they need, not only when they are overseas but here at home?

Mr Wallace: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance and that prompts me to answer one of the other questions. The integrated review is back up and running. Part of the purpose of that review is to ensure that we have the right ambition funded to the right level with the right equipment. That is the best service that we can offer to our men and women of the armed forces, and that is what we are determined to do through this review.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: As a former physiotherapist myself, may I pass on my condolences to the family of Lance-Corporal Brodie Gillon? Their tragic loss is a loss to us all. Since 2010, the Government have presided over a sharp decline in our regular armed forces. For example, the Regular Army has fallen from 102,000 to just 73,750—a 28% drop in personnel—and the number continues to fall. In light of the fact that NATO has agreed to enhance its role against Daesh, can the Secretary of State say how the UK will continue to play its part with such depleted armed forces?

Mr Wallace: It was going so well until the very last comment. If we stuck all our planning for the armed forces on numbers, we would end up back in the first world war. Modern armed forces need the right equipment and to be doing the right task. It is no good fighting the last war, the war before that, or the war before that. What is important is that we provide the right equipment, that we meet today’s threat—not yesterday’s threat—and that we plan for tomorrow’s threat as well. That is why this Integrated Review has started not with a discussion on the number of troops, or the numbers on the budget, but with threat, the doctrine of our adversaries and then what we need to do that job. On the point about the reduction of the regular armed forces, that was done because we recognised then that reserves, as Lance Corporal Gillon has shown, are incredibly important in today’s world. We need specialists—specialists who do not grow on trees, specialists whom we use depending on the fight or indeed the need that we have to attend to—and reserves are playing a stronger and greater part in our armed forces and are absolutely key in being able to meet the modern hybrid threat that we face every day.

I do not apologise that we have lost some regulars, but have increased our reserves. That is really important because that is why our troops remain among the best in the world.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): As somebody who, while in the Royal Air Force, served on Operation Warden, the no-fly zone over northern Iraq, may I acknowledge the RAF’s operations—40 strikes against terrorist targets—in the past year?

On the Integrated Review, may I just confirm again with the Secretary of State that we will look at having well-equipped armed forces with the right numbers of personnel, because the threats are still out there, and the last thing that we want to do in this dangerous world is to reduce our military capabilities?

Mr Wallace: We have been clear that we are not in the business of reducing the potency and capability of our armed forces. We are in the business of making sure that we are modernising to meet tomorrow’s fight. The worst thing that we can do is modernise—actually not really modernise, but equip ourselves—for what happened 10, 15, or 20 years ago. That is why we are determined to invest more in autonomous areas, in new domains, such as space and cyber, which are really important. The threat against space is, regrettably, real. Our adversaries are weaponising space and we are deeply vulnerable in the west to such actions because we rely so much on space assets.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It feels like distant history now, but the vote in December 2015 on the subject of deploying airstrikes in Syria was one of the most difficult that I faced in my time in the House. I was eventually persuaded to support that, and I think that the situation that the Secretary of State describes today is one that justifies the decision that the House took in 2015, but the assurances that I and others were given by the then Prime Minister were around what would happen in addition to the military solution. It was about the reconstruction phase and the aid effort that would be made. What assessment has the Secretary of State for Defence made of the changes to the Department for International Development now being folded into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office? Will we have an overseas development operation that can meet the obligations that were taken on by the Government in December 2015?

Mr Wallace: I know that the right hon. Gentleman is a thoughtful colleague and, indeed, at the time I think we were in the same Government. We should be proud that we spent £3 billion of aid in reconstruction and investment in that region and in protecting people from the effects of poverty. That is the other half of that reconstruction that he was worried about, and I think that that is incredibly important. On the other part of his question, which related to—[*Interruption.*] It has slipped my mind.

Mr Carmichael DFID.

Mr Wallace: DFID. We often talk about organisations and machinery of Governments—they come around, and come and go—but the key here is the sense of purpose and the mission. The mission has not changed; the mission

[Mr Wallace]

to invest and to help provide security and stability in Iraq and Syria has not changed and will not change. We all have an obligation to that part of the world because of events that happened perhaps 20 years ago or more, and that is not going to change. Whatever badge we put on the front of a door and whatever office someone sits in, that is not the fact; what matters to the people of Iraq and Syria is whether they are getting the aid, support, stability and security they need. I believe we are providing that, and we will continue to do that.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the primary role of British forces in the middle east will remain one of training, rather than of direct action, and that we will not be drawn into further significant land engagements?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend is right always to talk about the fear of mission creep. I believe the best way to ensure that mission creep does not happen is by Secretaries of State and Ministers making sure that they have strong oversight and that they keep a close eye on the mission, making sure that the parameters are set and communicated. His point is right; the best way to avoid a fight is to avoid a conflict. Our armed forces, sub-threshold, have a very real role to play in preventing conflicts from happening by improving security and training, and in some cases improving infrastructure—for example, in Sudan, the Royal Engineers have helped put in those types of important measures—so that a nation is strong and confident and does not need to resort to conflict.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I echo the Secretary of State's tribute to the professionalism and commitment of our armed forces. I also wish to reinforce the point made by the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) about our historical allies in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, who not only feel that threat from Daesh, but feel that there is sometimes a difficult relationship with those in Baghdad. Will the Secretary of State tell us more about what we can do and what he can do to amplify the commitment of this House to our friends in Kurdistan, and about the work we can do to make that region not only safe, but prosperous in the future?

Mr Wallace: I can give the hon. Gentleman the commitment that we are absolutely determined to help those people who share our values and have a key part to play in the reconstruction of that region. He reminds me that we should not forget in this House the evil nature of the Assad regime, which rules Syria, where some of the Kurds are living. That is the regime that gassed its own people and disappeared people in the night. That has not gone away and it is currently focused on a direction towards Idlib, where the humanitarian catastrophe will only grow for as long as Assad and his regime continue.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I thank the Defence Secretary for the update on Daesh, but he will know that the world's fastest growing Islamist insurgency is in the Sahel and west Africa. I welcome the commitment to send UK troops to be part of MINUSMA—the United Nations Multidimensional

Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali—the most dangerous peacekeeping mission in the world. Will he reassure the House that the National Security Council is looking across government at how the UK can address the sources of conflict in the Sahel and west Africa?

Mr Wallace: When my hon. Friend was in the Foreign Office, she did an excellent job crafting the Africa strategy, from which we still work. Just so that Members realise that I have not just announced a new troop deployment, let me say that the MINUSMA troop deployment was announced to the House some years ago. I fear it may have been so far away that people may have forgotten and thought I have suddenly announced a deployment. Africa is going to be key in the next 10, 15, 20 years. It always has been important, but the spread of Islamist terrorism, through al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and Islamists in west Africa, is a real, existing threat that we have to deal with. They undermine fragile democracies and fragile countries, often those that are very poor. We cannot turn our back on Africa on these issues. Where we can, we have to support those countries to see off the threat of Islamists and help them on the path to successful economies. I know that DFID and its strategies are working to do that, and at the MOD we are doing it through training and other such things. That is why we commit to countries such as Kenya and, indeed, now to Mali.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) made a point about foreign and defence policy in west Africa. Is not the crucial part of that whether the Secretary of State wins his own battle with the Treasury in autumn?

Mr Wallace: I am fighting. I spoke to Lord Robertson of Port Ellen about his quite excellent defence review in 1998. We have all been around that block. It is important that we fight for the correct amount of resource. It is also important that we demonstrate, both to the taxpayer and the wider Government, the utility of defence, which is often sub-threshold in the area of training, nation building or intelligence gathering, so at the very least we can make sure we help our allies. In the integrated review, one of the arguments I will be using to the other Departments is that we help to stop conflicts. We are not there to start them, but to stop them, and in the long run that is how to save money.

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's statement that Daesh is now a shadow of its former self thanks to the courage and professionalism of our armed forces. It is clear that Daesh and other terror groups know no borders, so can he reassure me and all my constituents that wherever the security threat comes from we will respond to protect our citizens?

Mr Wallace: The United Kingdom will follow international law and we will do whatever we have to do to keep our nation safe. Of course, it is always our preferred outcome to prevent people being radicalised, which is why I am a great supporter of the Government's Prevent policy, and to work with our allies around the world to ensure we help them to deliver justice. Justice must be seen to be done, as well as be done, against

those threats. That is why, across the world, we will examine every option we can. We will never forget that our job is to keep our citizens safe.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): I am glad of today's statement as well. I revisit a point that has been made, but not answered. Daesh is an evil that we must unite against, but the last statement to the House on these matters was in July 2019. There was a commitment in 2016 for a quarterly update on these matters. I urge the Secretary of State, given the gravity of our ongoing commitment, to make good on that commitment to provide a quarterly update to the House.

Mr Wallace: Yes, of course we should uphold that commitment. I will make sure that, subject to the covid interruption, we return to that. I put it on the Government website every time a strike is authorised or happens, so that people can have an ongoing update about what we are doing in their name.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): I also pay tribute to Lance Corporal Gillon, a very brave soldier. My heart goes out to her family.

The growth of Daesh and its offshoots in Yemen depends on smuggling by sea along the Red sea and, specifically, through the port of Hodeidah. What can the Government do to ensure that the sea routes are closed to Daesh to help to bring peace to Yemen?

Mr Wallace: With our deployments in the Strait of Hormuz we participate in constabulary duties, including patrols and so on, and we work with our allies, such as the United States. Where we find intelligence or something suspicious, we try to help to ensure that that zone is not increased by weapons smuggling. Only recently, for example, the Saudis managed to interdict significant weapons supplies to the Houthi, which would have had only one effect—to make the situation worse. Those supplies were interdicted and stopped.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab) [V]: I join with others in paying tribute to the extraordinary professionalism and dedication of our armed forces. I also pay tribute to Lance Corporal Brodie Gillon. She will be very deeply missed and we will always remember her.

As the Secretary of State said in his statement, the recent increase in its co-ordinated bloody attacks shows that the fight with Daesh is not yet over. For our part, the UK must continue to set an example as a world leader in protecting civilians in conflict. What steps is his Department taking, as part of the integrated review, to update its protection of civilians strategy?

Mr Wallace: When we are engaged in targeting, as the hon. Gentleman will probably know, we are very, very careful to make sure that we adhere not only to international law but all the safeguards we can to ensure innocent people are not killed or put in harm's way. At the same time, after a strike is concluded there is a wash-up, a debrief and a check back, through different methods, of what exactly happened to make sure if there are any lessons to be learned. I take incredibly seriously anything that would lead to civilians being killed. We do not help the people of Iraq by poor use of our weapons. It is appalling, and if we want to deal with Daesh we have to

show we are on the side of the community, not frighten the community or indeed make mistakes that cost lives among those very people we are there to help. That is the most important thing for me. I take a very, very detailed look at it. I made sure, right from the start of being in this job, that I reviewed all the rules that we had signed up to and followed, and indeed what tolerances there were, because that is a very important obligation to any elected Member.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I hope we can go just a little faster. I appreciate these are important matters—I am not trying to hurry them—but if we go a little faster, we can have proceedings concluded by 3 o'clock.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): I welcome the Defence Secretary's statement and particularly the progress that has been made on degrading Daesh. Can my right hon. Friend update the House on what steps the international coalition is taking to ensure that foreign terrorist fighters do not simply move their fighting elsewhere to locations beyond Syria and Iraq?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend asks a really important question. There are two areas: first, working with international partners through the UN and this investigation team to see what cases can be generated and what justice can be delivered to people either in the region or elsewhere. We are leaning into that and giving the support. In the area of intelligence collection, we collect intelligence, work with our partners and share that intelligence to make sure that we are, I hope, ahead of those people when they are choosing certain routes to where they would like to go. That is incredibly important. We do it successfully, but of course I cannot comment on the individual intelligence that we do.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): May I welcome the financial support that the Secretary of State mentioned in his statement in relation to Syria and the Syrian Democratic Forces, which, as he has acknowledged, are at the forefront of defeating Daesh? He will also be aware that the Syrian Democratic Forces are looking after thousands of fighters and their families while being attacked by Turkish forces and associated militias. Does he believe that these actions are counterproductive and should be condemned? Will he say what representations have been made to the Government in Turkey to put an end to these actions, which are putting the security of the region at great risk?

Mr Wallace: I regularly speak with my Turkish counterpart and make my views known to him about what I think is the most appropriate response in that region. I understand, on the one hand, Turkey's desire to make sure that its border security is intact. The Turks are the ones on the border of that awful war; they have lost thousands of people to the PKK, which is a proscribed terrorist organisation in this country. Therefore, from the Turkish point of view, they are deeply concerned about some of the Turkish terrorist groups. In that area, we in the United Kingdom definitely support Turkey in countering the terrorist threat, but on the non-terrorist threat, or the other threat, we make it quite clear that,

[Mr Wallace]

in Syria, the Kurds are a key part of bringing stability to that country. It is stability in that country that will prevent further refugee flows and the unstable borders, and it is in everybody's interest to work together, once they have got rid of Daesh and al-Qaeda, to make sure that that stability is returned.

I should also point out that there are over 3.5 million refugees from Syria in Turkey. I went to visit a refugee camp on the Turkish-Syrian border before the covid lockdown, and I heard from the head of the UN, who said very clearly that the Turks had done an outstanding job looking after their refugees. We should recognise that this is not straightforward, but the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) is absolutely right that some of those Kurds are our allies and have helped us. We need to make sure we help them.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement to the House. Can he provide an update, please, on the number of people who are joining Daesh as foreign fighters and what he might be doing to reduce the number of British citizens, or indeed prevent them from, joining such an evil force?

Mr Wallace: Fortunately, the flow of foreign fighters into Syria has almost dried up, but it is the case that in the United Kingdom and elsewhere we see people still aspiring to travel. When we see them, either we use the Prevent scheme to try to divert them from that course or, if we have to, we disrupt them through other methods. The message has to be that there is no glory in going to Syria; it makes things worse. We all need to work together to prevent extreme radicalisation.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): A recent King's College report found that inaction from western Governments in dealing with their own citizens who affiliated to Daesh and who are detainees in Syria and Iraq is providing an ideal breeding ground for a revival of the terrorist caliphate. With reports of escapes from inadequately guarded detention facilities, the authors warned that this is posing a significant, long-term and strategic risk to the United Kingdom. What is the Secretary of State going to do to address this?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Lady is right to identify the concerns that we all have, but it is not as straightforward as she might think. If I were to go to Syria and take people against their will, I would be guilty of rendition. Funnily enough, the people who can be put on trial and convicted are the ones who do not want to come back. We have all suffered in this House—I am afraid I have spent money paying for the rendition that went on when her Government were in office. Millions of pounds of taxpayers' money have been paid because of the illegal rendition of citizens. That is something we have to be careful—

Mrs Lewell-Buck *indicated dissent.*

Mr Wallace: The hon. Lady cannot shake her head. She is part of the Labour party, and the Labour Government cost the taxpayer tens of millions of pounds paying compensation—predominately to terrorists—for people being rendered. It is not as straightforward as

she thinks. That is why we are working with the UN and why we want it to be evidence based, and that is why I introduced, in the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019, the designated-area offence to make it easier to bring these people to justice in future.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his statement. I particularly welcome the contribution that British forces have made and pay particular tribute to service personnel from my constituency, Warrington South. As my right hon. Friend will know, British forces made the second largest overall contribution to the fight against Daesh, after the US: we led a 1,000-strong force. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the UK will remain at the forefront of the response to Daesh and, of course, the rebuilding efforts that really need to follow?

Mr Wallace: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. The assurance that I can give is that we tailor the size of our forces to the threat and the need. Currently, we have only 150 personnel in the country. We have 1,000 across the region who are engaged in providing air support and other support, but that is how far we have come down and still managed to make sure that we can support the Iraqis in dealing a blow to Daesh when they require it.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Of course, any rebuilding effort now faces the double whammy of the coronavirus pandemic, which the Disasters Emergency Committee says is at risk of spreading like wildfire in refugee camps in Syria and elsewhere. The Secretary of State spoke of the aid money that is going in, but will he say specifically what the UK Government are doing to tackle the pandemic among people displaced by the activities of Daesh? As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) asked, what impact will scrapping DFID have on the Government's specialist expertise in responding to this situation?

Mr Wallace: On the hon. Gentleman's last question, no one is scrapping the expertise in DFID—they are just merging the two Departments—so I think that expertise will remain. The aid is currently delivered directly into the camps through the UN and other agencies and they do, of course, have a covid response plan. I can write to the hon. Gentleman with the details of that response. We should pay tribute to the aid workers who are still delivering aid and support in both Iraq and Syria, often in a very hostile environment.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. Those who have assisted Daesh should feel the full force of the law. Does the Secretary of State agree that our duty to protect our troops, our citizens and other innocent civilians precedes all other considerations?

Mr Wallace: Yes, it does. It is in the departmental name: Defence. We have to do it and keep ourselves safe, but never forget that our allies are part of that process.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab) [V]: The Secretary of State has referred to UK citizens who have returned having fought alongside Daesh. Does he feel that there needs to be a change in the law to

ensure that those who have offered moral support—I am thinking of women who have travelled to become wives of Daesh fighters—are dealt with in our justice system?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Lady makes a really good suggestion. I am no longer the security Minister, but I think that it is something we should definitely look at. We changed the law to make it much easier to convict people if they go to a designated area, to make sure that if they are there and do not have a reasonable excuse such as working for a UN aid agency and so on, they could be convicted. That is one of the measures that we have taken, but I like the hon. Lady's suggestion, and it is certainly something we should look at.

Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. Syria is one of the world's largest catastrophes. Millions of Iraqis were held at the hands of Daesh, and we have worked hard to clear up the mess that it left behind. The job is not over. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will continue to help to rebuild and assist in tackling the poverty that has been left in Daesh's wake?

Mr Wallace: As long as the Iraqi Government wish us to be there, to support them and help them in their defence against Daesh, we will be there.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, reminding us that Daesh has not gone away, with the insurgency continuing. In March, Daesh temporarily suspended its operations in Europe due to covid-19, warning its followers to

“stay away from the land of the epidemic.”

Like everyone else, it has continued to operate online, so what more can the Government do to eliminate that online presence and tackle the radicalisation or recruitment of terrorists among UK citizens?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government published an online harms White Paper about a year ago. It is really important that we encourage or make internet service providers and internet companies take a slice of responsibility. They cannot be agnostic on some of the poison that is spread on the internet, whether by cyber-bullying, sexual exploitation or, indeed, radicalisation. That is where we all need to go next.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I do not think it necessary to suspend the sitting. As long as hon. Members leave in a careful, spread-out fashion, that would suffice. I thank them for leaving so gracefully.

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

BILL PRESENTED

CORONAVIRUS INQUIRY BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Edward Davey presented a Bill to require the Prime Minister to establish a public inquiry into the Government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September, and to be printed (Bill 168).

Welfare (Terminal Illness)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

3.2 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about terminally ill people in the welfare system. The aim of this Bill is to encourage the Government to address the failures of the special rules for terminal illness, which do not fast-track some terminally ill people for benefits, and to make it easier for terminally ill people to access the benefits that they need. In particular, it addresses the need for urgent action to reform two aspects of the special-rules guidelines that are a source of distress and difficulty for people living with terminal illness. They are the six-month rule which, under section 82 of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, obligates someone to provide medical proof that they have six months or less to live so that they can access benefits quickly and at a higher rate; and the three-year award—a Department for Work and Pensions guideline forces terminally ill people to reapply for benefits if they live longer than three years after the benefit is awarded. As I hope to outline clearly, those two deeply unfair rules are the source of much distress and anguish for individuals and families dealing with the shattering consequences of terminal illnesses such as motor neurone disease, terminal cancers, advanced lung and heart conditions and a range of neurological conditions, which are equally affected.

I want to begin by paying tribute to all the campaigners and charities who have campaigned so tirelessly for a change in legislation, particularly the Motor Neurone Disease Association and Marie Curie, which collaborated with the all-party parliamentary group for terminal illness on its report “Six months to live?”, published last year. I am really grateful that the APPG's chair, the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), is co-sponsoring my Bill. I would like to thank some of the other charities that have campaigned on this, including the British Lung Foundation, Sue Ryder, Macmillan and St David's Hospice in Newport.

I also want to pay tribute to my friend Madeleine Moon, the former Member for Bridgend, who did so much good work on this issue during her time as chair of the all-party group on motor neurone disease. Madeleine cared for her late husband, Steve, who died from motor neurone disease in 2015, and dealt at first hand with the mental and emotional toil that comes with supporting a loved one with terminal illness. The Bill she brought to the House on this issue in 2018 is the inspiration for this Bill being brought forward today, and I have no doubt that the pressure that Madeleine and other campaigners exerted urged the Government to announce a review in July 2019.

We are now over a year on from the review being launched, and there is still no official news from the Government. However, having spoken to the Secretary of State yesterday, I know that an update is near. I appreciate that there have been some unforeseen disruptions, and the review was paused during the covid-19 pandemic, but in the time that has passed since the review was announced, more than 2,000 people will have died from motor neurone disease alone. Tragically, many of those individuals could have spent the last months of their life struggling to access the benefits that they desperately need.

The special rules for terminal illness claims process is intended to enable people who are terminally ill to access benefits rapidly without going through the standard

[Jessica Morden]

application process. A claim under the special rules requires a person's doctor, consultant or specialist nurse to submit a DS1500 form stating that the person is likely to die within six months. That forces people who have unpredictable terminal illnesses or those expected to live longer than six months to apply via the standard claims process, which involves filling in long forms, attending assessments, delays in payment, lower rates and even meeting work coaches, all while waiting months for payments. Clearly, that is highly inappropriate for people who have been given the devastating news that their condition is terminal.

Statistics available for the personal independence payment, which is just one of the benefits impacted by the legislation, illustrate the human cost of the flaw in the system. Between 2013 and 2018, 74,000 PIP claimants died within six months of making their claim. However, around 10% of those people—nearly 8,000—saw their claims disallowed by the Department for Work and Pensions, including more than 1,000 who claimed under the special rules and 3,680 who died within three months of their application being disallowed. Last year alone, 1,820 PIP claimants died within six months of registering a claim that was disallowed at the initial decision.

As things stand, only 50% of the people diagnosed with motor neurone disease claim personal independence payment under special rules because of the six-month rule. It is unfair to ask some people with terminal illnesses to apply through the normal rules because they might have a slightly longer life expectancy than others, or because it is not possible to accurately predict that they are in the last six months of life. That is especially true for inherently unpredictable conditions such as motor neurone, where the rate of disease progression varies from case to case and doctors cannot give a precise prognosis of life expectancy. That is true for other conditions. For example, people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease can experience sudden and potentially fatal worsening of their condition, which is often brought on by infections. Research from Marie Curie showed that the accuracy of prognostic estimates for terminally ill patients in the UK varies significantly, from 23% to 78%. This failing system must be changed to allow for a sensible degree of flexibility, and that means bringing an end to the six-month rule.

It is not just campaigners who are calling for an end to the rule. Earlier this month, the High Court in Northern Ireland ruled that the six-month limit was discriminatory and “manifestly without reasonable” justification. As the MND Association, Sue Ryder and other charities have repeatedly emphasised, clinical guidance should be the starting point for benefit eligibility criteria for people with a terminal illness. They ask that a medical practitioner or clinical nurse make a clinical judgment that the person has a progressive disease that can reasonably be expected to cause death.

The unpredictability of terminal illnesses is the important reason why the separate but related three-year award needs to go. It is a clear anomaly that terminally ill benefit claimants whose condition has no prospect of improvement are eligible for shorter awards through the special rules than those who claim through the standard process. For example, ESA support group claimants with progressive conditions are entitled to the severe

conditions exemption, giving them a lifetime award, while higher-rate PIP claimants can qualify for an ongoing award with a light-touch review at the end of the 10-year point. However, claimants using the special rules process are not able or eligible to receive either of those longer awards and receive a maximum three-year award. Emma Saysell of St David's hospice in Newport rightly highlights that many people who have reached this point are nothing like they were when the benefit was first awarded and will never be any better than they are at that point. It is a cruel, absurd and disturbing injustice that people who are extremely ill, including some who are paralysed, ventilated or unable to speak, are receiving letters telling them benefits will stop unless they make a new claim.

Last month, at Work and Pensions questions the Minister said that both he and the Secretary of State would make changes to the status quo shortly. I obviously welcome that indication, and I hope “shortly” means very soon indeed—

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson) *indicated assent.*

Jessica Morden: And I think it probably does mean that from the Minister's indication.

In his comments, the Minister also cited three areas for potential changes: the six-month rule, improving consistency in the system and raising awareness to ensure that people know what is available to them through the special rules. I agree with Macmillan that any reform of the special rules should be accompanied by a renewed programme of engagement with clinicians to ensure they are properly supported to implement them. I also hope we can address the issue of non-medically trained assessors challenging doctors.

The Bill is not a money Bill, but it does call again on the Government to look at changes that can and should be made. In Scotland, which has some devolved powers in this area, the Scottish Parliament passed the Social Security (Scotland) Act in 2018, thus removing the six-month restriction. The changes in Scotland will provide an indefinite award to claimants under the special rules, rather than a maximum of three years.

In 21st century Britain we cannot tolerate a situation where our most vulnerable citizens and their families are forced to spend their final months together wrestling with the complexities of an obstructive benefits system. In a recent MND meeting in Parliament, a daughter quoted her father as saying:

“It was degrading to feel that I had to beg for financial support from a system I had paid into most of my life. I felt abandoned and reduced to a number.”

The word “terminal” should be enough. It should not be about time, as no one can guarantee how long the terminally ill will live, regardless of their prognosis. The criteria for the terminally ill need to change before more people suffer at the hands of this system.

As Madeleine Moon said so powerfully in a speech in this place back in 2018 when she was an MP:

“The unknown time you have must not be spent worrying about accessing benefits or keeping a roof over your head; it must be spent in love, laughter, and taking the painful journey together with dignity and compassion”.—[*Official Report*, 18 July 2018; Vol. 645, c. 456.]

I ask the Government to look at this matter again: to publish the details of the review and consider making suitable provisions to ensure that our welfare system works for the people it was built to serve in their time of need.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Jessica Morden, Peter Aldous, Drew Hendry, Hywel Williams, Dr James Davies, Tonia Antoniazzi, Chris Evans, Carolyn Harris, Judith Cummins, Matt Western, Nick Smith and Mark Tami present the Bill.

Jessica Morden accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 November, and to be printed (Bill 169).

Summer Adjournment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.—(*James Morris.*)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): From the outset, I have to impose a six-minute time limit on speeches in order that everyone who has indicated that they would like to speak has an equal chance to do so.

3.14 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I have the great privilege of representing Filton, which for more than a century has pioneered and led the world in aerospace. It is where the British Concorde was designed and built. The south-west hosts one of the largest and most significant aerospace clusters in the UK, with the top 14 global aerospace companies having a significant presence in our region. Some 17,500 jobs are due to the work of that sector specifically, which generates £1 billion annually for the greater south-west. That includes the wider supply chain and research work in local universities, such as the University of the West of England in my constituency.

The UK aerospace sector represents more than 110,000 jobs. The whole aviation sector is worth £52 billion a year, which equates to roughly 3.4% of our country's GDP. In my constituency, well over 20,000 jobs are directly dependent on the aerospace and defence sectors, with many more involved in the supply chain. In 2019, the aerospace sector contributed £32 billion in exports to the UK economy.

My constituency has always been at the forefront of research and development and innovation in the aerospace sector, so it is good to see the measures that have been put in place to protect and enhance the industry. It relies on highly skilled personnel in research and development, manufacturing and production, as well as a supply chain of small and medium-sized enterprises. It represents a skills base and a body of knowledge that our country cannot afford to lose.

Companies that I have spoken to recognise and appreciate the level of commitment and help that the Government have shown, including the furlough scheme, support from the Bank of England's corporate finance facility, funding for the Aerospace Technology Institute, which supports R&D, and support from UK Export Finance. The sum of that approaches about £9 billion.

If the Prime Minister wants to make the UK a science superpower, however, which I wholeheartedly support, I ask the Chancellor to consider increasing the proportion of Government R&D funding from the present level of 50:50 match funding to equal that of our European competitors, some of whom are ignoring EU state aid rules and supporting their industry's R&D to a ratio of 80:20. I echo the words of Matt Allen, the regional officer of Unite, with whom I have spoken often in the last few weeks, and say that if the Government invest in R&D here, the industry is much more likely to end up producing the products that are designed here, which will obviously help the economy and help to protect the industry.

The industry is grateful for the furlough scheme, but as the scheme winds down, we should consider a strategic sector-by-sector version for specific industries such as aerospace. I am reassured and encouraged after many

[Jack Lopresti]

meetings with the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), the latest of which was yesterday evening, that nothing is off the table when it comes to considering support for that vital sector.

Nearly 70 aircraft flown by UK-registered airlines are more than 15 years old and could be replaced by new aircraft that have better environmental standards and use 25% less energy. All new aircraft in service will be certified to fly with up to 50% of sustainable fuel on board and will be much quieter. The Prime Minister announced the ambition for this country to be the first to build an all-electric commercial aircraft, which will encourage the development of jet zero technology, a net zero carbon emissions aircraft, by 2050. The Government should support the scrapping of the 70 aircraft, allowing airlines to design and build newer aircraft to protect jobs and keep skills here.

I add my support to calls for a dedicated, long-term supply chain investment fund to support SMEs in the aerospace supply chain, many of which are world leaders in precision engineering and some of which have only one customer. The investment will give those companies the confidence to invest in the sort of world-beating technology that will power the industry well into the future.

In January 2018, it was reported that nearly a quarter of currently employed engineers will have retired by 2026. That is very troubling, but I remind the Government that one way to ensure that the aerospace sector has new talent for the future lies in the highly prized apprenticeships that the industry offers.

We must also bear in mind the vital strategic value to the country of a sovereign defence manufacturing capability, which gives our country the freedom to design and develop the equipment that our armed forces will need in an increasingly competitive and contested world. Our ability as a nation to be a reliable partner and ally depends on us being able to respond on day one to any threats to our national security or that could threaten our allies and friends around the world. We must continue therefore to invest in the Tempest programme, the next generation of combat aircraft, and provide increased funding for the defence budget.

In conclusion, Filton has been at the forefront of the UK aviation industry for well over a century and continues to underpin both our civil and military aerospace industries. As we look to the future, we must be able to maintain our edge in an increasingly competitive and contested world. The Government must reset the economy, and the aerospace industry will respond with the vigour that typified the spirit that motivated the early aeronautical pioneers.

3.20 pm

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, your office and all the staff who have helped us to keep Parliament open over the last few months. I hope everyone has a welcome break and we return refreshed in September.

I want to start on the issue of the Uyghur. I am incredibly anxious that, as we depart the House and go back to work in our constituencies, the plight of the

Uyghur will not be covered as much as in the last few weeks. Most people in the Chamber will have seen the ambassador's embarrassing interview on the "The Andrew Marr Show" at the weekend. He could not explain or confidently deny the footage he was shown: hundreds and hundreds of men, shaved and blindfolded, being marched on to trains. Who knows where their hair ends up? We know that 13 tonnes of hair have ended up on the market in America. We know that 2 million Uyghur are now enslaved in camps. We know that half a million Uyghur children are no longer with their parents, not because they are not around, but because the Chinese state wishes to institutionalise them and has put their parents into camps.

I have been urging the Foreign Office to work with our American allies to see the evidence they have collected that gives them the confidence to put four particular Chinese officials, who are in charge of the Xinjiang province, within the Magnitsky sanctions. I am asking the Foreign Office to have sight of this evidence and see if it is strong enough to meet our threshold in the UK, so that we can apply those sanctions, too. I also want the Foreign Office to go a bit further. I know the Foreign Secretary is incredibly keen to ensure that the term "genocide" is used appropriately and within the legal remits. We require the UN or international institutions to collect the evidence and apply that legal term. But, unfortunately, China's power and ability to vote within these institutions means that the UN is a busted flush when it comes to China and the Uyghur. I have therefore asked the Foreign Office to see if it is able to work with like-minded countries, such as Australia, America and the Netherlands, to set up our own independent tribunal to capture the evidence and see if there is enough to put in place an interim report on genocide against the Uyghur. I have been writing a number of articles with a senior female rabbi, who fears she has been reminded of a period in her family's history in the 1930s and 1940s. I hope therefore that the issue of the Uyghurs will not disappear as we go back to our constituencies.

I turn now to another international issue that touches us here at home but which unfortunately is out of sight and out of mind. Our shops are stocked, our medicine is here and our factories can work because seafarers make sure freight comes our way, but unfortunately 200,000 seafarers are stuck at sea because a number of countries, particularly India and China, will not designate them as key workers. So they have been working for months and years, unable to get off their ships.

Guy Platten, from the International Chamber of Shipping, has done tremendous work with the International Maritime Organisation to put in place international plans to get seafarers off and home and new seafarers on, but certain countries will not abide by these new international norms, which unfortunately means that seafarers are stuck, which is damaging their mental and physical health. At some point, it will become critical to our supply chains, too. The Department for Transport and the Maritime Minister have done a tremendous job, but I am urging the Foreign Office to use every diplomatic power it has to work with countries such as India and China to put in place crew changes to help our unfortunate seafarers.

I turn to home and my wonderful constituency of Wealden. Covid has been incredibly tricky, but so many people have pulled together, particularly East Sussex

Healthcare NHS Trust, which has worked with my care homes, hospitals and doctors surgeries. East Sussex County Council has done a tremendous amount of work, but I must pay a huge amount of respect to Wealden District Council, which has put in place a fantastic schedule to ensure that the money allocated by central Government is given to businesses in my constituency, giving them a lifeline to go forward.

I have too many businesses and individuals to thank, but two particular schools come to mind, as they stayed open during covid to ensure that the children of key workers and those at risk continued to be schooled. Blackboys Church of England Primary School and Groombridge St Thomas Church of England Primary School have kept me updated with occasional tweets, and I am incredibly grateful to all the teachers, all the volunteers and all the fantastic students who have been able to continue with their schooling.

The final point I want to make is that covid has been incredibly difficult for women, children and men in abusive relationships, and summer may not be any easier for them. In East Sussex, we have put together a one-stop portal to provide support and advice for those suffering from domestic violence. I thank Wealden police, and our police and crime commissioner, who has worked with me to set up ad hoc places across the constituency, particularly in supermarkets, so that those who are feeling vulnerable and under threat of domestic violence can reach out and speak to a professional who can help them get the advice they need. If people are struggling, they need to call the police service, but there are available places in refuges across my constituency of Wealden. Women, young people and men must remember that they are not alone and must reach out over the summer period if they need help.

3.26 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani). I congratulate her on mentioning the Uyghur Muslims; she is right to do so, and it is a shame that we have not had the opportunity to debate that situation properly in the House. I also join her in thanking the officers and staff of the House for keeping us running and keeping us safe over the recent months.

I want to take this last opportunity before the summer recess to raise two issues in relation to the coronavirus crisis, and to implore the Government to take into account the need for additional support for people and industries that are struggling the most. Although some parts of business and society are starting to reopen, and the Government are starting to wind down support, for some sectors the problem is not going away. In fact, it is no less acute now than it was three months ago, and will probably be the same in three months' time.

We all welcomed the Government's support schemes for workers at the start of the crisis; they acted quickly. But there are still 3 million-plus people who, for a variety of reasons, are excluded from the Government's support schemes and need help. Yesterday I attended a meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on ExcludedUK, which is now the biggest all-party group in Parliament. I think it has representation from every party in the House. We heard a lot of powerful testimony from people who have worked hard, paid their dues and done the right thing, but who, for different reasons,

have fallen through the gaps in the schemes. I particularly remember Julie, who has been a taxpayer for 39 years and gave a very moving testimony. She was caught out while moving between jobs and said something particularly poignant: "We've heard about the vouchers for restaurants, but we just want to put food on the table." There are a number of people in that situation.

I have many constituents who work in the music and event industries—people who had skilled jobs and regular self-employed work. Many of them had bookings and contracts for months and years ahead, could never have predicted that their entire industry would collapse so quickly and for so long, and many are now unable to access support. One of my constituents—a self-employed sound engineer—wrote to me yesterday. He is a top man in a business that has completely collapsed: the live music industry. He is having to consider selling his house because his savings will only sustain his family for so long. I know that the Chancellor is refusing to revisit these schemes, but I would strongly ask him to think again. I note the words of the Minister for Media and Data, the right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), during the urgent question yesterday. In reference to self-employed freelancers, particularly those at the BBC, he said,

"we continue to look to see what help can be given to them."—[*Official Report*, 21 July 2020; Vol. 678, c. 2005.]

I am slightly heartened by that. I hope that the Government are looking at what extra help can be given to those people, because there are things that the Government can do. A letter is on its way to the Chancellor from the APPG on ExcludedUK. It has a number of practical suggestions, many of which have already been recommended by the Treasury Committee's interim report, and I urge him to look at them with an open mind. There is practical help that we can give to people who are genuinely struggling in the current situation.

Secondly, I want to mention a sector that does not get mentioned a lot in this place. Like the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti), I want to talk about specific sectoral support, but not for aviation in my case. As far as I know, I am the only former professional DJ in the House—[*Interruption.*] Oh, there are others—I'm Spartacus! I want to mention the night-time industries. Although we can see a way back to some kind of activity for theatres, with socially distanced seating, and for galleries and museums, with safe walking routes, there is no return in sight for some industries. The nightclub industry, which I used to work in, is a social industry. It relies on communal activity and faces a particularly difficult future, until we develop a vaccine. As well as adding value to social and cultural life, it is an economic multiplier and brings life to our city centres.

Of course, I welcome the £1.57 billion that the Government have set out for culture, arts and heritage. I understand that the guidance for how that money can be used is due next week. While that guidance is being finalised, my plea to the Government is that they should not forget that nightclubs are an important part of our culture. Electronic dance music is one of the art forms in which this country is truly world class. Let us not define arts and culture too tightly or traditionally, and remember that our music venues and nightclubs are in particular need of support. There is £120 million earmarked for a completely unnecessary Brexit festival in 2022. That money could be spent supporting music and the arts in the face of the pandemic.

[Jeff Smith]

I need to finish, so I will do so by thanking the people of Manchester, Withington who have kept us going through this pandemic, including those who have kept our schools open, our NHS workers, our shop workers and key workers, and the people who have run the food banks. I congratulate and thank everybody who has kept us going through this crisis.

3.32 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Covid-19 has meant severe challenges for so many, but it has also given us the opportunity to witness extraordinary acts of kindness, generosity and heart, and I believe that that has been exemplified across Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey. Lockdown gave rise to many heroes across our public services and our NHS, but there are many who will never be, or seek to be, acknowledged. They are right across our communities—people who give but do not feel they have given. They are those who always feel that they should do more, all the while never noticing the vastness of their gifts to others, such is their selfless drive and love for their place, their ain folk.

Those in need in my communities have been helped by Glenurquhart Helping Hands, Fort Augusts covid community group, Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey, and Nairn residents help. Covid community response groups have helped people in Nethy, Boat, Grantown, Aviemore and across Badenoch and Strathspey and Loch Ness.

Across the city of Inverness, our people gave time and heart to groups that help people. Shelley Gill of the Acts of Kindness group in Inverness provided emergency care packs for those in need, and has vowed to continue that work. MFR Cash for Kids provided more than 8,000 local children with a hot meal, thanks to generous public donations. Its efforts are boosted by volunteers from Inverness Foodstuff, and Our Place also works to provide hot meals. The RoKzKool initiative provided parcels and support. They are the light in dark times that has helped many to steer a safer path through lockdown.

Businesses have also played their part, with efforts made locally to deliver for those unable to get out. They include the Storehouse, Swansons Food and Williamsons Foodservice, along with Inverness Taxis, Graham's Family Dairy in Nairn, Ashers Bakery, Inverness Auction Centre and many more.

I must also highlight the work of the Highland welfare team, led by Sheila McKandie, providing help and support to those struggling to make ends meet. Along with their colleagues in other departments, they made sure that, through the Scottish Government's funding for free school meals our weans were fed and offered over 4,000 children's food vouchers. From the staff collecting refuse, week in, week out, to the social workers working tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that the most vulnerable children in our communities were safe, staff across Highland Council stepped up and I know that in the highlands we thank them all.

We would have seen people in distress, too, had it not been for Citizens Advice, the Highland Homeless Trust, Women's Aid and Mikeysline. I also want to mention Macmillan CAB, which along with Marie Curie and

MND Scotland supports those diagnosed as terminally ill. They are angels for the affected and their families, but they still have to manage their help alongside the UK Government's DWP six-month rule.

People are still being asked to prove that they will die within six months in order to access full UK-controlled social security, such as universal credit. I thank the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) for introducing her ten-minute rule Bill to support scrapping that six-month rule. Over a year later, with thousands of people having died waiting, the UK Government still delay. My message is, get a move on. End this needless suffering: scrap the six-month rule.

In Highland, we have tried to get back to business. High Life Highland was particularly vulnerable to the effects of covid as it runs the leisure facilities, and yet it stood by its staff and our people, even delivering online tuition. I say to everyone at home who does not have High Life membership but has the means, now is the time to buy one.

We are, of course, open for business now. At Castle Stuart, Nairn, Inverness, Kingussie and across the constituency, our beautiful golf courses are open and, of course, well above par. People can now visit. They can visit for whisky tours, including Dalwhinnie and Tomatin, and they can sample Spey whisky too. Whether it is Jacobite Cruises or Cruise Loch Ness, dolphin tours, Culloden battlefield, Fort George, the Highland Folk Museum, Cawdor Castle, Nairn beach and dunes, the Caledonian canal, the Cairngorm Mountain, the Strathspey steam railway or one of our great places to eat and drink, they will be given a safe highland welcome when visiting.

Yes, people in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey have shown their love for their friends, neighbours and all who live and visit, but they do that while still being ignored by the Westminster Government on paying for universal credit and paying over the odds to have goods delivered. They produce the energy and yet they pay more for it, and they see the UK Government's hostile environment and a Brexit imposed on them that they did not want or vote for. It is no wonder that local support in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey is at an all-time high for us to take control of our own affairs and to become an independent nation.

3.37 pm

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). He gave us a real tour de force of all that is available in his constituency.

I add my voice to those of Members across this House in thanking our magnificent key workers for all they have done throughout this crisis. Having worked with many of them, I know the sacrifices they have made to support our most vulnerable. I also pay tribute to our charity workers, volunteers, councillors and local groups who have stepped up to provide support to other residents, their neighbours, friends and people across the Scunthorpe constituency.

In particular, I pay tribute to my friend and colleague, Councillor Derek Longcake who, sadly, died from coronavirus. My sympathies are with Derek's wife Janet, his family and the families of all those who have lost friends and relatives to this dreadful virus.

I want to mention the manner in which people in my constituency have handled themselves over the past months. Scunthorpe has been a real class act, and I am prouder than ever to represent my home town. In particular, it was a pleasure to meet Jude and Tilly in Central Park last week to look at Connor the covid snake, which is a collection of more than 400 stones painted by local people as a permanent reminder and a tribute to the community spirit shown during coronavirus.

In that spirit, I have a couple of matters to bring to the attention of the Government before we rise for the summer. The first, which will come as no surprise to Members across the House, is the protection of our steel industry. I started my role here when British Steel was on the brink and, frankly, we would not be making steel today were it not for the support that the Government gave to us in Scunthorpe. Many people have told me over recent months that they will never, ever forget that support. Moving forward, I ask the Government to continue to be a friend to steel and to do all they can to promote the use of our UK steel in national projects. It is absolutely right that we must build, build, build, but to do that, we must make, make, make, and I ask the Government to put that at the forefront of their plans.

There is not a Member of the House who could go even one day without steel. It truly is the backbone of our nation and we owe it to people across this land to make sure that our hospitals, schools and railways, such as HS2, are made from the very best steel that our money can buy—that is, UK steel. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is bang on—UK steel should be at the front of the queue, and I believe that the best way to do that is through the adoption of the steel charter.

I would also like to mention Scunthorpe General Hospital. To be frank, it needed a few quid spending on it when I was born there in 1985, and it is certainly now in need of an upgrade. Despite the tremendous support given to combat coronavirus, the infrastructure at the hospital is under huge pressure. Our local health team and I are working on a proposal, which I hope will be submitted in the coming weeks, and I trust that the Government will give it the urgent consideration that it needs. I thank the Secretary of State for Health for his commitment to visit Scunthorpe Hospital, which was very warmly received.

Finally, I would like to register my thanks to the Secretary of State for Transport for working with me to discuss plans to widen and improve safety on the A15. I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister would agree that road safety and infrastructure improvement are a crucial element of the levelling-up agenda. I have seen and been personally involved in the improvements and plans for Scunthorpe and its towns and villages over the last months. We have continued to find ways to progress works, despite the difficulties that we have all faced, from improvements to playgrounds, to measures to mitigate the traffic problems on Berkeley Circle, to working with our local council leaders. I have seen the dedication and commitment of local people as they work to make our area better. Coronavirus may have slowed us down very slightly, and it may have changed the way that we have worked, but I see a real commitment to our area and that commitment is totally undimmed by coronavirus. I look forward to working with the Government to address these matters over the summer.

3.42 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): During this pandemic, much of the focus has been on public health, the safety of workers and our economy, and rightfully so. This virus has heightened concerns about our health and many are wondering how they will put food on the table. However, in amongst the stress and worry, the virus has shown more than ever the need for joy and entertainment, relaxation and fun, socialisation and connections. For me, this means music.

Music is an incredible thing. It creates happiness and inspires hope. It tells of love and community. It gives voice to protest. At times, it inspires us to dance and sing along. Music puts words and sounds to every emotion and every cause. For many—myself included—music has been such a big part of lockdown, and at a time when people's mental wellbeing has been under enormous stress and loneliness is widespread, music has often been a common source of support. For those who live alone, it has filled their homes with sound, brought back memories of happier times and kept them going throughout.

I have had huge enjoyment listening to some of my favourite artists performing online gigs, such as KT Tunstall, James and a special concert of Irish musicians in support of the Irish stuck in Australia on temporary visas during this pandemic. On top of that, Durham music service has been teaching songs and how to play instruments to children across the county. I have even signed up to its online ukulele sessions.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): We look forward to that.

Mary Kelly Foy: When I am back in September—let us see how good I am.

Then there are the artists whose music has impacted on so many people during this crisis. In the north-east, we have Sam Fender, whose song “Dead Boys” has been nominated for an Ivor Novello award because of his ability to reach out to young men contemplating suicide, and my friend Nadine Shah, whose music covers the plight of refugees, sexism and racism. Now more than ever, the world needs singers, songwriters and poets to use the medium of song to open our eyes and ears to the reality of the world.

I welcome the investment the Government have announced for the arts, even if it arrived far later than it should have, and too late for some. Now that outdoor music is returning, it is important that local communities support these events—socially distanced, of course. I am looking forward to supporting artists myself, and I cannot wait to watch KT Tunstall at the drive-in gig in Manchester. There will be plenty of live outdoor music in Durham this summer, and it is important that every Member does their bit to support local artists across the country. Although Johnny Marr tried to forbid David Cameron constantly saying that he was a Smiths fan, I would like to remind the remaining members of the Clash that the Prime Minister is a fan of theirs, apparently.

While most music is about enjoyment and entertainment—a pastime that sustains our lives—for many people, it is also their source of income. Whether music is their

[Mary Kelly Foy]

main salary or a top-up to their existing income, it is vital that, as MPs, we look to support musicians, artists, venues, technicians and roadies in the coming months. Music is nothing without them, for in the time it takes for society gradually to reopen, plenty of people will be wondering whether they can survive as musicians and artists in this environment, and that will be a great loss.

The Government have provided some support to the arts, but it is not enough just to inject some cash and allow limited shows to resume. Too many artists will be left without an income. I am not asking the Government to proceed recklessly, as if coronavirus had never happened; I am asking them to do more for individual artists. Musicians and artists do not need blanket support; they need tailored financial help that enables them to survive this crisis. They need to be assured that a local lockdown will not leave them out of pocket and that the lack of physical gigs will not put an end to their careers altogether. They need to know that they will be supported to be innovative. Above all, they need to know that we, as a society, value their cultural contribution.

Without help, we risk losing a generation of artists, and once they are lost, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to get them back. The time to act is now. In the words of Tim Booth from James to musicians and poets everywhere:

“Let’s inspire, let’s inflame, create dreams from our pain”.

Music has kept us going during this pandemic. Let us work together to make sure it is still there when this is all over.

3.48 pm

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy). Durham is a beautiful city, in which I had the pleasure of spending three happy and I think reasonably productive years as a student. I am just sorry that I did not sample more of the music on offer outside the Rixy nightclub when I was trying to work hard and get a good degree.

When the novelist Jules Verne wrote about the fictional Phileas Fogg’s journey “Around the World in 80 Days” almost 150 years ago, he must have believed it was the beginning of a golden era of ever-expanding travel. Although this adventurous tale was brought to life by Sir Michael Palin 30 years ago, the mass transportation of humans across the globe came to an abrupt end in the early months of 2020, since when it has been more like “Around the Kitchen in 180 Days”.

After a testy and at times tumultuous 2019, 2020 was meant to be so different—more business as usual. But here we are, over halfway through the year, with our plans thwarted, our hopes suspended and many of our dreams left unfulfilled. The drumbeat of familiarity has also been swept away, only just starting to re-find its rhythm. Whether it is travel, retail, hospitality, education or our families, it has all had far-reaching consequences. Yes, no Tokyo Olympics that were due to start this Friday, and no London marathon for me to run this April, but that all pales into insignificance compared with the economic, social, emotional and mental fallout that covid-19 has created, jabbing at the very heart of humanity, with births, deaths and marriages—our life’s compass points—all directly impacted.

It is the last of those—marriages—that I want briefly to address. With about 220,000 couples exchanging vows every year in England and Wales, and most tying the knot in the summer high season, the best-laid wedding plans of thousands of nearly-newlyweds for what should be the best day of their lives have been dealt the cruellest of blows—and this time no one can blame the British weather. With restrictions of 30 people present at wedding venues still in place, most are postponing or even cancelling their bookings, leaving a huge and potentially permanent dent in the wedding industry. This is an industry worth £10 billion to the UK economy, made up of 137,000 small and medium-sized businesses employing half a million people working as caterers and as specialists in planning, lighting, design, flowers, decoration, clothing, photography, entertainment and many other supply chain jobs.

The Government have been working hard to support the hospitality sector, with pubs and restaurants now open, backed by £30 billion-worth of schemes to help trigger economic activity, including the “eat out to help out” scheme, but for family-run businesses like the Cheshire-based Boutique Hotel Group in Eddisbury, the longer that the limitations on numbers at its three venues—Peckforton Castle, Nunsmere Hall and Inglewood Manor—remain in place, the greater the damage for it and for other local businesses that have contacted me, both financially and reputationally. To illustrate, since the start of lockdown through to the end of August, BHG will lose nearly £6 million in revenue thanks to the loss of 250 weddings, already leading to 25 staff redundancies. Should the status quo continue through September and October, which looks likely, another 124 weddings will go, as will a further £2.2 million in revenue—so the situation is getting beyond desperate. The business rates suspension and the furlough scheme, in particular, have been an absolute lifeline, but they cannot help to prop up the industry indefinitely. In any event, as the managing director of BHG, Christopher Naylor, told me: “Every month that our business is closed, even after taking into account the job retention scheme, it still costs £250,000 just to stand still.”

I therefore implore the Government, as a matter of urgency, to look again at the restrictions still in place for wedding venues like Peckforton Castle, which has ample capacity for 600 guests, or 300 covid-secure guests—a far cry from the limit of 30 still imposed—together with setting out a clear road map to reopening. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will send that message loud and clear on my and my constituents’ behalf to the Business Secretary and the Chancellor—both of whom I have also raised this with—and with the necessary vigour. With other venues such as pubs, museums, cinemas, zoos and sports halls now thankfully open, the justification for keeping wedding venues unusable is increasingly hard to maintain.

In the final chapter of “Around the World in 80 Days”, Fogg’s marriage to Aouda is postponed, not because of covid-19 but because it was on a Sunday—how times have changed. The wedding went ahead the next day, and, Verne reminds us, Fogg won something more important than the money from—spoiler alert—winning his bet; he had won

“a charming woman, who...made him the happiest of men!”

So let us hope that this is not the final chapter for our fantastic wedding industry and that it can bring happiness to many more couples now and in the future.

3.53 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I am pleased to be able to speak in this end-of-term debate. On behalf of the constituents of Newport East, I would like to put on record our enormous gratitude to the workers who have been there for us and kept services up and running throughout this unprecedented crisis, including our wonderful NHS staff, emergency service workers, retail staff, council workers, school staff and many more. I also want to take this opportunity to thank all the community groups and organisations that have done so much unsung work on the ground to support people, including the two food banks based in Newport East—Raven House Trust and Caldicot—and the Trussell Trust, Jesus Cares and Feed Newport, which do such a wonderful job. I thank those who do not do it for the thanks.

The Aneurin Bevan University health board region, which covers my constituency, was initially a hotspot for the virus and one of the worst affected areas in the UK when the virus took hold. Since then, there has been a dramatic fall in the number of new cases, and it is fantastic that the virus has been so well contained in Gwent. There is no doubt that this is down to the remarkable work of our brilliant NHS staff—a testament to the value of our health service in the region in which it was conceived and the diligence of the public in adhering to the guidance from the Welsh Government over the past few months. On that note, I would like to thank the First Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, and his Cabinet colleagues for the considered and dignified leadership that has been shown throughout the pandemic. That has made a real difference.

The support provided by the Welsh and UK Governments has been welcome and a lifeline for many. However, it is important to note that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) said, many groups have fallen through the cracks of the support provided by the UK Government. I want to mention some of those businesses and individuals in my constituency.

Support for the self-employed has not been comprehensive, and many hard-working individuals have missed out—people like the 68-year-old self-employed handyman who gets more than 50% of his income from his state pension and was not entitled to any support, or the constituent who became self-employed part-way through the year and was counted as having more than 50% of earnings from employment so was excluded from Government support. Those are just some of the 3 million people excluded from help, and we need the Government to address that.

Then there is a whole cohort of people who were not placed on furlough by their employers, including people advised to shield or self-isolate who received just statutory sick pay, agency workers who were laid off and working students who could not claim universal credit. There are also those who have been unable to apply for bounce back loans despite fitting the eligibility criteria, because banks refused their application for business accounts due to credit ratings.

A number of other businesses have been left in the lurch—in particular, in my constituency, the hospitality supply chain and the exhibition and events industry. We think of all those who have lost their jobs during the pandemic or are now at risk, including constituents of mine at Virgin, Caldicot Tinmasters, the Orb steelworks, which closed on 3 July, EnerSys, Newsquest, British Airways, the Celtic Manor and more. I hope that the Government will look at more ways to support those different groups over the following months. I urge them to look at the report by Chwarae Teg and the Fawcett Society on the devastating impact of coronavirus on women and girls in the UK, highlighted to me by Newport women's institute. The crisis has made existing inequalities worse, as women are the majority of those in poverty and are more likely to be in low-paid, insecure work. There are very good recommendations in the report, which I ask Ministers to look at.

Along with the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft), I co-chair the all-party group on steel and metal-related industries, so I would like to say a few words about the steel industry. The Government must look urgently at what further steps they can take to support our industry in both the short and long term. The steel sector has seen a huge drop-off in orders during the pandemic, and many UK steel companies are still waiting for liquidity support some four months after the Government pledged to do everything they could to support businesses. I am glad that the Prime Minister acknowledged this in Prime Minister's questions, but it is high time that it was backed up with more substantive action.

Given the importance of the sector's supply chains in trading relationships with mainland Europe, urgent clarity is needed on how steel exports will be treated under the EU steel safeguards in 2021, which draws ever nearer. I know that Trade Ministers are working with UK Steel on that, which is welcome. Steel should and can play a vital role in the economic recovery from the pandemic, and I fully support Community, Unite and GMB unions' "Britain, we need our steel" campaign, which calls on employers and the Government to create a plan that uses Britain's steel and invests in our industry and our people. That will require the Government prioritising UK steel in major construction and infrastructure projects such as HS2 and an auto scrappage scheme. We must ensure that we use our steel.

As I have emphasised repeatedly in this place and in meetings with Ministers, the situation at the Orb steelworks, which sadly closed on 3 July, raises a generation-defining question: do we want to be a country that manufactures goods or one that just imports them? We need a comprehensive UK industrial strategy if we are to avoid days like 3 July, supporting a thriving manufacturing base, which will be the foundation of Wales's and the UK's future economic success.

3.59 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to rise to speak in this final debate before the House adjourns for the recess. I am very much looking forward to getting out and about in my constituency in a way that has not been allowed in recent months. I want to visit every corner of Mansfield, getting back in touch with residents, and I know that colleagues here will be doing the same.

[Ben Bradley]

I want to take this opportunity today to raise a few local priorities and talk about the progress that has been made since I arrived in this place in 2017. I know the Minister will be keen to hear about progress in Mansfield because it is at the heart of the Government's levelling-up agenda. I can see the Minister nodding his assent, which I take as a hugely positive sign.

Coronavirus has been a challenge for the whole country, but particularly for communities such as Mansfield, where the levelling-up agenda is so important because, already, we are falling behind the rest of the UK. One of the challenges going forward will be supercharging that agenda to ensure that we catch up and fill that growing gap. I want to put on the record my thanks to the many people who have worked incredibly hard over recent months to get us through this crisis. I could name individual jobs and roles and everybody who has been involved, but, inevitably, I will be accused of missing somebody out, so, to anyone in my constituency who has played a positive role in recent months, I thank you for everything that you have done.

One of the key priorities in the recovery will be the skills and retraining agenda, which is something that is very close to my heart. I have talked a lot about that subject since I have been in this place. It is something that we have focused on since 2017, when I set up an education working group in my constituency, which brought together local partners—Nottingham Trent University, West Notts College and the local authority—to look at how we could have a positive impact on educational attainment in an area of great disadvantage. We have made some incredible progress, not least in the creation of a formal partnership between West Notts College and Nottingham Trent University, which is where I graduated from, so I am really proud to be able to work with it to do something positive in the constituency. Perhaps the most obvious example of the benefit of that partnership is that, for the first time, we will be delivering, through Nottingham Trent University, degree-level nursing qualifications from the college campus in Mansfield from September. That will give a huge opportunity to local young people, so few of whom have been able to access higher education, to be able to do so from home and to be able to get involved in a hugely rewarding and promising sector. The NHS is our biggest employer locally, so it really is a great opportunity for young people.

I was pleased to be appointed a further education ambassador by the Department for Education, enabling me to feed directly into that skills agenda and into that shift from pushing so many young people towards university to highlighting the benefits of further education, skills and apprenticeships, which will be hugely important in the coming months. I look forward to being closely involved in those discussions.

Sticking with the levelling-up theme, I want to raise the issue of the regeneration of town centres. As I have said in this place a number of times, one of the most striking signs—or perhaps the biggest symbol—of the decline of market towns in particular is seeing those empty shops and the tumbleweed across the centres and it really gets my constituents down. We have some big opportunities in the coming months to invest in that regeneration and to take positive steps to improve our town centres. In the past few weeks, we have been pleased to make a submission to the future high streets

fund. Hopefully, we will secure a positive response from the Government—up to 25 million quid—to transform some elements of the town centre, including a shift towards delivering services from the town centre, where retail is hugely challenging. For instance, I would like to bring council services into the town centre to increase the footfall around our shops. I would like us to have a community hub with a health and skills office in the town centre, as well as more residential buildings. That would help to bring in visitors and increase footfall in the town to help support our shops. We have the chance to do that. We will also submit proposals in the autumn for the town deal. We have been very fortunate to secure this funding from the Government. Again, we will have opportunities to recover some of what we have lost and to bridge the gap. I would like to see us replace the Warsop sports centre, which closed last year, and ensure that, in an area with huge health inequalities, we are delivering the services and facilities that constituents in Warsop most desperately need.

Finally, in the last few minutes before I finish, I want to touch on local government reform, which will be hugely important to us and a local priority over the coming months and years. Following the coronavirus pandemic, local government finances are perhaps more challenged than ever and the system of two-tier authorities in Nottinghamshire seems more unsustainable than ever. In many ways, we have seen the best of local government through the crisis, with so many public servants, as they often do, stepping up to serve during times of great difficulty. This is not a judgment on any member of staff, but we now face the choice of having to raise taxes and cut services to make ends meet or rationalising our system of local government to do something more effective and more efficient, by having one instead of eight chief executives, 70 instead of 350 local councillors, and getting rid of some of the duplication in those services and doing things more effectively. I wanted to get on record my wholehearted support for delivering that for Nottinghamshire and for Mansfield in the next year or two.

With that, I draw my remarks to a close, but let me end by thanking the House of Commons staff for all their work in keeping us safe and keeping things going in recent months, and by wishing colleagues in the House a pleasant summer in their constituencies.

4.5 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I have dedicated a lot of time to two issues this year and I happen to chair or co-chair an all-party group on both. First, I co-chair the all-party group on beauty, aesthetics and wellbeing, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), who is a good friend. The hair, beauty and product industry is an economic powerhouse, contributing more than £30 billion to the UK economy and employing more than 370,000 people, predominantly women, with more than 49,000 businesses up and down our high streets. Yet in the past few weeks, in this Chamber, it has been totally disrespected and even mocked by the Prime Minister and his male-led covid recovery plan. We have written to the Chancellor outlining the support that this industry needs if it is to survive post-covid. It has been shut for longer than any other industry and it has not received the same level of financial support as other sectors. As it starts to reopen, it needs VAT reduced to 5%, as has happened for the

hospitality and leisure sectors. These businesses need extended business premises eviction protection and more favourable repayment plans for any loans they have been forced to take out to help them survive this unprecedented period. It has been a privilege of both co-chairs to use our voices to stand up for this female-led industry, and we will continue to do so until the patronising sniggering stops, and the beauty and wellbeing sector receives the recognition and respect it deserves.

The other area I wish to discuss is gambling. As the chair of the all-party group on gambling-related harm, I have focused on this issue for a long time. Our recent report on online gambling harms calls for an urgent review of the Gambling Act 2005, something that was in the Government's election manifesto. Our report was backed by a Lords report, a Public Accounts Committee report and a National Audit Office report, where it has been recognised that there are systematic failings in both this industry and its regulator. Online gambling has grown exponentially, and all too often it is a toxic and dangerous environment. The 15-year-old analogue legislation is not fit for the 2020 digital era. I constantly hear stories of harm, devastation, demoralisation, destitution and, at its very worst, suicide as the consequences of a gambling addiction.

Gambling disorder does not discriminate; its victims will be male, female, young, old and even children. From having gambling firms' logos on football shirts to having no stake limits on online platforms, from 16-year-olds being able to legally deposit hundreds of pounds on the national lottery every week to little children being exposed to loot boxes, and to television and social media advertising, the gambling industry has become the new tobacco industry. There was a time when nobody wanted to believe that smoking was dangerous, and the gambling industry would have us believe that nobody is harmed by gambling, but we know differently. Some 1.4 million people, 55,000 of whom are children, struggle with an addiction to gambling, and we need to take action to protect them from harm. The way to do that is to review the legislation, with a view to rewriting the Gambling Act to take into account how the world and technology have changed since 2005.

Finally, tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of the children's funeral fund in England. Approximately 6,500 babies and children pass away before their 18th birthday, and almost 3,000 families have used the fund since its inception, which means that over 50% of bereaved parents are not making use of it. Some may choose not to, which is entirely understandable, but I am concerned that many parents may not be aware of it. Now, a year on, would be a good time for the Government to re-publicise the Children's Funeral Fund, to raise awareness of its existence and to ensure that my son's legacy—Martin's fund—reaches every grieving parent who needs that support in their darkest hour.

4.10 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who has made a powerful contribution to the debate. Like many colleagues, I should like to put on record my thanks to all the key workers who have done so much for all our constituencies up and down the country in recent weeks—not just those we immediately think of such as health and care workers, but many people who have kept our vital services going.

I should like to follow up a number of points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft). She referred to British Steel at Scunthorpe, and many of my constituents work there and in the supply chain. It is an example of our more beneficial, shall we say, ties with China, given the investment in the Scunthorpe works. It is an important employer in the area, and it would be a devastating loss. She referred to Scunthorpe Hospital, which serves my constituency too, and I gladly support her calls for investment in it, not forgetting the Diana Princess of Wales Hospital in Grimsby, which serves my constituency as well and is in need of further investment.

Like all coastal towns, particularly seaside resorts, Cleethorpes has suffered as a result of the health crisis. I appeal to Government to recognise that there are particular problems for our coastal communities, which need ongoing support, especially in relation to the hospitality sector. My constituency does not just contain Cleethorpes which, as I have said many times, is the premier resort of the east coast. It is a very industrial area, as it contains the largest port complex in the UK at Immingham and Grimsby. I have two oil refineries, power stations and much more. The sector is absolutely vital in providing for the nation as a whole and is at the forefront of the applications for free-port status. I am sure that the Minister will urge his colleagues who will make that decision to support the bid from the Humber ports.

I want to mention, like my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), the town deal. The Greater Grimsby town deal was the first of its kind to be nominated by the Government, some three years ago, which shows how important the partnership between the public and private sectors is if we are to ensure almost the continued existence of our town centres. They are very much under pressure at the moment and will certainly be in need of considerable support from both the public and private sectors. Public money can start the ball rolling and, hopefully, attract some key business investment as the shape of our town centres changes considerably over the coming years.

I wish briefly to mention the BBC. Yesterday, I ventured to quote the view of the director-general, who wrote to the Blue Collar Conservatives group and said that the BBC

"will continue to deliver new programmes that represent and reflect modern Britain and the voices of the whole of the UK." The BBC certainly does not represent the views of the people of Cleethorpes, and that is probably true of many industrial, and now predominantly Conservative, towns across the north of England. If we are to continue to fund the BBC through the licence fee—on balance, I think that will probably carry on in some modified way for the foreseeable future—it needs to take note of people's views.

We all have our regulars who contact us to complain about the BBC and its news coverage and so on—often with justification—but that contact has grown considerably in recent times. Presenters can have a rather superior tone, as was particularly true during the Brexit debate, when we saw them more or less saying, "How could you possibly support leaving the EU?" I remind the BBC that 70% of my constituents did in fact vote to leave. The majority of them would be in the elderly group—they would be predominant in that 70%—and although they value the BBC, they do not value the direction in which it is currently moving.

[*Martin Vickers*]

I urge the new director-general to come along to Cleethorpes; he is very welcome and I would happily arrange a socially distanced forum for him to debate the issues with local people. The message should go out to our national broadcaster that it needs friends, and critical friends, particularly in this place.

4.17 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak today. I have been hugely impressed by the efforts that have been made to ensure that the House has functioned as normally as possible in these unprecedented times. I would have liked to say a little more about that but, as I have a whole smorgasbord of matters to raise before the adjournment, I do not think I will have time to do so, so I just want to put on the record my thanks to the House staff for keeping the show on the road and, indeed, to everyone in the country who has joined in the fight against coronavirus.

As we come out of lockdown, the immediate issue facing countries is how we best protect the parts of the economy that are not going to recover as quickly as other parts. It has been a tough time for businesses, as it has been for everyone. The support that has been there so far has been invaluable, but we cannot afford to stop it now. What is the alternative? Do we allow companies that have traded successfully for many years and been responsible for thousands of well-paid, permanent, high-skilled jobs to go under because of a short-term disruption that has impacted on everyone?

Some of the biggest employers in my constituency, such as Vauxhall and Airbus, fit that description. They should play a huge role in the future prosperity of my area, but currently they have uncertainty. The aerospace sector is strategically vital in the UK economy: it supports thousands of jobs directly and more than 100,000 more in the supply chain. We cannot afford to lose it. We are about to lose 1,400 jobs at Broughton, which will have a devastating effect on the economy of the whole of north Wales and the north-west. We know that once those jobs go, they are not easily replaced.

Thankfully, production at Vauxhall in Ellesmere Port is going to start again next month, but it seems that we are behind other plants in Europe that have already restarted production, often with state assistance. Coupled with the continued absence of a decision on the next model for the plant, that leaves us all fearing for the future. It is not too late: we can act and do something to save these jobs—and with them the entire future of motor manufacturing in the town.

To stimulate the market, we need a consumer support package that is open to all technologies and has additional environmental incentives. It is no exaggeration to say that the previous Labour Government's car scrappage scheme made all the difference to Ellesmere Port and many other parts of the automotive sector. We need a modern equivalent of that, or we risk losing the many great strides that we have made in the automotive sector in the past decade. We also need the job retention scheme to continue, in order to meet the automotive sector's needs, because it will not come out of this crisis as quickly as other sectors. We need support soon, or we risk losing the car industry altogether. The proud history of motor manufacturing in my town could be lost for good.

I want to say a few words now on leasehold reform. As co-chair of the all-party group on leasehold and commonhold reform, it has been my pleasure to work with some great campaigning individuals. I will not name them except for one today: Louie Burns, who sadly passed away last month. He was a rare beast—a lawyer with a conscience. I say that as someone who considered himself such a person before entering this place. He was the best of us. He had a formidable intellect and a passion for justice that always saw him stick up for the leaseholder, so rest in peace, Louie.

I am sure Louie would have been pleased to see yesterday's report from the Law Commission on reforming leasehold, which has been long awaited and at last recognises the fundamental unfairness and problems with the system. The challenge now is for the Government to ensure those recommendations are implemented swiftly and without being watered down by the powerful lobby who wish to protect freeholders' interests. I really hope that time is now up for the unfair, exploitative and outdated system of ownership that is leasehold.

Since I came to this place, I have consistently talked about the importance of the high street; other Members have talked about that today. Many people want to have pride in their local town. They want to see it thriving and they want an end to the drift we have seen in recent years away from our high streets and our town centres. That decline has sadly been accelerated by coronavirus. I was pleased, therefore, when the Government announced last year the towns fund and the high streets fund, because I thought that Ellesmere Port would be one of those places likely to benefit from that initiative. I was therefore disappointed when we lost out on those funds, because we had been told we were well placed, but that disappointment turned to anger when I saw the list of towns that were successful.

I have nothing against those towns, but I saw a pattern between what looked like marginal and target Conservative seats and successful bids, so I asked the National Audit Office whether it could look into this. Its report yesterday confirmed my suspicions that the entire process was tainted by what I can only describe as a blatant subversion of the rules for party political purposes. Criteria were applied by civil servants and towns were ranked high, medium and low priority. All the constituencies that contained a low-priority town that were selected by Ministers were Tory target seats at the general election last year. Some 84% of the towns chosen by Ministers that were ranked medium priority were also Tory target seats last year, so the pattern is clear and some of the justifications given by Ministers for favouring lower-ranking towns over those with greater need are frankly embarrassing.

Take Cheadle, ranked 534th out of the 541 towns considered—almost the lowest priority of the lot, yet somehow it was chosen. This is what the report said:

“Cheadle is strategically located between Stockport and Manchester Airport, with strong motorway links to relevant job opportunities and a new link dual carriageway. The area is part of Stockport Borough Council, which is looking to set up a Mayoral Development Corporation.”

I have no beef with Cheadle, but that reasoning is an absolute nonsense. Most towns are strategically located between other places. Actually, what is the logic of having a fund to boost town centres if one of the reasons a town is chosen is that it has good transport links to elsewhere?

This is an absolute disgrace and we see right through it. We will not forget this manipulation and I will not stop fighting for support for my town. This kind of gerrymandering might have helped the Government win the general election, but in the long run it will do them damage, because people will see it for what it is—a squalid fix from a Government who are supposed to govern for everyone, not just the areas from which they won support.

4.23 pm

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I will not say it is a pleasure, but it is interesting to follow the eclectic comments of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), whose speech I would summarise as sour grapes.

That is not the tone in which I wanted to make my remarks this afternoon. I want to thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the other Deputy Speakers, Mr Speaker and the whole House staff for the amazing way in which they have allowed us to come back here since the end of April, in this hybrid fashion, to hold the Government to account through this difficult period for the country.

I also want to thank everyone in my local area—in West Worcestershire and across Worcestershire—who has worked tirelessly to support the whole community and everyone who has observed the guidelines in such a way that I now have real hope that we have conquered this public health challenge. I am particularly grateful to my own casework team, who have had to deal with quite unprecedented volumes of work in service to the community. I want to put those thanks on record to them now.

As chair of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I want to update colleagues on what the IPU has been up to. I thank the staff of the IPU for having worked relentlessly right through this crisis, working to maintain those links between 179 Parliaments and 46,000 parliamentarians, at a time when it could not have been more important to maintain those links. As Back Benchers, all of us are part of the IPU, and we have taken the view as an executive that we want to continue with virtual links between Parliaments. We have had virtual bilaterals with Sweden, Norway, Italy and Colombia. I thank Mr Speaker for agreeing to take part in the virtual Speakers' conference that will happen during August. I was also delighted to hear today that the president of the IPU has invited Professor Sarah Gilbert of Oxford University to be the keynote speaker, and that she has agreed to that invitation. That is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the fantastic work they are doing at my alma mater.

I also want to thank everyone who has taken part in all these virtual events. As the House knows, we have a particular focus on the non-Commonwealth countries, and we have found the sessions to be very informative in terms of the links between different Parliaments and different countries and how they have taken different approaches to the outbreak and at different times. We have had some very good information sharing and learning from each other.

We have also been able to focus on many of the other priorities of the BGIPU. On media freedom, we had a John Smith Trust session with graduates from Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. We were able to focus an event on refugees. We have been able to liaise

with UK ambassadors and high commissioners from across Africa and from some of the most conflict-afflicted parts of Africa, such as Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, as well as with the International Committee of the Red Cross. We have been able to hold seminars jointly with the BBC. There was one on Chechnya and LGBT issues.

We were able to hold a roundtable last week with the ambassador from the Republic of Korea. I think all colleagues are aware that Korea has been able to apply its experience from the outbreak earlier in the 2000s to the current crisis, and we learned an enormous amount from that session. All those events are of course on the website.

I should update colleagues on the fact that over the course of the next few months, we have to make a decision as a Parliament as to who we want to back to succeed to the presidency of the IPU, because the current president, Gabriela Cuevas Barron, comes to the end of her term in October. There will be a meeting in November to decide the next president. At the moment, only two people have so far shown their candidacy—one from Portugal and one from Pakistan. We as the BGIPU are looking for a few more candidates to show their hand. We want to see what the whole field looks like before we decide who we want to back to take on the important role of the presidency.

I encourage all colleagues to get involved and take part in the wide range of interesting meetings. There has never been a more important time for these 46,000 parliamentarians from 179 countries to come together and share their experiences and how they have been holding their Governments to account. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to update colleagues.

4.28 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) and hear a detailed update on the work of the IPU. As we head back to our constituencies this evening, we will reflect no doubt on an extremely challenging period for our country and our constituencies. I put on record my thanks and admiration for the key workers and community groups in my constituency that have pulled together in an incredibly impressive way to get us through these difficult times.

I want to focus today on an area where I feel the Government have failed and are letting our country down, and that is specifically around the manufacturing sector. We know that a recovery for our manufacturing sector will be crucial for the post-pandemic economy that we wish to build. I will focus on the backbone of our manufacturing sector, which is the steel industry.

There are 4,000 highly skilled and relatively well-paid jobs at the Port Talbot steelworks in my Aberavon constituency, but those people have been badly let down. For a decade, successive Conservative Governments seem to see steelmaking as metal bashing. They seem to see it as a sunset industry. It is not. It is at the cutting edge of so many of the important manufacturing innovations for both our past and our future. Steel is also central to the homes we live in, the cars we drive and the offices we work in. It is crucial to Britain's defence, automotive and infrastructure sectors. Steel is also crucial for the green agenda. Wind turbines are

[Stephen Kinnock]

based on steel, as are many other green technologies, yet we have seen very little in terms of creating a supportive policy environment for the steel industry.

We need fairer industrial energy prices. Why is it that our energy prices are 80% higher than those of our competitors in France and 60% higher than in Germany? We need an integrated Government procurement strategy, so that British steel is actually at the heart of infrastructure projects. We need to tackle extortionate big business rates that punish investment in new plant and machinery. We need the Government to be much, much quicker to provide urgent cash flow support to an industry that is in crisis because of the coronavirus. We need bespoke loan support. We need it urgently for the industry. Where is it and why has it taken so long? Every day that goes by takes the steel industry deeper into this crisis.

I also want to say a word about why this is so important to our sovereign capability and our national security. Covid-19 has shown the essential nature of having national supply chains that we can rely on. The UK has 229 product lines that are strategically dependent on China, of which 57 relate to our critical national infrastructure. We can no longer be too reliant on economies such as China's and on regimes who have shown their disregard for the international rule of law.

We also need to recognise that steel is a driver of jobs and employment. We talk about "build, build, build" but we must also say, "jobs, jobs, jobs." We know that nationwide the UK steel industry employs 32,000 people and contributes £3.2 billion to mitigating our balance of trade deficit. It contributes £5.5 billion to the economy directly and through supply chains. Let us think about the cost of doing nothing. If, God forbid, the steel industry, tragically, were to be allowed to fall over by the Government, imagine the cost of all the relatively well-paid steelworkers who would be put on to the social security system. Look at the capital expenditure cost of closing down our steelworks and those iconic blast furnaces. It would cost the taxpayer billions. It is the definition of a false economy, and that is why the Government must act and act now.

That is why I am supporting the amazing new union-led campaign, "Britain, We Need Our Steel". I congratulate Community union, the GMB and Unite on the campaign and I urge Members across the House to sign up and support it. The unions must be properly consulted. It was very disappointing to read in the Sunday newspapers that apparently discussions are happening about transitioning away from a blast furnace-based model of steelmaking. It is simply not acceptable to be floating those kinds of plans, having them leaked out into the press without proper consultation with a trade union—by the way, a trade union movement that has been the model of constructive engagement and modern, 21st century trade union working. That needs to stop. We need proper consultation. We need proper Government support and we need to see it now.

We need a modern manufacturing renaissance in this country. We will not have a healthy post-pandemic economy unless we have a strong and healthy post-pandemic steel industry. This is a great and proud country. We are strong, modern, diverse and industrial. Our future relies on the steel we make here in the UK: from rail to electric cars, from wind turbines to hospital beds, from

pots and pans to vans, to baked bean cans. The message today has to be clear: we need this urgently and we need it now. Britain, we need our steel.

4.34 pm

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock). Like him, I want to thank all those in my constituency who have worked so hard during the period of lockdown: our NHS staff, carers, key workers, volunteers and community groups. I particularly want to thank NHS staff on both sides of the border who dealt with the unwelcome recent spike in coronavirus cases in the Gtretna and Annan areas and brought that outbreak under control.

I want to use this opportunity to highlight a concern that I have that one unintended consequence of covid might be a limiting of the ability to use cash and, in the wider context, of access to cash, about which I have spoken on a number of occasions in this House. I greatly welcome the fact that the Government intend to legislate on access to cash, and I hope that, in what I am sure will be his very eloquent closing remarks, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), in a rare appearance at the Dispatch Box, will be able to tell us when the Government intend to bring forward that legislation. I now have a further serious concern, however: even if we resolve the ability to access cash, will people be able to use it, given the number of outlets that are now saying that they will not take cash?

The issues around access are well-rehearsed in many ways. We have had the closure of bank branches and cash machines converting from being free to having a charge. Until I became involved in this issue, I did not realise that most cash withdrawal transactions are for small sums of £10 or £20; a £3 charge in relation to a withdrawal of that amount is a hugely disproportionate mark-up. There are also concerns about those machines, either free or otherwise, disappearing, for example, in Lochmaben in my constituency, where constituents have been alarmed about a planning application to remove a cash machine that is vital to the community. There are also complicated arguments around interchange rates, on which the banks and cash machine providers operate. Many of the providers are now looking for a regional interchange rate, so that the rates are different depending on where the machine is and the amount of use and its priority in the community.

I am sure that those important issues will be debated when the access to cash legislation comes forward, along with the very welcome community access to cash pilot. I was pleased to be able to speak to Natalie Ceoney, chair of the board that is overseeing that pilot. The pilot is looking at not just direct access but one of the other big issues that most of us face in our constituencies, of community and voluntary groups in particular who raise money and then need to deposit cash, as do lots of small businesses. These organisations and businesspeople are finding it increasingly difficult to deposit that cash, so in the wider context of the access to cash argument, a deposit scheme must be available.

Access to cash is about being able not just to get that cash but to spend it. In a previous Parliament, I introduced a Bill to guarantee that Scottish bank notes would be accepted here in England and the other parts of the

United Kingdom, and the issue I faced was not about legal tender, and the arguments people make about that, but the fact that retailers and service providers can refuse any form of payment and increasingly are refusing cash payment. A myth has developed that somehow cash is dirty and can spread coronavirus, which is completely untrue; the Minister could help on that. I would like to hear the Government make that much clearer.

As the Bank for International Settlements reported in April, the likelihood of transmitting covid-19

“via banknotes is low when compared with...credit card terminals or PIN pads.”

We must be clear that cash is safe and, as with any contact, safer after people wash their hands and take other measures. Cash is not a spreader of coronavirus.

We do not want to see a back-door move to a so-called cashless society. Recent reports indicate that 8 million of our fellow citizens could not cope in a cashless or cash sparse society, so let us not end up there without thinking it through. Let us see the Government bring forward their access to cash legislation, but let us also make sure that people can use that cash.

4.40 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The most difficult times often demonstrate the power of people coming together. The creation of the Compassionate Community Hub in Bath had an incredible response, with thousands of Bathonians signing up to help vulnerable people in our community. I recognise the fantastic work of 3SG, Virgin Care, and Bath and North East Somerset Council in getting it up and running. I give my heartfelt thanks to all those who have given their time to help.

Some residents have felt isolated and alone; some face financial worries or housing insecurity. Compared with the same time last year, Bath citizens advice bureau has reported a 34% increase in employment issues and a 200% increase in issues around utilities and communication. Even something as simple as the closure of our local skate park due to lockdown meant that a coping mechanism was no longer available.

All those things can contribute to worsening mental health. Analysis suggests that mental health has worsened substantially as a result of the pandemic and 43% of psychiatrists have seen an increase in emergency and urgent cases. The Royal College of Psychiatrists says that there will be a “tsunami of referrals”. The Centre for Mental Health forecasts that half a million more people will experience mental health difficulty this year. If there is a second wave, the effects could be even greater.

It is not a new problem. There was a mental health crisis in the UK long before the pandemic, and it will become even clearer that the system is not working. The Government must take mental health seriously. Unless plans are put in place to meet the extra demand, mental health services will not be able to cope.

I urge the Government to work closely with the voluntary sector, which is calling for the creation of a national mental health renewal plan. We can learn from the expertise of those organisations, which have been invaluable throughout the pandemic. Progress towards parity of esteem for mental health will need funding. Of course that means for the NHS, but social care, local authorities, welfare and community services will all need proper funding too.

Mental health cannot be viewed in isolation. It needs to be placed at the heart of society in schools, workplaces and our communities. In Bath, local organisations have stopped many of our residents falling through the gaps. Bath Mind has had contact with more than 500 people across Bath and North East Somerset who were not known to it prior to the lockdown. Developing Health & Independence has worked with more 2,500 people on GP shielding lists. Many were not previously aware of how to access help. Without those organisations ensuring prevention and early intervention, the cost to the statutory sector would be enormous.

Certain groups have disproportionately felt the impact of covid-19 on their mental health. A study has found that levels of anxiety and depression remain high, even as restrictions ease, among low-income households, people with already diagnosed mental ill health and young people.

Research from the Royal Society for Public Health suggests that young people’s mental health has suffered most as a result of the pandemic. We know that people under 25 are much more likely to work in sectors that have been closed. DHI has also shared concerns about an increase in family conflict, being witness to parental domestic violence, and exploitation through county lines. A national young persons’ lockdown exit strategy is needed as part of lockdown easing. We cannot allow young people to be further disadvantaged, and must prevent this crisis from developing into a mental health pandemic. Mental health issues do not discriminate. Local authorities must have the resources to support our communities. Warm words are not enough. I urge the Government to act now.

As I have a bit of time left, let me say that we have heard many people in the House speak powerfully in support of their communities. There could not be a bigger fan of my city of Bath than I. I echo the sentiments of a lot of colleagues across the House, in that I shall do my utmost to ensure that Bath and my constituents get through this crisis as safely as possible.

4.45 pm

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), especially her words about mental health. I could not agree more. We should treat mental health and physical health with parity, and do what we can to help people in such deep crisis, especially during this time.

This Session has been an eventful one. Our nation has been battling the coronavirus, and the Government’s response has brought in strong and effective measures to open up the economy, protect people’s livelihoods and keep us safe. As we look ahead to the forthcoming adjournment and the next sitting, however, I wish to raise matters local to Rother Valley that require the House’s attention.

The coronavirus pandemic has caused much suffering and pain in my constituency, as it has in all four countries of the United Kingdom, yet in this darkest of times I have been privileged to witness community spirit in Rother Valley blossom and flourish. The selflessness of my constituents has been truly extraordinary, ranging from schoolchildren making PPE to volunteers doing food parcels for more people. As a result, I instituted the Rother Valley hero awards to recognise some of the amazing work that has been done in the constituency.

[Alexander Stafford]

In the wake of the pandemic, it is critical that we relaunch Rother Valley's economy. I am therefore supporting the *Rotherham Advertiser's* "Restarting Rotherham" campaign to raise awareness that Rother Valley is open for business. This post-coronavirus relaunch of the economy ties in perfectly with my electoral pledge to bring lots of high-quality, skilled jobs to the area, and chimes with the Government's levelling up of our infrastructure and facilities.

We already have many good businesses in Rother Valley, including Swallow GB in Thurcroft, which produces high-quality, award-winning sheds and greenhouses. As well as greenhouses, I want Rother Valley to be known for the green economy, and am particularly excited by the prospect of hydrogen—which the House knows I have been advocating for—and the potential for a hydrogen plant to be based in Orgreave or Thurcroft in Rother Valley. These new green jobs could kick-start our economy and allow us to build back better for the whole country, and I very much believe that former industrial areas such as Rother Valley should be at the heart of our green recovery.

Infrastructure-wise, I have been vocal in my bid to link up Rother Valley's different towns and villages, which are appallingly served by public transport at present. I have been championing the reopening of the old South Yorkshire Joint Railway line, which would service Anston, Dinnington, Laughton, and Maltby.

I am also unwavering in my support for new bus routes and more frequent services across the constituency, as the buses in Rother Valley are truly woeful. It is a disgraceful situation when a short journey that can take 15 or 20 mins in a car takes up to an hour and a quarter on public transport and that bus arrives only once an hour. It is simply not good enough. In response, I have convened the Rother Valley transport taskforce as a forum for discussing solutions and progress. I intend it to meet once the pandemic is over, and encourage all residents of Rother Valley to get involved so that we can work out how to restart Rotherham, restart Rother Valley and get better transport services for our communities.

I remain steadfast in my opposition to hurtful projects such as HS2, which will bring untold damage and no benefits to the communities of Rother Valley. Similarly, I oppose fracking. It is a retrograde step, and not what we want for our future green economy to rebuild jobs.

It is important for us in this House to remember that constituencies such as Rother Valley are made up of individual towns and villages that breathe life into the greater whole. We are full of wonderful community activities such as the Kiveton and Wales annual scarecrow festival, which is on its way. I look forward to seeing many different scarecrows across the constituency over the recess, and I encourage everyone to visit them for a good day out. On top of that, Swallowest FC staged a charity walk for the mental health charity Mind, which I have been privileged to take part in, and that goes back to the comments from the hon. Member for Bath about how important mental health is. I have been working with others to protect the hub of our community for future generations, such as the mineworkers' recreation ground in Maltby, which is also the home of Maltby Main FC. It is important that our sports fields are protected, because once they are gone, they are gone. We need to

protect and nurture them. That is why I am also supporting Dinnington Town football club's efforts to raise funds to install a 3G pitch for the benefit of the town and local sports clubs.

As the House will know, one of my priorities is to rejuvenate the high street in Dinnington by reopening the police station, saving our local post office, clamping down on local crime and antisocial behaviour, and repurposing Dinnington College as a community centre. I have chosen to have my constituency office on that high street to show my support and try to get our high streets back to where they should be. I am also co-ordinating with local groups such as those in Harthill and Woodsetts to ensure that fracking never blights our beautiful Rother Valley.

We must also look forward. For instance, in Whiston we must prepare for winter flooding by working with the Environment Agency to build robust flood defences in the area, thereby protecting our homes, and in Kiveton Park there is an opportunity for us to regenerate our beautiful stretch of the Chesterfield canal. During the pandemic, this Government have kept people in Rother Valley safe and protected our livelihoods. Now, there is lots of work to be done. We must turn our heads towards our recovery and achieving real and meaningful transformation for Rother Valley. We must deliver on levelling up for Rother Valley and the north.

4.51 pm

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to follow Members' impassioned speeches about their communities and to hear a bit more about Rother Valley just now.

I was reading today's *Daily Telegraph*, which is not something that I do regularly, but it is good to know what the enemy think. The front page reported that the American Government and Pompeo believe that the Chinese are responsible for thousands of deaths in this country. Did the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister challenge those assertions? The report did not suggest that they had. I have heard no challenge of those assertions. I am no fan of the Chinese authorities. On my first delegation to China in 2006, I raised, with colleagues from the Socialist International who were there, issues of human rights in China. My view is that the human rights situation in China has gone downhill from there, not improved, but for such conspiracy theories not to be challenged by our Government is extremely dangerous.

In the middle pages of *The Daily Telegraph*, another article says that racist hate crimes against Chinese and south Asian people in this country have increased by 61% so far this year. If Members cannot see the link, I implore them to look again, because there is a clear link between misinformation about China and racist attacks on Chinese people in this country. We must not play the game of China, of misinformation, lies and abuses of human rights. We must win the global battle of ideas and for the future world we want based on our values of truth, justice, democracy and human rights.

That is why many of my constituents were deeply concerned when Royal Mail delivered through their doors the racist rag *The Epoch Times*. It is a disgusting magazine that Royal Mail has voluntarily decided to deliver, not through its universal service but on a private

contract. Royal Mail is entitled to refuse delivery if it brings the service into disrepute, is dangerous, is harmful or is likely to harm or upset the receiver. I will tell the House what this newspaper says. It says:

“there were several cases of people recovering from the CCP pneumonia”—

it does not call it covid—

“miraculously after they condemned the CCP”.

It says, “If you condemn the CCP and China, you will recover from the CCP pneumonia.” These are dangerous lies because they not only promote racism, but suggest to people that they can be cured, or can avoid getting coronavirus if they are racist. Who is the funder of this magazine, which has gone to every constituent in my constituency and in numerous other constituencies around this country? *The Epoch Times* is the biggest funder of online advertising for the Trump campaign in the election later this year. There is a direct link to the US and the racism that is peddled in our streets, and it is incumbent on our Government to stand up to it. I have written to Royal Mail, which gave a very weak response initially. It has now responded more seriously and I hope that we will investigate this further because it is not acceptable for people to receive this in their homes.

The reality is, however, that many people do not live in permanent homes; they live in temporary, rented accommodation and they do not know when the doorbell will ring and it will be their landlord asking for them to be kicked out under a section 8 or section 21 notice. This Government have suggested that they wish to abolish those no-fault evictions, but we are still waiting for that law to be enforced. They told renters in my constituency and across the country that they would not have to worry about having to leave their home because of arrears resulting from coronavirus, but we heard today, as a result of the excellent urgent question from the shadow Housing Secretary, that the Government wish landlords to take covid into account but will do nothing to require them to do that and will not suspend section 8s. Of course, section 8s do not allow the courts to use their judgment; they require the courts to evict, with no questions asked, where someone is in two months of arrears. That section needs to be abolished, as do the no-fault evictions, and we would then have a much better position for renters in our communities, particularly in Brighton.

Let me finish by saying that Brighton is a seaside holiday resort, all along the coast, including Peacehaven and Saltdean in my constituency. It welcomes all of you during the summer. Come and enjoy our lovely lido and our lovely beach, and our parks. I hope to see you there.

4.57 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is an honour and pleasure to follow the terrific speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle).

I thank the people of Warwick and Leamington for their endurance, self-sacrifice and adherence to the guidelines these past few months. They managed to resist the temptation to go to Barnard Castle, and for good reason, because of course we have the wondrous Warwick castle. I recognise that we do not have a beach at Warwick castle, although it banks the fine River Avon. It is a very attractive place in its own right.

More seriously, I wish to express my thanks, and those of all the residents of Warwick and Leamington, to all our frontline workers. In the past few months, we have seen rainbows appearing in windows in every street in the constituency, thanking our frontline workers. I thank those at Warwick Hospital and at the Heathcote rehab hospital, and all in our health and emergency services, our care homes and our schools. I also thank our key workers across our food and agricultural sector.

I particularly thank our voluntary and charitable organisations, such as Warwick district food bank, which have done such a brilliant job. I have seen at first hand the work they have done. They are too numerous for me to mention their names individually. I also thank the Warwick and Leamington mutual aid group for what it has been doing, as well as restaurants, cafés, chefs and butchers, who have stood up, got together, got organised and supplied meals. They have been very much in the background, but they have done such a terrific job. I also wish to place on record my thanks to council officers for the speed with which they have got the business grants out and expedited the support on business rates. Without that, many businesses could have gone under so quickly.

However, having commended many of the local authority officers for what they have done for businesses and in helping with shielding, I have concerns about the failure of some and a lack of leadership in respect of recognising the threat of the pandemic in our care homes. While we had weekly meetings as representatives across Warwickshire, nowhere on the agenda was there any mention of social care, until I asked for it to be raised. We had things like green waste on the agenda, but not care homes. That just underlines how there was an absolute blindness to this issue that was clearly going to be a huge problem. There have been 65,000 excess deaths, as we know, with 400 in Warwickshire. We cannot wait for a Government inquiry, whenever that may be: we need an interim urgent inquiry to take place. I certainly want to see one in Warwickshire and I will be calling for one.

Let me turn to the economy, starting with our high streets. I welcome the support that the Government are talking about, but we must—I am calling on residents—back our local businesses, because they provide the jobs, the prosperity, and of course such great services. However, we also need infrastructure. I very much hope that the Government will find the money to support us in our Leamington Spa station development to create a proper 21st-century transport hub. I do appreciate the work that the Government did with the furlough scheme, but Australia has just announced, as we have seen elsewhere, that it is going to extend its furlough scheme by another six months. That is what we need, because we will face a huge problem with unemployment going into the autumn. I want to place on record my concern for those I have been campaigning for who have been excluded by all the other support policies that the Government have put in place—the 3 million we have heard about.

I turn to the need for sectoral support. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), mentioned the tragedy of the closure of the Orb steelworks. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) talked about the importance of steel and the need for these products, which are a critical part of our manufacturing sector. In particular, I will always speak about the

[*Matt Western*]

preciousness of our automotive sector and the supply chain. Without those plants, we will not have these products manufactured in the UK. I welcomed the Chancellor's statement, but it was selective in supporting hospitality and construction, yet in the west midlands we have 58,000 people who work in the automotive sector. That is why we need sectoral deals. We must have, as we did in 2009, support for scrappage schemes and other support given to different sectors. This is being done in other countries. If we do not restore these businesses and these markets, then investment will be going to other countries, because that is what the international businesses will do. No other sector faces the same headwinds that our automotive sector does, with changes in emissions regulations and, of course, the significant impact that there will be from changes in our trading relationship with Europe.

On the need to address climate change, I very much hope that in the autumn we will see some mention of industrial strategy from the Chancellor, who, surprisingly, has not talked about 11 March and did not again recently. With the challenge of addressing climate change we need economic change, and that is a huge opportunity. As we have heard, we need to reduce the cost of our energy. We should have the cheapest energy in Europe because of the offer of wind, but we do not.

Finally, may I ask that we urgently bring back Westminster Hall debates? We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) about the real need for those sorts of local debates. I thank all the staff here and the security teams for what they have given us.

5.3 pm

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western). It will come as no surprise to him that there is a lot that divides us politically, but we can absolutely agree that Warwick castle, where I went several times as a child, is a great day out. I look forward to taking my own children there soon.

In the Adjournment debate prior to the February half-term recess, I spoke in detail about a proposal that would devastate my constituency—the Oxford to Cambridge expressway road. I set out the case as to why it would be an environmental and economic disaster that would wipe out people's homes, farms and businesses, and the beautiful villages of Buckinghamshire. I will not repeat the detail of those arguments today, other than to say that it was very good news that when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor published the Budget in March, the road investment strategy 2, or RIS 2, document that accompanied it moved the expressway project out of the “go ahead” column into the “paused” column.” Better news is that I have had confirmation that Highways England has not progressed work on the project.

It goes without saying that my constituents continue to be nervous and concerned that that project might reappear on the agenda. I ask the Minister to urge colleagues in the Department for Transport to move on and to look at alternative projects, such as improving existing roads and delivering a bypass for the village of Wing, rather than the Oxford to Cambridge expressway.

Moving to the covid-19 crisis, I add my voice to so many others this afternoon in thanking every single key worker who has supported us through the crisis. It has been a pleasure in the crisis for the county of Buckinghamshire as a whole to have come together and worked together. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) is in his place, and all five Buckinghamshire MPs have worked together with Buckinghamshire Council, the NHS trust and Buckinghamshire Business First to ensure that we are connected and working together to support all our residents.

On councils, I have nothing but praise not only for Buckinghamshire Council but, importantly, for all the town and parish councils that serve us. At a very micro and local level, they can do much to improve lives and support people.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I fully agree with my hon. Friend's sentiments. It is a delight to welcome him and all my new colleagues to their places—I have never seen the Bucks MPs work more closely together—and I echo his praise for all our key workers and especially our local NHS, who have been staggering in their efficiency and effectiveness.

Greg Smith: I totally concur with my hon. Friend's comments.

To develop the point that I was making about parish and town councils, clearly the Government have put in unprecedented levels of financial support for the principal councils—in my case, Buckinghamshire Council—but parish and town councils have also spent considerable amounts of money for which they need support.

Earlier today, I talked to the mayor of Princes Risborough Town Council, in the south of my constituency. Throughout the crisis, the council has spent £20,000 on various initiatives. That might not sound a lot in the scheme of things, but to a town council it is an enormous amount of money, and it has lost about £30,000 in income—bear in mind that the total precept is £380,000, and that is an enormous amount. I urge the Government, if at all possible, to ensure that our town and parish councils also receive compensation that they need, so that as they set budgets for next year, services are not squeezed or cut.

I wish to focus on two sectors as we come through the crisis. I am enormously proud to be on the Conservative Benches, and to have supported the Chancellor on the unprecedented package that he has given to support businesses and jobs throughout our economy. As our economy reopens, some sectors still need support, and I agreed with every word of my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) about the wedding sector. I have worked with companies such as Bijou Wedding Venues, which operates Notley Abbey near Haddenham in my constituency, and it is important that that sector gets to reopen more fully in a way that it knows it can do safely, if it is to survive.

There are also businesses that continue to be unsure. One of those is the soft play sector and children's play centres. They are confused at the moment as to why it can be that children can do so many other activities of a similar nature, but they still do not have a date for which they can even plan to open. It is so important for children—I see this in my own three-year-old—to be able to interact and play with other children of their

own age, in particular at that tender age when they are developing so much. I urge the Government to look at when, for soft play centres and similar businesses where children come together to play, we can get a date by which they may open.

Lastly, there is our coach industry. I am sure right hon. and hon. Members will have noticed the “Honk for Hope” campaign as it came through Westminster very noisily the other day. I went out to meet representatives of Countrywide Coaches from Princes Risborough and Masons coaches from near Cheddington in my constituency. It is a sector that really is struggling, and it is an important sector for two key reasons. In their own right, such companies bring £7 billion into the UK economy every year, but they are also the enablers that bring people into London to go out, on day trips or on holiday, and to spend their money so that we will get the economy open once more. It is a sector that has had to spend an enormous amount of money—for example, through the public service vehicle accessibility regulations recently, which has left many of them £200,000 or £300,000 in debt. If we can get a support package for our coach industry, it really will be appreciated and support the economy.

5.10 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I have three concerns from my constituency and then one national issue. First, train services from Congleton urgently need improving. Will the Government press Northern to do so now? In particular, the Sunday service, at just four trains per day each way, is unacceptable, with gaps of up to four hours between trains. There are still no advance tickets from Congleton. Local passengers have suffered endless recent service interruptions and strikes, and the latest blow is the complete removal of CrossCountry services, which need reinstating. This is a well-used station. It could be even more popular, given more regular and reliable trains. I urge Transport Ministers to ensure that the people of Congleton get the train service they deserve.

Secondly, I raise a concern on behalf of an entrepreneurial restaurateur and hotelier in my constituency, who expresses gratitude and appreciation for recent Government measures for the hospitality industry, but has concerns on business rates policy. He tells me: “Hospitality pays a second tax on sales. This is because the business rates are assessed on sales, not on premises’ value. Why? It means that more successful businesses are penalised and failing poor businesses are rewarded. Can this be what Government really wants to achieve?” He explains: “When we bought a business four years ago, the business rateable value was £23,750, based on the sales from the previous owner’s low-level operation there—a poor operator who had made no investment and was rewarded with very low business rates and artificially supported. Since we have refurbished, we have now been reassessed for rates to £101,000. This is because of our sales reaching much higher levels. We already pay VAT on our sales. We already pay corporation tax on our profits. It acts as a complete disincentive to investment. We now pay more rates than the rest of the entire street put together. This includes two banks and seven shops. If Government want regeneration of the high street, this must be changed.” He concludes: “I am very happy to pay business rates based on a rateable

value that reflects the value of my trading buildings, but why should I have to pay more than other traders?” Can I ask Housing, Communities and Local Government Ministers to review this business rating policy?

My third constituency concern follows the recent tragic loss of life both of a 17-year-old girl and, separately, a cyclist near Astbury, where for years there have been many similar tragedies. Residents at Wallhill Lane near Brownlow and Padgbury Lane are concerned, and I have been asked on behalf of the Link 2 Prosperity businessmen’s group to press Government for an extra link to the Congleton link road currently under construction—an additional section from Sandbach Road to Newcastle Road to improve road safety, help traffic flow around the town, improve quality of life for residents and reduce pollution in this residential area near Congleton High School. Would Transport Ministers consider funding this, please?

Fourthly, an issue of deep concern to parents across the country is the profound harm that can be caused to children all too easily viewing available pornography online. The Government have stated many times, not least in our 2015 manifesto, their intentions to better protect children from online harms, yet I regret to say that they have not followed this up with appropriately expeditious action. That action is urgently needed, particularly bearing in mind that lockdown has increased digital use by children. Part 3 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 required robust age verification checks, but they have not been implemented. The Government then said that they would seek to address that with other online harms, but action has progressed slowly. An online harms White Paper was published in April 2019. The consultation closed a year ago, but the Government’s full response has been delayed and is not yet forthcoming. Meanwhile, the proposed online harms Bill has not been introduced, and we understand that it could be 2023-24 before it is enacted and implemented—several years after age verification could have been implemented for pornographic websites under the Digital Economy Act 2017.

I am not alone in raising these concerns. Many Conservative MPs are extremely concerned. I call on Ministers in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and in other Departments to expedite work on this, so that several more years do not pass before children are better protected from the profound harm that seeing pornography online can cause. I urge Ministers to implement part 3, with age verification, now. We cannot make the internet safe, but we can make it safer.

5.16 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I would like to raise several covid-related issues that have affected individuals and organisations in my constituency: first, the economic impact; secondly, schools; and thirdly, policing.

Hon. Members have raised the challenge facing the exhibitions and events industry, which is worth £70 billion a year to the UK economy, and provides 700,000 jobs. Organisations in my constituency such as Easyfairs UK, which employs 100 people, are really suffering. It was one of the first sectors to shut down, and will be one of the last to come out of lockdown. The industry has shed 20% of its direct workforce, with many more

[Munira Wilson]

job cuts—potentially 60,000—to come in the exhibition space alone. It desperately needs further financial support, particularly as the furlough scheme ends in October. While we have been given hope by the Prime Minister that some of those events could get going again, it is the sort of industry that needs quite a lot of lead time for buyers and sellers and the setting up of those events.

Rightly, the October date is contingent on coronavirus prevalence data, as well as pilot events, but it would be helpful to have a slightly earlier indication on whether the industry could open up sooner, because it has worked with the Government to put in place a lot of covid-secure arrangements. The industry is known for its work on health and safety, so I urge the Government to look at that again. It relies a great deal on freelancers and the self-employed, and we have heard many times in the Chamber about the number of people who have been left out of the scheme.

I have been contacted by a freelance 3D designer in the exhibitions and events industry who has not worked since 12 February. Luckily, he can get a bit of support by furloughing himself, but he is a director of a limited company with a small salary. We have heard today about the ExcludedUK APPG, of which I am a member, and in which 250 Members participate. We heard some harrowing stories this week of the mental health impact on, for example, new job starters who were not eligible for the furlough. The lady we heard from is on medication and getting deep into debt. I urge the Government to look not just at plugging the gaps in those schemes but at further support for debt counselling, because many of those who are excluded have got into a huge amount of debt, and at everything that Members from all parts of the House have called for, including further support for mental health services.

I wanted to touch on funding and support for schools. I was horrified to hear from my daughter's primary school, which is in my constituency, that what I thought was a welcome additional funding pot that was being granted to schools to cope with coronavirus excludes the claiming of costs associated with opening schools to more pupils from 1 June as well as additional staffing costs. This seems absurd to me, because many schools in my constituency and across the country have bent over backwards to try to welcome back as many kids as possible before the holidays safely and securely, in line with guidance. That has meant additional cleaning and IT equipment, fencing, screening and other materials to allow for social distancing and maintaining bubbles, as well as additional staff costs to cover staff who might be shielding, for instance. These are not covered in the guidance around the extra funding that the Department for Education has put in place. We know that many schools are already struggling with their budgets because of cuts over many years, so I urge the Government to think again. They should not have to absorb these additional costs when they have tried their very best to welcome back as many pupils as possible.

We have also heard many times in the Chamber about the lack of laptops for pupils who cannot afford devices to learn at home, and I particularly wanted to draw attention to Richmond upon Thames College in my constituency. We know that one in four children at colleges across London are on free school meals, so it is

servicing a particularly deprived population. The college had to give out 90 laptops and dongles to its pupils and used bursary funding to do so, but that bursary funding has been slashed by £130,000 by the Education and Skills Funding Agency on the basis that these pupils benefit from free travel in London. Those of us who are London MPs are well aware that under-18s free travel is about to be scrapped, thanks to the Government condition on the TfL bail-out recently, so I again urge the Government to rethink that policy.

Finally, I want to touch on antisocial behaviour and policing. We know that, because of the guidelines and restrictions, there is a lot more socialising outdoors. This has resulted in a lot of drinking until late outdoors and a lot of additional antisocial behaviour, with people using outdoor spaces as public toilets. I particularly draw attention to Twickenham Green in my constituency, where residents are long-suffering. I am dismayed that the police have said that the problem with stepping up patrols is that police in south-west London are being called to shut down raves in other parts of London. This comes back to the lack of policing and the desperate need to boost police numbers, so I urge the Government to make good on their manifesto commitments and boost policing.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Steve Baker will have the last speech at six minutes. Everyone else will get five minutes to ensure that we get everybody on the call list in.

5.22 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): In High Wycombe, joy and celebration abound, because just last Monday, Wycombe Wanderers football club were promoted to the championship. I put on record how proud of them the whole town is. It is a miraculous achievement and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will join me in congratulating them.

The first point I want to make about the Government's business is that it is time to repeal and replace the Coronavirus Act 2020. I have made my case in a Red Box article in *The Times* today, and I am very grateful to *The Times* for carrying it. I am also very grateful to Liberty for its comprehensive and, indeed, abridged briefing, which it provided to Members and which I thoroughly recommend.

What we have seen since I stood over there and made a speech—which I think went fairly viral—in opposition to the range and scope of the Bill, is, as I made very clear, a dramatic expansion of powers being passed in an undesirably swift way. Of course, the Government needed to act in haste in all the circumstances. I do not by any means judge my right hon. and hon. Friends for that. They needed to do it, but they now have the luxury of time over the summer recess and, indeed, new information from what we have learned from the progress of the pandemic. I just say to them that this dramatic edifice of powers and regulations related to coronavirus and public health and their basis in law must now be reviewed comprehensively. Parliament must in future have a chance to scrutinise necessary powers properly, and the public must have confidence that rules are proportionate and have been reasonably made. Conservative

Ministers worthy of the name cannot afford to be—and I am sure are not—cavalier about civil liberties. With that in mind, I implore my hon. Friend the Minister to look at repealing the Coronavirus Act and replacing it.

Let me move on to set the record straight for an individual and thereby try to right an injustice. As will become clear, I am the only recourse that this individual has. But I want to start by talking about trade policy, of all things. The UK Government are now embarked on a trade policy that most Members will know about: it will flatten power and make it more accountable to change the structure of power in the world to reinvigorate the global trading system, just at the moment when we need it. The UK is going to catalyse that change, but it is perhaps the biggest politics.

Many of the people associated with the journey of formulating that trade policy, from the days when the Legatum Institute special trade commission was doing that job, and I was working with them, have been exposed to and suffered really vitriolic attacks. Indeed, I would say that I have suffered malevolent attacks. Today, though, I want particularly to defend Christopher Chandler, who is the founder of Legatum and that family of companies.

On 1 May 2018, my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) made a speech, the main object of which was Christopher Chandler. I wish to acknowledge the nobility of my hon. Friend's intent, because any Member of Parliament presented with such a dossier would face difficult questions about what to do with it. He referred to a call for an Intelligence and Security Committee investigation of Mr Chandler, who does not appear in the recent ISC report.

We might, then, ask what Mr Chandler and others did. Legatum, the company that Mr Chandler founded with three partners and of which he is the chairman, commissioned an extensive forensic investigation into the claims by former members of law enforcement and military intelligence. Richard Walton, the former head of counter-terrorism command at the Metropolitan police, performed his own independent review of the findings of that investigation and concluded that the allegations made by MPs in the House were totally false. Mr Walton has today briefed me on the reasons why he has drawn that conclusion, and I am absolutely satisfied that the reason why Mr Chandler has not been called to face charges is that there are no charges that he should face. He is an innocent man and, whatever the noble intent of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight, I am afraid that Mr Chandler has been unjustly dealt with.

Legatum told me today: "When given the opportunity to present the truth, Legatum has overwhelmingly prevailed in 13 out of 14 actions in the UK, resulting in a stream of corrections, retractions and apologies." This is, then, fundamentally a case of justice. As I say, I believe that Mr Chandler has absolutely no case to answer; it is just that under the system we currently have an individual has no recourse to what is said in the House of Commons, other than a Member of Parliament standing up for them. At some point the House is going to have to deal with the issue of a right to reply.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way; I was aware of what he was going to say. He makes a really important point and, respectfully,

I listen with care. Clearly, a right of reply may strengthen the credibility of privilege, such that we could see it as a questioning event in the public interest rather than an accusatory one. I am in favour of that, because I want the privileges that we have to have credibility. I hear what he says and I respectfully listen to what he says and to what he says about his friends. I would merely say that parliamentarians who care about the relevance of this place wrestle with what the right thing to do and say is, sometimes in complex and difficult circumstances. Does he agree that we all try to act in the best possible way? If there is work to be done on updating privilege, I am very happy to join that.

Mr Baker: I would not expect my hon. Friend to go any further than that today and I am very grateful to him for what he has said. That will have been heard and I am grateful to him.

In the urgent question earlier, I said something about Legatum's work on Russia, which I think is honourable and noble. It would be strange indeed if Mr Chandler was connected to Russian intelligence, given that he has put so much investment into fighting the effects of Russian wrongdoing. I have already mentioned trade policy; it is rare indeed that one can say that somebody has facilitated so much benefit to so many people.

Let me say a little more, because Mr Chandler is also a believer in private philanthropy. Since its founding in 2012, the END Fund has facilitated the delivery of more than 720 million treatments relating to neglected tropical diseases, in 27 of the world's poorest countries. His Freedom fund has liberated 24,277 men, women and children. His Luminos fund has, through its Second Chance accelerated-learning programme, seen 132,611 children brought back to school. Mr Chandler is not a man who should have been vilified; he is an inspiration.

Injustice is not always brought down on the heads of the weak. Virtue does not always belong to the poor. On this occasion, I have had to do something—it would have been far better had I not had to do it—and that is to defend a man who is wealthy and strong, but who has been placed in a position without a right to reply, and it has been necessary for me to stand up today and to seek to set the record straight and to defend his honour. I say again that Richard Walton, the former head of the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command, has investigated all of these matters and said, "The allegations made in the House of Commons are totally false." If you will allow me Mr Deputy Speaker, my last words are from a quote chosen by Mr Chandler himself:

"Truth ultimately prevails where there are pains to bring it to light."

I have taken those pains today. Let truth prevail.

5.30 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): The coronavirus experience has introduced us all to many businesses and organisations in our constituencies, which, however long we have lived in them or represented them, we did not know about. One of those for me was the very thriving events industry in Mitcham and Morden. I have had almost 15 companies approach me, including Larry Walshe Studios, Just 4 Linen, Dash Linen, LightWave Productions, White Light Ltd, Focus Lighting, Tuxedo Express Laundry, Skyline Whitespace and Oxygen Events. What unites them is that they are all part of the events

[*Siobhain McDonagh*]

industry, providing services to other bodies, and all of them, without exception, have had no support other than the furloughing scheme. Many of them are now making tens and hundreds and thousands of people redundant.

Events firms that operate from industrial premises and that provide their services on a for-hire basis are not eligible for the Government's expanded retail discount, under the guidance issued to local authorities, because they do not sell on-site, so are not covered by the definition:

"Hereditaments that are being used for the sale of goods to visiting members of the public."

Unfortunately, eligibility for this grant is also a prerequisite for accessing the Government's retail hospitality and leisure grant.

Throughout this crisis, events companies have been viewed by Government as providing services to the industry rather than actually being part of it, despite the fact that they are entirely reliant on this industry for their business. A point of frustration for these business owners is that the Chancellor himself said on 17 March that the event hire companies should be included in the envelope of leisure and hospitality and eligible for the RHLG, saying:

"Those that have business properties will be eligible both for the relief and the grant, which will cover a significant number of events companies that have premises. Obviously, if they do not have premises, they will not qualify for business rates relief, but should be eligible for some of the other measures that I have outlined today."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 2020; Vol. 673, c. 694]

Whereas other businesses, such as shops and restaurants, which have already had access to these grants, can open straight back up—I do not wish to underestimate the problems that they, too, are experiencing—these events businesses will have to wait a lot longer before they can reopen. Many events are organised a long time in advance—I am talking about weddings, conferences and concerts.

This is an industry that is worth £70 billion in the UK annually. An article in the *Financial Times* a week ago estimated that as many as 30,000 jobs could be put at risk if the Government do not step in. There has been a lot of focus on transparency in terms of when the events industry will resume, and it is small consolation that the Government have now set the date of 1 October for some events, conferences and expos to resume, which will not make up for the seven months that they have been without meaningful work. Even then, depending on the state of social distancing guidelines by October, it may still not be viable for some businesses to come back, so what are we asking for?

We are asking the Government to approach the remaining months of the furlough scheme for event businesses in a different way. Because they cannot come back to work, employers should not have to make a contribution. The scheme should possibly be extended beyond October for certain corners of the events industry, if necessary. We are asking that the Government either revise the guidelines to local authorities to allow events companies to access backdated financial support through the expanded retail discount and the retail hospitality and leisure grant, or establish a new pool of support for those companies, transparency with businesses and a clear timetable or road map for returning all corners of the events industry as far as possible, so that they can

plan and prepare accordingly. Larry Walshe of Larry Walshe Floral Design suggests a VAT reduction in the same way as for other events companies. That will encourage consumers with postponements and engaged couples to plan a wedding for 2021-22.

5.35 pm

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): It is how we respond to a challenge that defines us. Covid has brought our communities together in ways that I think none of us could have imagined six months ago, ensuring that the most vulnerable—those who are shielding or on the frontline—are supported, encouraged and taken care of. In Runnymede and Weybridge, we have volunteers delivering food parcels and collecting prescriptions; councillors, charities and volunteers at Runnymede foodbank, simply next-door neighbours, helping out in their street. We have community initiatives such as Nourish our Nurses, which was established in my constituency to support staff at St Peter's hospital, delivering fresh fruit and vegetables with handy recipes. Incidentally, on that note, St Peter's has told me that during this crisis it has received more chocolate than even NHS staff can manage. As a former NHS doctor, I find that slightly surprising, but there we are. Local resident Matthew Thomas, when his marathon was cancelled, ran lengths of his street with the aid of neighbours to raise money for charity—the first Weybridge street marathon.

Hundreds of constituents, such as Sew Weybridge and Sew 'n' Sew, have put their talents to sewing masks, scrubs and scrub bags, while others, such as the design and technology department at Salesian school in Chertsey, have used their skills to make visors and screens. On that note, I recently visited Brooklands college in Weybridge, a top-notch college that offers vocational courses to hundreds of students, young and old, with fantastic local industry support. We are going to need that as we come out of this crisis. It tells me that applications for apprenticeships are up, all supporting my constituents' prospects in the job market. Throughout Runnymede and Weybridge, there are examples of our residents, our businesses and our schools—everyone—going the extra mile and our communities becoming even stronger as a result.

We often talk about key workers, but the fact is that in our society everyone's work is key. Arguably, the hardest challenge is still in front of us. We must not just support jobs, but make jobs. We must not just protect our businesses, but give them the tools to grow and flourish. We must consolidate our strong public services and allow the NHS to continue and evolve. Local representatives tell me that they have seen more change in a few months than in a lifetime. I welcome change and our fast responsiveness to covid, but we must also reflect carefully on our next steps.

I believe that the role of the state should be to provide the opportunities for growth and the assurance that there will always be support for those who need it most. In Runnymede and Weybridge, that particularly means improvements to our roads, our rail connections, supporting our aviation sector, improving our natural environment, and protecting our homes and businesses from flooding by building the River Thames Scheme. However, development and infrastructure need to work with our communities. Aviation needs to be sustainable and not

blight people in Englefield Green, and across Runnymede and Weybridge, with air and noise pollution. People living in Addlestone should not have to keep their windows closed due to noise from the M25. Our rail services should make the daily commute easier, not push people into driving because of cancellations or high fare prices. On our public services, the Weybridge hospital site needs to cater for the needs of the community it serves.

We clearly face many challenges, but with change also comes opportunity. It is my sincere hope that we can use this time to seize those opportunities with ambition and determination. As we recover and rebuild from this crisis, we must not just bounce back but bounce higher.

5.39 pm

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): Today, I want to return to the incredibly important conversation started in this country after the outrageous killing of George Floyd in May. In my view, that conversation is only partially complete: vital questions regarding our intentions and objectives hang in the air, alongside solutions asserted from some quarters which, at least to me, remain untested and are at times jarring to the good nature and general tolerance of the Britain I know and love—questions such as how we, rightly, consign all forms of discrimination in our society to history, how we interact with our complicated past, and, fundamentally, how we raise up our fellow man and woman to fulfil their ambitions, focusing on where they are going rather than where they have come from.

That this debate even began is something I welcome. When these questions arose two months ago, I looked forward to a robust, potentially uncomfortable debate, acknowledging the past and recognising the progress made, but accepting there would always be more to do. Yet what came next was neither what I expected, nor sometimes did it, in my view, do justice to the questions that were raised. On issues as deeply sensitive as this, we all have a responsibility to debate as broadly as possible, with a willingness to both listen and recognise that no single one of us and no single group has the answer to every question, but too often we have seen attempts to impose a single worldview on the contours of this important debate: a new framework about discrimination, saying that it is somehow intrinsic and unavoidable; about individual autonomy, saying that we are reduced to the indelible product of our physical and mental characteristics, rather than being more than the sum of our parts; about our societal ambition, saying that meritocracy may no longer be our shared objective; and about our compassion, saying that somehow we are institutionally unable to show it.

While I personally have much to learn and many more conversations to have, two months later I simply do not recognise this portrait of our country: systemic discrimination, inherited privilege, the implication that ends justify means, the assumption that only one ideology, anti-capitalism—or, more accurately, Marxism—can resolve some of the challenging issues in front of us, and the focus on inanimate objects rather than on minds and intents and souls.

Do we really want to centre debate on the vexed issue of statues, for example? How can the toppling of a statue ever be helpful in demonstrating our respect for the rule of law and due process, and, fundamentally,

how does a focus on pulling down and graffitiing statues help one poor child in North East Derbyshire or Newham or Norfolk?

Every day when I come to this place I am surrounded by reminders of the past. Many of those reminders are historical figures who at best ignored and at worst oppressed my family, my class and those who came before me who wanted to live their lives with the freedoms that I have today. They sent my forefathers down the mines to die early. They treated my rights and freedoms as their own personal playthings. They put people like me to death over hundreds of years. And yet the answer for me cannot be to focus on stone images or inherited sin; those statues are the reminder of an imperfect past, but also of how we built a better society based on the toils of individuals who can do both good and bad at the same time.

Our island has a story; it is gory, bloody, bloodthirsty and unacceptable at times by modern standards, but at the same time it is a unique story of progress and resolution. It is the shared endeavour of all of our history that now allows us the freedom to look at what might be, rather than to focus on what was.

And to do that, we simply must talk. I have heard too much in recent months about exhaustion and fatigue, and that some of us are no longer going to talk about issues of profound importance. Yet no one can be exhausted. Join the battle, be critical, stop cancelling your opponent; live that Voltairean notion that, other than those who advocate violence, we respect the right of anybody to say whatever they want, even if we disagree with it. One may erase men's voices, status or words temporarily, but is it not better to seek their souls than their silence?

So, as we end this parliamentary Session with profound questions hanging in the air, I hope we will return to these issues again in the autumn. These issues of profound importance need to be constantly in our thoughts, but, equally, constantly debated, rather than reduced to predetermined ossification.

5.44 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley). I share his desire to maintain the debate about Black Lives Matter and racism and discrimination in our society. I hope and expect that it will continue.

As we break for the summer recess, I have a long list of issues that I would have liked to raise in this debate. I have written letters to Ministers about many of them, but have not received a reply for several months. I could have picked any of them, but I will focus on an area of urgent concern that I hope will be put at the top of the Minister's to-do list—namely, the national scrubs crisis.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteers across the country who have worked very hard to rise to the challenge of the national scrubs crisis. Demand went up hugely. Previously, 20% of healthcare workers had to wear scrubs, but since covid-19 most of them now do so. The Government have simply not risen to meet that demand, so volunteers across the country—from Shetland to Devon, and at the Putney Scrub Hub—have stepped up. They have sewn and cut and worked all hours. I pay particular tribute to Rosie Taylor-Davies, who has led an amazing team of volunteers. They have made 4,000 scrub sets for the Royal Marsden Hospital

[*Fleur Anderson*]

and 3,000 sets for St George's Hospital, and have also supplied care homes, dentists and breast-screening clinics. These are not small orders; they meet a large, industrial-scale need.

In response to a recent survey, 61% of UK doctors said that the hospital where they work faces a shortage of scrubs. This situation risks the sharing and spreading of the virus. Dentists have told me that they did not feel that they needed to close down during this crisis. They could have stayed open, as happened in Germany, but they had to close because of the lack of PPE, including scrubs. That simply cannot happen if there is a second wave.

At the same time, there have been multimillion-pound contracts for PPE, which need to be explained. They include a £252 million agreement with Ayanda Capital Ltd, a company owned by the Horlick family through an entity based in Mauritius, which is a tax haven. In addition, £108 million-worth of PPE contracts were entered into with a chocolatier and a supplier of pigeon netting—strange choice. And an £18.5 million contract was awarded in May to Aventis Solutions, which is an employment agency with net assets of £332. During this week's hearing of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, the Secretary of State failed to provide any answers to the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) as to why those contracts were awarded and how much PPE they have actually provided.

We do not have a national plan on scrubs, so we are relying on volunteers such as Putney Scrub Hub in Roehampton, which has taken over squash courts and is working all hours to make the scrubs that we need. Garment factories are lying unused and garment workers are unemployed, even though we have this huge need. Months into the crisis, we are still relying on volunteers to meet this need. It cannot go on.

How much longer are the Government planning to rely on volunteers to provide basic health equipment? Why is there no sustainable national scrubs manufacturing plan, with a proper UK supply chain using garment factories to meet the needs of all of our health workers? We have applauded them on Thursdays and we know how much we owe them, yet many of them lack the basic equipment. Medical students have been told to provide their own. Doctors have been told to bring in tracksuits. People have been told that they need a call-out for children's pyjamas for medical need.

Will the Minister please put this issue at the top of his to-do list over the summer recess? Will he bring together the Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department of Health and Social Care to put together and deliver an urgent scrubs plan before we return in September, so that all our NHS and healthcare workers have the equipment they need, and all the volunteers at Putney Scrub Hub and across the country can put away their sewing machines, put down their scissors and get back to their normal lives?

5.49 pm

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): Bury football club was elected to the Football League in 1893. It was expelled in August last year due to the financial mismanagement of two people, Stewart Day and Steve Dale. A community

has lost part of its heritage and tradition and something that has linked generations for more than 100 years. How can that possibly be correct?

I cannot overstate the loss of Bury football club, in an emotional, social and economic sense, to the town that I represent. It is a disgrace. The English Football League did nothing to assist Bury. It allowed people to run the club into the ground. It put nothing in place and did not represent the interests of the fans of the club—a club that is so close to the hearts of thousands of people I represent.

I raise this issue now because many other clubs in the English Football League are facing significant financial challenges. Many other clubs will potentially find themselves in a position where they are on the market and people will be looking, as with Bury, to buy them for a pound, take advantage of the support and financial support of the fans, take money out of the club and vanish, which is essentially what happened in Bury's situation.

The EFL is not, and has not in the last 12 months, been fit for purpose in terms of how it addresses and represents the interests of the fans, as highlighted by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, which said clearly that more must be done to safeguard the interests of football fans who rely on their football club for friendship and camaraderie. For many people in my town, it was the only time they went out. One man in his 70s had been going to Gigg Lane since he was a boy and those were his only friends over that time. He has lost those things. The football club is much missed.

I fear that many other football clubs will be in Bury's position. The EFL, since the debacle with Bury, has not changed the fit and proper person test. It has not put in place any procedures to address the problems that the Bury situation created. Indeed, football clubs are nearly unique in that their customer base, 99 times out of 100, cares more for the company than the actual directors.

As politicians, we must realise that football clubs are more than simply the playthings of individuals who want to take money out and take advantage of fans. They can be engines for social regeneration. Once a club like Bury has been lost—I hope to goodness it does not happen to any other clubs—the effect is felt by local businesses that rely on the club. Businesses have gone out of business in my constituency because the football club does not exist. What is the EFL doing about that? Nothing, and nothing has changed in the last 12 months.

I call on the EFL to face up to the issue. It must ensure that the fans of clubs all over the country do not face the same fate as those of Bury, that they have a defender in the EFL, and that it is an organisation that will make sure that the people who take on such clubs have the right character and financial backing to properly represent the interests of the fans who are dedicated to their clubs and have been for many years.

Bury was in division one at the start of the season, which has now finished. If the EFL is going to give financial assistance, by whatever means, to other clubs facing a similar financial situation to the one that Bury faced, it cannot be right that it simply turned its back on professional football in Bury. I urge it to work with all in Bury to ensure that football continues to be played in Gigg Lane at the earliest opportunity.

I give my thanks to everyone who has worked so hard at Bury AFC. It is a phoenix club and, in the last few days, it gained membership of the North West Counties Football League, which is a fantastic achievement. Everybody involved in that club should be extremely proud of everything that they are doing to resurrect football in my town, but that does not get away from the fact that Bury was treated appallingly. I hope to goodness that no other fans go through what Bury fans have gone through in the last 12 months.

5.54 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): We come to the end of this parliamentary term in the sober knowledge that in the past six months more than 45,000 families in the UK have suffered the devastating loss of bereavement due to covid-19, many thousands more have suffered the trauma of a terrifying serious illness and millions now face job insecurity. I pay tribute to the amazing team of staff at King's College Hospital, to those working in social care and in our schools, and to all the key workers who continue to work through the long, hard slog of covid-19.

For many of my constituents, there will be no rest or peace of mind over the coming weeks, and this summer will continue to bring challenges and hardship. Many private renters in my constituency live every day with anxiety about what will happen to them after 22 August. So many have suffered a loss of income due to coronavirus and are in rent arrears as a result. It is extraordinary that the Government have stubbornly persisted with their plan to end the temporary ban on evictions in just a month's time; not only that, but it has put the burden of proof on the tenants to demonstrate the impact that coronavirus has had on them, forcing people to disclose deeply personal information in court just to keep a roof over their head. The Government ask landlords and tenants to work together to resolve problems, but there is an immense power imbalance between landlords and tenants, and many abuses of power result from the Government's ill-informed, ill-conceived approach.

I pay tribute to social care workers, who have done so much to support and care for our most vulnerable loved ones during the pandemic, often placing their own lives at risk without access to testing or PPE to keep them safe. It is shameful in this context that the Government are content to clap social care workers during the pandemic, but not to award them a pay increase like other key workers. One of the most important priorities for our coronavirus recovery is reform of the social care sector, and improving the pay and conditions of those who work in social care—who have witnessed heartbreaking scenarios, and been there to care for and comfort the most vulnerable in our communities during this time—is critical to that.

Finally, families across my constituency should be looking forward to a summer break—holidays, day trips or a relaxing time at home. But it is impossible for people to relax when they have no money and their prospects of finding work at any time in the near future look uncertain. That is the situation for freelance workers, new starters and sole directors of limited companies, who have seen their income decimated but have still received no support from the Government. The plight of 3 million people across the UK who have been left behind during the pandemic is desperate, and I urge the Government to do much more this summer to ensure that they are supported.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish you, all House staff and Members a safe, restful and healthy break over the summer, but in doing so I urge the Government to turn their attention with urgency to those for whom this summer brings only struggle.

5.58 pm

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this final debate before the summer recess. I am going to talk about one specific issue that is linked to the constituency that I have the honour of representing, but which also affects the whole country—that is, the use of social media in prisons.

This is a particularly pernicious crime. Social media is often used by convicted criminals to brag openly about how they are continuing to break our laws even from behind bars, and how they are still enjoying freedoms that should have been taken away from them, such as communicating with the outside world. These social media posts display a lack of respect for our criminal justice system, and, even worse than that, they show complete contempt for the victims of crime, their families and friends.

Victims and their loved ones should not have to live with the fear and anxiety that perpetrators can continue to have a presence in the community or even use social media to contact them. It often feels like the person who victimised them is taunting them on social media when they are posting from inside prison. The use of modern technology to post on social media is a way prisoners can essentially break out of prison walls and carry on causing anguish and misery to all those they have hurt. This is a completely unacceptable state of affairs, and it cannot be allowed to continue.

This anguish has repeatedly been felt in Ipswich since the brutal murder of Tavis Spencer-Aitkens in June 2018, which left our town in a state of shock. Five men were sent to prison in connection with Tavis's death—four for murder and one for manslaughter. It is now my understanding that all five of them have made social media posts since being locked up. Most of us can only imagine the additional pain this has caused Tavis's family as they seek some sort of peace after his tragic death.

I want to go into detail about three of these cases that have been brought to my attention since my election and set out clearly how this problem has persisted. The first case occurred in January, when Callum Plaats, who was convicted of Tavis's manslaughter, posted a picture of himself grinning on Facebook, along with the caption, "Five years left lightwork"—five years being the remaining amount of time he expects to serve in prison if he only serves half his 14-year sentence. At the time, I called for Plaats to serve his full sentence given this contemptuous and insulting act of criminality from behind bars, and I stand by that today.

I thank the Prisons Minister for meeting me following that case and setting out the work that the Government are doing to combat social media use in prison. The extra £100 million being invested in detecting mobile phones in prisons and stopping them getting in there in the first place is welcome, and I am in no doubt about the Government's commitment to tackling this issue, but two further cases of social media use by Tavis's killers since then have caused further concern that more needs to be done.

[Tom Hunt]

In April, Aristote Yenge, who was convicted of Tavis's murder, posted on Instagram calling on people in the community to get in contact with him. In the post, he brazenly detailed the prison he is in and his prisoner number. I called on Facebook to take this account down, which it did, and the Prison Service launched an investigation. But just this month, Kyreis Davies, who was also convicted of murder, posted a picture of himself posing on Snapchat. This latest post is a particularly bitter pill to swallow, after Davies recently had his sentence reduced on appeal from a minimum of 21 years to just 16 years. I have spoken before in the House about the anger that this sudden reduction has caused in Ipswich. His recent criminal communication from prison has only added to the disbelief and confusion in our community about why this murderer will now be released, a free man, in his early 30s.

Ultimately, I think all of us can probably accept that it is completely unacceptable that individuals convicted of murder and asked to spend a life sentence in prison are able to freely communicate on social media from inside prison. It is against the rules, yet it continues. Every single time they post, the hurt and anguish felt by friends and family of the victims only increases. When this House comes back in September, the House must debate this and the Government must take action to eliminate the use of social media in prisons. Yes, the investment in technology to detect mobile devices is welcome, but we should go further. There should be a strong punishment for all these individuals who use social media in prison, to serve as a deterrent for anybody else who considers doing that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The winding-up speeches will begin at 6.32 pm, and I have six names on the call list, so if everybody sticks to five minutes, the last person will not quite get five minutes, but almost everybody will get equal time.

6.3 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I want to start by sharing some news. I was really pleased and proud to become an auntie over lockdown, and I am very excited for Suzanne, Graeme and Fraser James Thewliss, the newest addition to the family.

There have been lots of babies born in lockdown, and my heart goes out to all the families who have found it particularly difficult not being able to see new babies, meet their families and cuddle. It has been incredibly difficult for many people to come to terms with that, and I hope that there will be joy and jubilation when all these families are reunited.

Can the Minister investigate when breastfeeding support groups and other groups that parents have not been able to go to and socialise in, as they usually would in the new days with a baby, will be able to safely start back up again? That is a great source of support for many new parents. If he could also look at support for milk banks, that would be very useful. There was a piece on the BBC this morning, presented by Victoria Derbyshire, with Dr Natalie Shenker of the Human Milk Foundation speaking about the importance of milk banking to many families, particularly in lockdown. It has had very little Government support, and some support would be welcome to ensure that this sector is well protected as part of the NHS.

It has been heartwarming to see the groups in Glasgow that have come together during lockdown, providing support to so many people in our communities. I have a huge list of names I would love to read out as a thank you, but I will restrict it to three. I want to thank Possibilities for Each and Every Kid—PEEK—whose PEEK-a-chew van managed to deliver 140,000 meals to families in Glasgow during lockdown. It fundraised for this and it was really well received. I also wish to thank the Sikh food bank and Charandeep Singh, who has organised 70,000 meals going out to families in Glasgow since April. This will be kept going until the end of August and, again, it has been incredibly well received by many people who cannot get the food that they would usually be able to get and by older people who are particularly isolated. I also thank the Sistema Scotland Big Noise Govanhill and congratulate it on its seventh birthday, which falls this week. It has managed to get devices out to young people in Govanhill so that they can continue with their music lessons over lockdown. It has provided data to those devices so that the young people who did not have internet connections at home could get that.

The more serious issue I wanted to raise before the House rises for recess is the two-child limit and the rape clause, which Members know I have raised on many occasions. The figures released just last week by the Government have highlighted that 911,190 children across the UK are now missing out on valuable support because they happen to be born as the third child in their family. Restricting child tax credits and universal credit to the first two children in the family is having a hugely detrimental effect. It was already punishing families for circumstances that they could do nothing about, and the coronavirus has only made that worse.

I pay tribute to the Church of England and the Child Poverty Action Group, which have campaigned relentlessly on this issue, along with many women's organisations, under the banner of "All Kids Count". Inherent in this policy is a judgment and stigma about the number of children poor families have, and this myth of the "welfare queen" that has gone about for so many years. The Government will say this is about making sure that those in work can make the same choices as those supporting themselves through benefits, but that is not the case, because nobody can predict the future. Nobody can predict the course of their life, from when their children are born, all the way through, until they leave the family home. It only takes a death, somebody losing their job or a family splitting up to plunge a family into a circumstance, which is why we ought to have a social security safety net.

The current safety net is full of holes and issues such as the two-child policy are now driving child poverty in this country. I urge the Government to reconsider and to reinstate these benefits, because this a trap for so many families, from which they cannot work their way out. We are talking about low-paid families—families who are working. The vast majority of people who would be entitled to this benefit are in low-paid work. They are the very people Members have talked about as having kept the economy going: people working on the frontline, in shops and as cleaners, doing their utmost to keep us going. So the Government owe it to these families to keep them going, to make sure that their children can have food put on the table for them and that no child is

punished because of the size of their family. After all, we cannot predict the future and nobody should be punished because of it.

6.8 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Before the House adjourns for the summer recess, there are many points I wish to raise. I look forward to a fully functioning Parliament, when it is safe to do so.

Unfortunately, Southend airport has been hit by easyJet losses, arguments about section 106 and about night flights—we had a good meeting with the Minister recently. I congratulate all the local police officers on the way they have tackled antisocial behaviour, which has spiked recently. But I think the money that has been wasted on restoring the Belvedere is to be questioned—there is lots of graffiti back on it again. Like my neighbouring colleagues, I was horrified when I learned about proposals to reorganise local government, with an elected mayor, which we had not been consulted on. It is just not going to happen, but I think it would be helpful if the Government gave the local authority leaders a steer as to the way they see future local government reorganisation.

The endometriosis inquiry is carrying on, and I am delighted to say to colleagues that, inspired by my constituent, Carla Cressy, we will be issuing our report in the autumn. Billy Mansell is a wonderful constituent working for people who suffer from fibromyalgia and he has launched a new initiative called “Sphere Master”—I congratulate him. I am delighted that the Government have introduced Lucy’s law and delighted that so many of my newly elected colleagues are strong on animal welfare measures.

Southend must and will become a city. The Duke of Edinburgh will be 100 next year and Her Majesty the Queen will be celebrating her 75th anniversary a year afterwards, so we need a city competition and Southend can become a city.

I congratulate the Music Man Project on securing a grant of £10,000 from covid relief funding and we will be taking our wonderful show for people with learning disabilities to Broadway.

I am so sorry that I have to announce that the inspirational Paul Karlake, a constituent who was a wonderful local artist, has died as a result of coronavirus. I send my sympathy to his relatives. I also greatly miss Dame Vera Lynn. She was an east ender like myself—wonderful. Let us have no arguments about a statue to Vera; let us get one put up. On that subject, the British Monarchists Society also feels that there should be a statue to Her Majesty the Queen to coincide with her 75th anniversary.

A constituent—I shall just call her Barbara—has tried everything to get some financial support during the pandemic. She cannot get income support. She does not qualify for the self-employment scheme. She is an events organiser. I want the Department to give her help.

This year is the 100th anniversary of the mayoralty of Southend. John Lamb is the present mayor, so he will still be the mayor during the 100th anniversary’s inception.

At Ekco Park in the constituency I represent, there is an argument between leaseholders and freeholders about the upkeep of people’s properties. That needs to be settled. Everyone would recognise that we need housing,

but it is just not on to put more houses on green areas in Lundy Close. I am sick to death of Travellers arriving. My thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois)—we want the Government to stop Travellers and the antisocial behaviour.

I visited Mr Sandhu’s son in prison in the Czech Republic. The trial is going on at the moment. I hope we get a good outcome.

I am delighted that we have tax breaks for motor homes; they deserve it. I thank the Czech ambassador for visiting war graves. I congratulate the 3rd Chalkwell Bay Sea Scouts on getting the Queen’s award for voluntary service. I was delighted to take part in the Jack Petchey virtual judging.

The Maldives have been readmitted to the Commonwealth; my interest is in the Members’ book. They have been hit over tuna and hit over air bridges. Now, they are on the human rights priority countries list. Absolute disgrace.

I pay tribute to the coronavirus action group, and I am delighted that a statue of Eric Cole will be in place on the Ekco site. I congratulate Audrey Snee on her work there.

We have presidential libraries; we need prime ministerial libraries. It was a shame that the VE day celebrations could not go on as we had wanted. I am organising a VJ day celebration on 15 August.

Sadly, again in Southend West, we lost wonderful Dr Zaidi to coronavirus. I congratulate Westcliff High School for Boys on its centenary celebrations. I am glad that we are leaving the European Union. I praise all those people who have contributed on covid-19. c2c continues to give a rotten service. We should not have TV licence fees for the over-75s; some of the producers are paid too much. As far as schools are concerned, with the 11-plus, we want guidance on the delay in the test as soon as possible from the Government.

I wish every colleague a very happy summer recess.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Congratulations, Sir David Amess. Wonderful. That was one continuous sentence, I swear.

6.13 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). I reassure him that, as far as I am concerned and others on this side of the House, Southend is already a city. We already know that.

My parliamentary aide, who looks after my speeches in this House and gives me some of the things that I say, has got her bags packed. She is understandably far away at this stage. She is probably very pleased to have the recess in place. I am especially pleased to represent my constituency of Strangford. Everyone here will know—I say this very honestly and very respectfully to everybody—that it is, without doubt, the greatest constituency in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I am also proud of my heritage and of my culture, and I am going to speak about that very quickly in the short time that I have. I am a member of the Orange tradition—the Loyal Orange Lodge in Kircubbin, the Apprentice Boys of Derry in Comber, and the Royal Black Preceptory in Ballywalter.

[Jim Shannon]

This year was a very, very different 12 July for us in the Province, because we did not have the parades. We in the Orange tradition and the loyal orders took a decision not to parade—not to bring people together, for specific reasons of safety because of the pandemic. I absolutely hold to my tradition. There are events held Province-wide that have never had an issue and that see neighbours of every background—nationalist and Unionist, Protestant and Roman Catholic—enjoying music and a carnival feeling, bringing money into the local economy and having family days off work together.

The celebrations for the Twelfth this year were different but none the less still precious. The loyalists took the decision not to march, but the bands walked the designated routes with their social distancing and did many, many parades around the villages and the towns. The bands range from flute bands to silver bands, to accordion bands, to pipe bands, to brass bands, bringing an absolute volume of rhythm together. There is music from many generations, from hymns to classic pieces—all are played as the band marches on, the streets thronging with happy children, grannies in their foldaway chairs, and families waving their Union flags, and their Ulster flags as well, enjoying the family day out. I give credit to the ordinary, decent, good people of the Province.

The Orange Order made the courageous decision not to have the official Twelfth, but there was commemoration of the battle of the Somme when the Orangemen of the 36th (Ulster) Division stormed onwards with their orange sashes or ribbons on and held high, with the war cry, “C’mon boys—no surrender!” The decision not to march this year was made to protect the vulnerable from this dreadful disease, and we applaud that. We celebrated glorious garden Twelfths. We did not congregate; we kept socially distanced. We did not line up in our thousands on our streets, but we did celebrate with each other in a safe way. Outside gatherings were restricted to 30 people. I thank all those who thought outside the box to allow the tradition to continue, but in a safe way.

We had bands who applied to walk and marched in communities, such as the Sons of Ulster flute band, who marched in and out of every cul-de-sac in the local Bowtown estate in Newtownards to enable people to come to their front door and enjoy a taste of the Twelfth while remaining safe. The North Down flute band put on a display for elderly residents in Newtownards. We also had the Newtownards Protestant Boys, the ex-servicemen and veterans band, the Newtownards Melody band and the William Strain memorial band, who all marched in different estates and areas to bring the Twelfth to people at home.

Down on the Ards peninsula, where I live, the Ballywalter flute band and the Ballyhalbert flute band marched, as well as the Auld Boys flute band. The hon. Members for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) will know what I mean when I refer to the Auld Boys. They are people who used to be in the bands in younger days and then got together when they were 50-plus and joined together in a band. That was the band that we had in our lodge. The Auld Boys were out there and we went to support them as well. The Comber bands, the Ballygowan bands, the William Savage Memorial Toy band from Killyleagh and the Ballynahinch Protestant Boys band

from Langley ensured that people could stay at home and enjoy with family what we usually take to the streets to celebrate.

I love the Twelfth. I enjoy the craic. I am proud of how the people of Northern Ireland, in the face of adversity, determined to uphold the tradition as well as was possible. The reason is that it means more than a tradition and more than something to do. It is a part of what makes us who we are, and of what makes me proud to sit in this place—our love of our country, our heritage and our Queen. I want to congratulate the Orange Order, the bandsmen and women, and every person who would usually throng the streets. Thank you for doing this well—for remembering in safety.

There are only 355 days until the next 12 July, which I am really looking forward to already, for the laughter, the smiles, and, hopefully, no fear of covid-19. I wish everyone here, especially the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis), a visit to Northern Ireland next year, if that is still on the cards.

6.18 pm

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): It is a particular pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), whose passion for this place and for the Union I hugely admire. He will not remember doing it, but a few weeks ago he intervened on me and at that point I felt like a proper MP, so I thank him for that. It is probably unconventional to say so, but I am pleased to be followed by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis), who has ingrained in my mind Stoke-on-Trent North, Kids Grove and Talke. I am sure he has spoken about them in this place more in the past six months than they have been referred to in the past six years, so well done to him.

In my maiden speech, I talked about a lot of my constituency’s issues coming under the heading of infrastructure, and that is what I want to talk about today—first, the importance of reopening Grove station. I am delighted that it has made the list of stations to be considered for funding to be reopened this summer. I have told my constituents that I will keep going until it is opened or I lose my seat—I hope that it will be the former. My constituents have wanted this for 40 years, and it will take people off congested roads and will connect the area better. It will support our efforts on climate change, and I hope that we can make it happen.

That is not our only transport issue. We would like better cycleways, and we are pleased with the Government’s commitment on that. We also have problems with our roads. Beyond the usual potholes that everyone has in their constituency, we have particular problems with the A34 and the A420. In normal times, there is crash after crash and near-miss after near-miss, as well as huge problems of littering. Coming to an Adjournment debate near you, with permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, are the A34 and the A420. [Interruption.] Indeed.

One reason for needing better transport links is the increasing population in the constituency. A huge number of houses have been built in the constituency, and another 5,500 are coming in the next decade. Most people in the constituency accept that the country needs more houses and that we need places for people to live in. Issues arise, however—apart from when it is right on their doorstep—when the proportion of affordable homes is driven down by developers on the grounds of viability;

when houses are built to standards that are not environmentally friendly, or when they are simply built to low standards, with all sorts of problems that go far beyond the snagging that we might expect from new developments.

Along with those houses, we need new services. We need more school places and, in particular, health services. I am having productive conversations with ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care about that. The population of Didcot has grown by 38% in the past five years, so GP services and others are bursting at the seams. Those infrastructure issues are for when we return from the recess, but when I go back to my constituency, one of the big things that I want to do—other Members have touched on this—is support local businesses, shops, pubs, bars, community groups, charities and so on.

I had a bit of an issue last month when I tweeted that I was going to spend a day visiting shops, and would try to buy something in each one I went in. The local press reported that I was going to visit every single business in the constituency and buy something. That was a particular concern, given the number of estate agents in my constituency. Fortunately, the good people of Wantage and Didcot do not believe everything they read.

6.22 pm

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): May I begin by thanking the amazing people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke for their tireless work during the pandemic? I am delighted to nominate a few of those unsung heroes: Amy Stephens, who led Team Chatterley and 50 volunteers to deliver meals across the area; Scrubs for Stoke, which sewed 10,000 items or more for our local NHS—the Royal Stoke University Hospital and the Haywood walk-in centre; Adam Yates and Carol Shanahan from the Hubb Foundation, which has delivered over 100,000 meals during the pandemic; and a gentleman called Richard Stephenson Evans, who works for Kidsgrove Tesco and has given up his time, again and again, for the community of Kidsgrove and Talke. He has delivered once again during the pandemic. If ever a man deserved a knighthood, it must be him. I hope that that was heard by those with the opportunity.

Ceramics are where I want to go to next, because I cannot for the life of me believe that at Chequers the Prime Minister does not have Stoke-on-Trent tableware to eat from—[*Interruption*]*—*which is a shame. We need to make sure that that is corrected, with better Government procurement of ceramics. We need to make sure that whenever I visit a Government Department and turn one of its plates or mugs, it says “Made in England: made in Stoke-on-Trent”. Churchill China and Steelite are wonderful additions to the UK economy, and we need to see the 5% VAT rate extended to supply chains such as ceramics. The business rates holiday should be extended to allow those businesses to keep going, because they are vital to the economy of my constituency. I hope that the Government will back the #DineSafe campaign, which copies health advice from Spain, and says that if people have chipped plates they should replace them—with, of course, Stoke-on-Trent’s finest, which will stop coronavirus seeping in past the glaze.

Chatterley Whitfield is the next thing I come on to. It is an amazing colliery, the largest deep coalmine site in Europe. This site will be an industrial heritage park in

the future. I have put my political career on the line over this site. Not a single predecessor of mine has spoken about this site since 2010. For 10 years, the site has been ignored in this House—according to the House of Commons Library, in case anyone thinks I am lying—so I raise the issue. I have an industrial heritage park coming along, and we have Historic England, Chatterley Whitfield Friends and Stoke-on-Trent City Council with a long-term plan.

We will put a museum on there, bars and some retail units. We will turn some into a teaching school for Staffordshire and Keele universities, and the rest will be open for the private sector to bring about the business park revival that is already on the site, regenerating, restoring, protecting and preserving our industrial heritage—from the pits to the pots is how we are known in Stoke-on-Trent, and we must ensure that that history is not forgotten. I implore the Government: I want half a million for a feasibility study to ensure that that is possible. My grandad always told me, “God loves a trier.”

Price & Kensington is another thing. Section 216 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 will be looked at in this House in a ten-minute rule Bill debate on 22 September. I am looking to get rid of a level 3 fine, leaving it unlimited, because Price & Kensington, an amazing teapot factory, is being allowed to rot by a rogue owner. A private owner is allowing it to fall into disrepair, stuffing it with mattresses and allowing it to become a fire safety hazard. The fine should be unlimited. The measure was a great piece of legislation brought in under Labour during the Tony Blair years, but I want to see an unlimited fine so that the judges can decide how bad the damage to the community and to safety is, therefore making owners responsible for the lands that they own. I hope to have cross-party support for that.

Silicon Stoke is the next thing on the agenda. VX Fiber and the city council have teamed up, with £9.2 million of Government investment, to install gigabit broadband into the home directly. Staffordshire University is the leading video games development university in the country, and we have some of the best 4G download speeds, so I want a 5G testbed in Stoke-on-Trent. I want the levelling-up agenda to take place by making us the heart of the video games industry—with the likes of Carse & Waterman Productions and Reels in Motion, we can see the full potential. Let us introduce a video games investment fund, encourage more small studios to access and benefit from the video games tax relief, provide rent-free accommodation and promote Silicon Stoke.

On the Stoke to Leek line, we have not seen a single station reopen since Beeching. In fact, we have seen further cuts. I want to see a line that will link us up and potentially give me back a station in Milton, giving the people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke better rail access. At the moment, the line is there, but it is mothballed. Network Rail has to maintain the bridges but, guess what, gets no money back for that.

Finally, the great town of Kidsgrove: I am delighted that the Labour-run town council has backed my plan for CCTV to be upgraded, and with the £25 million in the town deal we have. We will deliver a fantastic health and wellbeing centre. Kidsgrove sports centre must be delivered—we have 63% more inactive people and some of the worst childhood obesity stats in the country.

6.27 pm

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): It is an unusual pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis).

I first give a shout out for the many people in my constituency who have absolutely gone the extra mile during the coronavirus pandemic, whether the staff at the local hospitals—Weardale or Shotley Bridge—the fantastic work of local doctors in care homes, the people at Hunger Handout in Leadgate who I will visit over the summer recess, the people at Glenroyd House in Consett who have been making scrubs for doctors and helping out with food parcels, and many local groups from Maiden Law to Wearhead. I say a huge thank you for everything that they have done.

I also thank those on the Government Front Bench who have visited my constituency over the past few months. Unfortunately, the Northern Powerhouse Minister and the Environment Secretary who came to visit are no longer in post. When I informed the party chairman of this the other day, she was rather worried. However, I do not want to discourage any other Ministers from coming to North West Durham, and I have already extended an invitation to the Minister for Defence Procurement to visit Cook Defence Systems in Stanhope, which makes the tracks for all our armoured fighting vehicles. I have a commitment from the Health Secretary to visit at some point—we are desperate for a new community hospital at Shotley Bridge—and from the Education Secretary or one of his team to visit the excellent Derwentside College, which produces such fantastic vocational education for young people.

Shotley Bridge is my top campaign, but my second big local campaign has been for a feasibility study of the possibility of getting a transport train link or guided bus link back into Consett. We have one of the largest populations in the country without access to a fixed public transport system, and I am really hoping to hear good news later in the summer from the Department for Transport. If the Minister could possibly give the Department a nudge, I would be most grateful, as would my constituents.

My predecessor as Member of Parliament for North West Durham said that she did not have any friends who were Tories, but since I joined this House I would like to think that I have made at least two friends on the Opposition Benches. One of them is the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), who is the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, on which I serve. She has allowed me to work closely with my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) and to lead on the National Audit Office report and the PAC report on gambling harm.

That reference to gambling harm brings me to the other Opposition Member whom I would like to think I can now call a friend: the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who gave a passionate and emotional speech earlier. I am glad to see that she is still in her place. I really hope that later this year, once we have looked at the Gambling Act 2005 and after the review that is due to take place, the Government will introduce legislation. It is really important that the country looks at gambling, which is a huge issue for many people—particularly the poorest and the most vulnerable—in many constituencies throughout the country.

I wish to finish with two other small things. First, I thank the Government for listening to me on the motorhomes tax earlier this year; the workers at Elddis are most grateful. I also thank the Government for finally bringing forward the removal of the toilet tax. As co-chair of the all-party group on local democracy, I know that that means an awful lot to really hard-stretched local councils.

6.31 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to be the SNP lead on the summer Adjournment again; I think this is now the fourth occasion. I note that this time I am the 37th person to speak in this debate, which is a record—it is usually far fewer than that.

It was good to see hon. Members continue some of the great traditions of the House. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) on becoming the apprentice of the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). Perhaps we should call him Anakin for the purposes of this exchange. In the finest tradition, he raised a lot of constituency issues, and I will try to do that too in my allotted time.

I see the Minister, the Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household, the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), is in his place, so I have two quick observations. First, when he was in the Ministry of Defence, he always promised me that Glasgow South West would get contracts. He always promised that there would be contracts for shipyards and contracts for Thales. Perhaps when he responds he can tell us where those elusive contracts are and update me on their progress.

Secondly, I try to keep out of English-only debates, but if by next year Southend is not a city, I predict that the hell that will be unleashed on the Government will be a considerable one. I am sure that the hon. Member for Southend West will continue to push for that.

We always read in the newspapers that MPs are now going on holiday. It is not a holiday; it is a recess. From my email inbox and the post that my office gets, I can say only that my office has never, ever been busier than it has been during the covid pandemic. I assure new Members that it is not always like this. The work has been considerable, and I pay particular personal tribute to the greatest constituency office staff in these islands, which is of course that of Glasgow South West. I pay particular thanks to my constituency office staff: Dominique Uebas, Scott McFarlane, Tony McCue, Keith Gibb and the great Roza Salih, who is the office manager. I pay tribute to all the constituency office staff of all hon. Members across these islands.

Many hon. Members have quite rightly congratulated the constituency organisations that have stepped up to assist the most vulnerable during the covid pandemic. I have been particularly pleased, as a trustee of Feeding Britain, to secure £50,000 from that organisation for short-term and long-term food projects. One of those is the Ridgeway Dairy and Drumoyne Community Council free packed lunch service for the people of Drumoyne. The Govan Youth Information Project did a similar project for young people in Govan. I am particularly pleased that the Scottish Government have stepped up and provided significant amounts of money for the communities of Govan and Pollok during the covid pandemic.

Like other hon. Members, I want to express my condolences to all those who have lost loved ones due to covid. I have been particularly saddened to see the families of some of my regular constituency correspondents get in touch with the office to say that they had lost them. I am particularly thinking of Mr John Dunlop, a person who regularly corresponded with the constituency office, and I express my sincere condolences to his family.

I am afraid to say that we have also, unfortunately, lost a number of young people who have taken their own lives in Glasgow South West. That has been particularly hurtful for the community, and I do want to touch on this subject. I want to thank the Turf Youth Project, which has organised social-distanced meetings to communicate with young people and their families, and which is now moving on to an online survey. I believe this is a major issue that we are going to have to deal with not just during the pandemic, but as we get out of it. We need to make sure that young people have opportunities, not just job opportunities—I will come on to that—but creative opportunities. We need to make sure that they have the necessary support, the club infrastructure and all those things so that they have a creative outlet to express themselves. It is very important that young people have that creative opportunity, whether through music, film making or any of those activities.

I am particularly pleased—a number of hon. Members have referred to this—that the Women and Equalities Committee is looking at the whole issue of body shape and the pressure on young people to have a certain look and a certain perspective on life. Rosshall secondary school invited elected Members to the school to discuss its projects, and concerns about that came up a number of times.

There have to be job opportunities for young people, and when we come back in September we really need to have a discussion to make sure that young people are not discriminated against. We now know it is easier to make young people redundant than older people. Why is that the case? Because, under statutory legislation, people under the age of 22 are entitled to only half a week's wage for redundancy pay, whereas for someone over 40 years of age it is one and a half weeks. We perhaps need to think about that issue, but also, for those hon. Members who spotted my face mask earlier, about the WASPI issue. The slogan of the 1950s-born women is, "We paid in, you pay out—give us our retirement and give young people work." We need to have a discussion about how we merge those issues. There will be some economic thinking that all political parties have to engage in, and we should now debate whether the old ways of looking at things are appropriate and whether we now require new thinking.

There has been a record number of speakers, as I said earlier, and perhaps one of the reasons is the lack of Backbench Business debates. I am particularly thinking of the aviation sector, which 140 Members have asked to participate in a debate on. I think that is really important.

I hope the Minister will apologise to the people of Glasgow for the Government closing half the jobcentres there two years ago, with the news that they are going to have to reopen them. That is perhaps an indication of some of the things the Department for Work and Pensions has got wrong. I ask the Minister to pressure the Home Office to investigate how Glasgow asylum seekers have

been treated during the covid pandemic. Being locked up in hotels and given food that is completely and utterly inappropriate is no way to deal with those people.

In closing, let me touch on the issue of statues, which the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) raised. I perhaps did not agree with everything he said but we need to have a debate on statues. They are symbols and we are going to have to deal with that appropriately. What we cannot have, as we have had in this country, is people giving Nazi salutes to cenotaphs or statues of Churchill. That is perhaps one of the most sickening things that we have seen in the last few months, and I am sure that the whole House will agree with me in condemning that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope that at the end of the debate—at 7 o'clock—you will rise Alice Cooper-style and declare that school's out for summer. I congratulate all hon. Members and hope that they have a good summer back in their constituencies, working with the great organisations that are out there.

6.40 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I start by thanking every single one of the hon. Members who stayed behind; we have heard from over 30 hon. Members today. My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) has asked me to remind the Minister that there are 30 Backbench Business debates still waiting to be allocated, so perhaps he could do that. For hon. Members who have not done this before, the hon. Member for Guildford (Angela Richardson) made her maiden speech at one of these events, and there she is now—she will be doing the Adjournment debate—so she has got well stuck in, and her maiden speech was not that long ago either.

Hon. Members raised a number of issues and I will gather them under various headings. The issues of businesses and additional support from Government were raised by the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti), my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris)—she persevered with Martin's fund—and my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

I do not have to remind right hon. and hon. Members that this is an incredibly unusual time. Many hon. Members mentioned covid-19, our local heroes and the difficulties for people and businesses, including the hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) and for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft). I have to agree with the hon. Lady about the steel industry. My friend Nic Dakin played an important role in ensuring that steel remained in Scunthorpe, and I think my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), when that all broke, was in India trying to organise a meeting with Tata.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy) talked about the importance of music during this time. The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) showed us how lives have changed in 180 days. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) talked about our local heroes in the NHS and the leadership of the First Minister in Wales. She passed me a note earlier that said, "Visit Wales"—but only if socially distanced—and, of course, I have to add Northern Ireland and Scotland and every other part of our wonderful nation to that.

[Valerie Vaz]

The right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) talked about the issue of cash, which is very important. The hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) all talked about the difficulties in their constituencies under covid-19.

The hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) will be surprised that I agree with him—I think that there should be less interference from the Executive. Parliament is sovereign and we need to review the Coronavirus Act and the immense powers under it. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer) and my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) talked about the scrubs crisis. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) mentioned our key workers, particularly in King’s College Hospital—the doctors and all the workers, including nurses, care workers and those who push the trolleys and feed people who have had to go to hospital.

I do not know how the hon. Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) did this, but he managed to get on the call list, very quietly. Other hon. Members mentioned their constituencies—the support, the successes and some of their concerns, which I know the Minister is noting down carefully. That includes the hon. Members for Mansfield (Ben Bradley), for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford), for Buckingham (Greg Smith), for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), for Bury North (James Daly), for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) and for Wantage (David Johnston). I say to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) that we were very jealous when the former Chancellor, George Osborne, gave Tristram Hunt, the then MP, extra money for the Potteries. Hopefully, the hon. Gentleman has made the call and that will be answered.

Many Members touched on human rights and our international links. Our country should be a beacon of hope around the world. As I do every week, although the Leader of the House is not here, I will mention Nazanin, Anousheh and Kylie. The hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) talked about human rights and the Uyghur. The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) said how important it is that we keep up the international links, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle). The hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) said we must continue the debate after the death of George Floyd. I put on record our condolences to the family on the death of Representative John Lewis, who I thought would see us through this difficult time. He stood shoulder to shoulder with Dr Martin Luther King and Reverend Jesse Jackson. What he did say was:

“Don’t give up and don’t give in”,

and we won’t. We have seen how, during the coronavirus, our communities have come together, so that we can build a new world for the nephew of the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), Fraser James, and all the babies born in lockdown.

I do not know what the hon. Members for Southend West (Sir David Amess) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon) have done. I think they must be on the naughty step. Usually they open this debate. Again I reiterate my support for Southend becoming a city, and I will absolutely do all I can to support the hon. Member for Southend West.

Finally, I want to thank Mr Speaker and you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and everyone who has pulled this House together, including all the House staff and all our staff. I think we can put away our Zoom faces. They are actually quite scary, aren’t they? I do not want to do that any more. I have to say to all hon. and right hon. Members and everyone around the country that we have all been magnificent and you have all been magnificent. We will not be having a rest; we will still be working, as the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) said. In the meantime, I hope everyone does have a relaxing summer. I thank you all for your hard work.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): It is probably an appropriate time for me to follow that by thanking, on behalf of Mr Speaker, the other Deputy Speakers and, indeed, all Members of Parliament here, all the staff who have—through daily miracles, quite frankly—enabled us to have the Parliament functioning during this unprecedented crisis. Thank you to each and every one of you in this Parliament.

6.47 pm

The Treasurer of Her Majesty’s Household (Stuart Andrew): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I say what a pleasure it is to close this debate, although I think it was slightly easier to wind up last time, given that there were far fewer contributions? That is what makes this debate extremely enjoyable, however.

I would like to join every other Member in saying a big thank you to all members of staff here at the House for all the work they have done. I wish them a very happy and peaceful summer, because I think they really deserve it. I also want to say thank you to our Doorkeepers, who are always looking after us extremely well, and those in the Table Office, the Vote Office and those who have been doing the IT. Sometimes it has felt like we have been watching the Eurovision song contest getting the various constituency votes in, but it has been interesting, and I am glad those working on the IT have been able to do that so well.

I am glad also that Members mentioned caseworkers in our constituency offices. I know we should not, but sometimes we get used to some of the abuse we get. It is pretty awful that it is our caseworkers who sometimes get it, too, and I pay tribute to all of them for the work they have done.

Given I do not get the opportunity to speak very often, I will put on record my thanks to all the workers in the Pudsey constituency for everything they have done, including community groups such as the Farsley, Pudsey and Horsforth Live at Home schemes and Aireborough Voluntary Services to the Elderly. They have been amazing.

It has been a real challenge across the country, and I pay tribute in particular to all those who have lost loved ones. Our thoughts are certainly with them through

what has been a difficult time. As we come out of it—we do that one step at a time—we can hopefully start to put this difficult period behind us. I know that this country will come together to try and make sure that we have better days ahead of us.

There have been some highlights. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) was talking about his local football club and their promotion, and I have to say that we have had our own in my city, with Leeds being promoted. Two of my friends who have gone through disappointment after disappointment over the past 17 years—Rob Murphy-Fell and Clare Horrocks—are finally celebrating the promotion of Leeds into the premiership, which is good news.

I have sat here today feeling a bit like Father Christmas, receiving children's lists of requests. Some children are slightly greedier than others, but I will try my best to respond to each of the points that have been made. My hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) rightly talked about the importance of the aviation industry. I know from my time in Defence the importance of the Tempest programme. I hope that it will help our industry in the UK.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) and others quite rightly mentioned the awful way in which Muslims have been treated in China. We take this issue extremely seriously, have raised it on many occasions and will continue to do so. She also talked about domestic abuse during this difficult period. I am glad that she raised that subject. A really good thing that has happened in this period of our Parliament is the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill. There has been real cross-party working on that legislation, which has made the Bill even better—and I thank colleagues for that.

The hon. Members for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy), for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and for Twickenham (Munira Wilson), my hon. Friends the Members for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) and for Buckingham (Greg Smith), and others, mentioned the events industry. I know from my own postbag—and from a personal friend who has an events company—how difficult the current situation is for that industry. I will certainly relay the views of the House to the Chancellor and others, and highlight the specific points raised by those Members.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) started off talking about all the local heroes in his constituency and then—like other Members did—tried to convince us all to go to his constituency for our summer holidays. It certainly sounds beautiful, but he had to spoil it by going on about independence for Scotland. If only that once-in-a-generation independence referendum had gone the Scottish National party's way; it did not and they need to get over it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft) rightly paid tribute to one of her councillors, Councillor Longcake, who sadly lost his life during this crisis. My hon. Friend has also already been a fierce campaigner for the steel industry in her constituency, and other Members raised the issue with regard to their constituencies. I am getting a glare from the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), but it was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) and the hon. Member for Aberavon

(Stephen Kinnock). The Government are supporting the sector during this difficult period and we are putting huge investment into infrastructure. We have also introduced steel-specific procurement guidance that requires Government Departments and public bodies to consider social and environmental factors when procuring steel. I certainly hope that that will see more British steel being used in the fantastic investment that we are making across the country.

I wish the hon. Member for City of Durham good luck with her ukulele lessons. I am sure that we would all like to see them. I was glad that she and other hon. Members talked specifically about the use of music in trying to prevent male suicide. Suicide is an issue that we should debate and which unites us all in wanting to do what we can to try to reduce those instances.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury and others talked about weddings. From August, we hope to start phasing in larger celebratory meals or receptions for weddings and civil partnerships. Over time, we will assess whether it is possible to make such gatherings bigger. I fully understand the difficulties that it is causing. Two of my friends, Rob and Michelle, have sadly had to postpone their wedding, and I know that many others have had to do the same.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) said that Mansfield was the centre of levelling up in this country. I am afraid to say to him that, following the general election, we now have many other competitors for that position, as has been seen in this debate. He is a doughty champion for his constituency.

I want to move on to the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). She raised the issue of beauticians and said that it was a serious issue. May I say from this Dispatch Box that I fully recognise and understand that? I know that there are many businesses that are worried, and we are looking at everything that we can do to ensure that they have a safe opening. She also talked about the issue of gambling. I know that this is something that she and others feel passionate about. We have been working closely with the Gambling Commission over the past 18 months to introduce a wave of tougher measures, and we hope to be able to report on that soon. Then she came on to the issue of the children's funeral fund. My previous work in children's hospices makes me very alive to the difficulty that many families face when they have lost a child. I have seen so many families go through that, and I want to congratulate her on her campaign. I am glad the Government have introduced it, and she is absolutely right that we need to promote it to other families.

There were a load of bids. My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes put in a bid for a free port. My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) talked about support for his constituency. I will make sure that all the bids are brought to the attention of the relevant Minister. I am afraid that that is as far as I can go. I was a bit disappointed that the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) was trying to say that, in terms of levelling up, we were somehow favouring some towns and cities for electoral advantage. The point is that the people of those towns turned to the Conservative party because they were sick and tired of being neglected by their Labour representatives who had been there for so many years.

[Stuart Andrew]

The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) rightly raised the issue of racism against the Chinese community. There was an extremely powerful contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley). He rightly said that, yes, we have some uncomfortable periods in our history, but it is only through history that we learn, and it is only then that we can make our country even better. I say to the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown that it is not just the Chinese community that we need to be thinking about, but every community. I hope that, whether it is a statue or whatever it is, we learn the lessons and educate the next generation about where we have come from and be proud of the fact that we have been on a journey. I say that from a very personal perspective. My life was very difficult when I first came out in the 1980s in Wales, but now nobody even bats an eyelid that I live with my partner. That is a wonderful testament to the way this country has developed. There is more work to do, but let us not forget the progress that we have made.

I just want to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe. He has received an award—jointly, I understand—for civility in public life.

Mr Steve Baker: Politician of the year.

Stuart Andrew: Oh, politician of the year. Pardon me for getting that so wrong. That is a fantastic achievement and I congratulate my hon. Friend.

I also want to mention a couple of other colleagues. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly) talked about Bury Football Club. I remember the first day he arrived, he collared me and said, “Who is the Minister for sport?” He immediately went off and raised the issue with him. Clearly, he is not giving up and that makes him a superb MP for his constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) quite rightly raised a very difficult issue of prisoners having access to social media. There is nothing worse than victims feeling like they are being hounded by the people who have perpetrated the crime from prison. I will refer that to the relevant Department.

I will probably have to finish here, because time is running out, although I will say that if my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) backs me in the next leadership bid, I will ensure that china from Stoke is stocked in Chequers.

Valerie Vaz: Is there a vacancy?

Stuart Andrew: There is no vacancy—I said the next time!

Finally, I could not possibly cope with trying to respond to the many, many issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) raised so quickly, though I realise that he has just managed to get a year’s worth of press releases in about six minutes. I congratulate him on that and wish him well in his campaign to make Southend a city.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

Southern Heathrow Rail Link

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(David Duguid.)

7 pm

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): It is my great pleasure to open this debate and to have the opportunity to explore with ministerial colleagues and others the potential economic benefits of a southern Heathrow rail link. My belief is that a southern rail link fits exactly with the spirit of the times. It exemplifies the ambition set out by the Prime Minister that, after the pandemic, Britain will not only have a thriving future but one that is cleaner and altogether smarter than what went before.

This is not the first time that Members have sought to raise the issue of rail access to Heathrow from the south. Indeed, it is the very intractability of this question that causes me to bring it back to the House for further examination today, and I do so with the strong support of my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr Lord). With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to briefly cover that history, to look at progress since the announcement of the most recent Government initiative in 2018, to explain what economic and environmental benefits such a link could bring to the nation as a whole, as well as to my constituents in Guildford, and to provide my hon. Friend the Minister with the opportunity to bring us up to date.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way and congratulate her on securing this Adjournment debate. She will know that this is an issue on which I have been engaged for over four years. In 2015, Hounslow Council put forward a proposed route for southern rail access to Heathrow from London and Surrey, including a station in Bedfont in my constituency. That was important to underpin regeneration proposals around Heathrow, and its benefit-cost ratio was very favourably assessed by Network Rail. Does she agree that this is a very opportune time to reconsider the economic benefits of such a proposal, not least in terms of the skilled jobs and greener infrastructure that we so desperately need and the direct link from Waterloo to Heathrow that could come from it? Along with my wonderful hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), who is on the shadow Front Bench, I also want to mention the opportunity to consider western rail access to Heathrow, which has had Government approval since 2012.

Angela Richardson: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, and I agree with her that now is the right time to look at the economic benefits and the skills and jobs that this will bring. It is exciting that this sort of project could have bids coming in from a range of providers, and the competition would be very beneficial. The Heathrow to Waterloo link could be looked at in the wider scope of the project, but I am sure she will understand that I am keen to see a line go to my constituents in Guildford. I will come on to the western link later in my speech.

Members from outside the south-east of England often, and understandably, criticise policymakers for taking a London-centric view of issues. I would like to reassure them that London-centricity can work to the detriment even of other towns and cities in the south-east.

Access to Heathrow is just one example of this phenomenon. It is possible to reach the airport by train on a number of services, such as London Underground's Piccadilly line, the Heathrow Express, Heathrow Connect services and hopefully, before too much longer, the hugely impressive Elizabeth line, which will bring direct trains to the airport from City and docklands. However, it is nigh on impossible to reach Heathrow by train from a whole number of boroughs in south-west London or substantial towns such as mine in Surrey and Hampshire, even though it is possible to see aircraft taking off and landing from some of them.

Transport authorities serving many of Heathrow's competitor airports, such as Schiphol and Charles de Gaulle, have long since understood that a major hub for flights should also be a public transport hub. In Heathrow's case, people can arrive by train if they like, as long as they are coming from the east. That gigantic airport, one of our drivers of economic growth, tourism and investment in normal times, and undoubtedly again after the pandemic, effectively sits at the end of a branch line.

Clearly, there are other public transport connections to Heathrow that are not based on railways. It is served by a variety of coach and bus connections that are valuable to airline passengers and the many thousands who work in the wide range of businesses located there. Those services include a direct hourly coach link from Guildford that opened in the last two years. Nevertheless, however many buses and coaches are available, they fail to attract the substantial number of users who otherwise default to their own cars or taxis and private hire vehicles. Those vehicles congest still further the greatly overloaded road network that serves the airport, cause damage to economic efficiency and reduce the attractiveness of the region south of Heathrow to investment.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech about an incredibly important topic. A direct rail link from Guildford to Heathrow would make a massive difference not only to her constituency but to mine in Meon Valley and beyond. At the moment, it takes up to two hours to get there by train and coach, as she has mentioned, but about 45 minutes or less—or half the time, anyway—by car. Does she agree that it will take cars off the road, which will have an incredible environmental impact on her constituency and the others surrounding Heathrow?

Angela Richardson: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I could not agree more. The time spent in the car on those journeys to Heathrow from constituencies that are further down the line than mine and further away from Heathrow has an impact on the environment. Those cars on the roads generate vast quantities of noxious gases and particulate matter that are harmful to the health and wellbeing of our citizens, along with substantial volumes of avoidable carbon dioxide.

In such circumstances, some might say, "Build more roads then," but it was recognised by Highways England in 2016 that no amount of road building could overcome the problem. Its "M25 South West Quadrant Strategic Study" concluded that only a solution based on public transport investment could address congestion on this vital national motorway. Indeed, I understand that it is one of the most congested stretches of motorway in Europe.

[Angela Richardson]

With such a blindingly obvious need for rail access to Heathrow from the south, there have been a number of attempts to find an answer. The most significant of those was a scheme known as Airtrack devised by BAA, then owners of Heathrow, in the early years of this century. The fundamental, and ultimately fatal, flaw in the Airtrack proposal was that it was based on knitting together various sections of existing railway, with a few short additional stretches, and then greatly increasing the frequency of trains on those tracks.

The Victorian lines were built in an era when road traffic was horse-drawn, so they intersected at multiple locations with level crossings that now serve thousands of cars and lorries every day. The increased frequency of trains over those crossings would cause the level crossing barriers, and hence the roads, to be closed for unacceptably long periods. When the opposition of road users, communities, businesses and local authorities found voice through hon. Members of this House, the Airtrack project was doomed.

Airtrack had been conceived in part as an attempt to mitigate the major expansion of airline passenger numbers and employees at Heathrow associated with the opening of terminal 5. The one positive legacy of this story is that, beneath terminal 5, there sits in cavernous darkness a station awaiting the arrival of a railway from the south.

I understand that similar provision exists for a western rail link to Heathrow at terminal 5. The western scheme has been under development for as long as the southern route and would contribute to making Heathrow a public transport hub on the international model I described earlier. I know the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) has been an energetic supporter of a western link for the benefits it would bring to his constituents and I am delighted to see his interest in the debate this evening.

Returning to a new railway for my own area, the prospect of a southern rail link to Heathrow was raised once again as part of the consenting process for the expansion of the airport by means of constructing a third runway. Without revisiting all the many powerful arguments for and against Heathrow expansion, it was noted, as part of the scrutiny of the proposal by the Transport Committee, previously chaired by the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), that a southern rail link was urgently needed with even a two-runway airport, let alone with the third in place.

It was in that context that my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) announced, as Transport Secretary in March 2018, that a southern rail link to Heathrow would be the pathfinder scheme for a radical initiative to attract private sector investment and ideas into the design and construction of new railway infrastructure. That was a widely welcomed announcement, as it opened up the prospect of not just businesses but local authorities and local enterprise partnerships helping to accelerate the development of vitally needed new railways, rather than having to wait in a queue with many other existing schemes being devised within the traditional rail industry process. Now, more than ever, we need to allow the talent and expertise in the private sector to contribute to our levelling-up efforts across the country.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): I admire my hon. Friend's innovative approach to championing infrastructure in her constituency. Does she agree that projects like this present an excellent opportunity for steelmaking constituencies like mine in Scunthorpe, where we make a number of world-class steel products, such as rail?

Angela Richardson: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I could not agree more. Now is the time to champion British steel. She is not only a champion for British steel, but for the jobs that will bring in constituencies like hers. I would like to see that tie-up and opportunity.

We have a style of action now that has been adopted by the new Secretary of State for Transport and his colleague, the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), who is replying to the debate, to invite proposals from a range of stakeholders to reverse the Beeching-era rail closures. Sadly, however, more than two years have now elapsed since the original invitation for promoters to bring forward ideas for a southern rail link to Heathrow.

Members across the House will appreciate that the machinery of Government has been disrupted by events since March 2018, but my key question for my hon. Friend the Minister is this: when will we see full throttle applied to this project? For in truth there is no conflict between this scheme potentially benefiting south-west London, Surrey, Hampshire and the wider south of England, and the Government's levelling-up agenda for the nations and regions of the UK. Most of the infrastructure schemes envisaged for the north, the midlands and the south-west require significant amounts of public money, but the southern rail link to Heathrow does not. Private sector investors, backed by design and construction partners, are ready to get on and build this railway. I believe we should choose one of them to do just that.

From the perspective of my own constituency of Guildford, I have been grateful for information supplied to me by the directors of Heathrow Southern Railway Ltd, whose design proposal avoids the busy level crossings at Egham, which proved so tricky for Airtrack. They envisage frequent trains from Guildford reaching terminal 5 in just 29 minutes and then continuing on to Old Oak Common for interchange with HS2 and the long-awaited Elizabeth line, before terminating at Paddington. This will be transformative for my constituents and for the capacity of Guildford and other towns similarly served, such as Woking, Basingstoke and Farnborough, to attract investment. It is little wonder, therefore, that local authorities such as Surrey and Hampshire County Councils, as well as the Enterprise M3 local enterprise partnership, want to see urgent action taken by the Government.

In conclusion, may I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that the station is waiting at Heathrow? Let us lay down the tracks, enable the building of a southern rail link to Heathrow, and stoke the engine of prosperity in Guildford and beyond.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With the permission of the mover and the Minister, I call Dr Ben Spencer to make a small contribution.

7.14 pm

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Angela Richardson) and the Minister for allowing me

to speak in this debate. I also admire my hon. Friend for the strong case—it was a tour de force—she made for a southern rail link, which would provide a local economic boost and create and support jobs in Runnymede and Weybridge at a time when they are sorely needed. It would deliver greater connectivity between Heathrow and London and my constituency, and cement my constituency's status as one of the best places to live and work—alongside, of course, her constituency of Guildford.

A southern rail link would improve our local infrastructure and economy, but, crucially, it would also help us meet our environmental targets. Air pollution and noise pollution from the M25 and M3 affect Runnymede and Weybridge badly. We want people to use public transport, but the infrastructure needs to be in place. This would support the aviation sector, which both directly and indirectly supports many jobs and businesses in Runnymede and Weybridge. A new train track to Heathrow airport would not just help those who want to head off to Lanzarote—dare I say it, but I think everyone in this country could do with a holiday? It would also create jobs in the sector and help those in those jobs to get to work, day in, day out.

At a critical point in our country's economic recovery from covid, a southern rail link would help us to not just bounce back but bounce higher.

7.16 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I would like to start by thanking everyone who has contributed and by extending further congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Angela Richardson) on securing this debate on the economic benefits of a southern rail link to Heathrow airport. I also congratulate all others who have contributed, including my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer), the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), my hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley (Mrs Drummond) and, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft), who is unrelenting in her passion for her town and its core industry, as I think she will find we are in the rail industry, too.

The question my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford asked about the economics of a southern Heathrow rail link is, as she outlined, one that my Department has been considering for some time. Our Heathrow rail access programme was established in December 2016, with the aim of providing a step change in the accessibility of Britain's busiest airport.

Unless travelling from central London, the current public transport offering to Heathrow is poor. Many people choose to use their own cars instead, leading to the traffic congestion that my hon. Friend outlined. Improving transport links to the airport would open up access for many regions of the United Kingdom, and a southern access scheme would open up new markets across the south-west of London and, indeed, the south-east of the United Kingdom, providing an attractive alternative to the heavily congested road network.

Although demand for air travel has fallen dramatically due to the coronavirus pandemic, we are supporting and want to see the recovery of the aviation industry. Thus we recognise the importance of major schemes such as this in encouraging people back to air travel, as well as in supporting passengers as they return.

The scheme my hon. Friend mentions would be part of the Government's plan to build back better, build back greener and build back faster. We want to rebuild Britain and fuel the economic recovery across the United Kingdom. As she knows, this Government have committed to building a Britain with world-class infrastructure and have established Project Speed, ensuring that we are building the right things better and faster than before. Project Speed is an ideal method of dealing with some of the delays with the southern link.

The Heathrow rail access programme comprises two major schemes: the western rail link to Heathrow, serving Reading to London Paddington via a new tunnel to Heathrow, is the other one. I, too, am pleased to see the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) in his place. Not only does he give proper scrutiny to everything I try to do in the Department; he is also passionate about making sure that the western rail link to Heathrow actually comes about and does what it says on the tin for his constituents and others. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford, I am pleased to see him in this debate.

The southern access link is at a much earlier stage of development than the western rail link project. It is intended to link terminal 5 directly to the south-west of London, potentially as far out as Surrey and Hampshire. I know that that is welcomed not only by my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford but by a whole host of people across Surrey.

Seema Malhotra: The Minister and I have spoken briefly on this matter since he took up his post. May I make a request to him because I think there is an opportunity in this world of projects to move forward? Sometimes there has not been a coherent debate, a proper assessment and proper criteria against which to evaluate a scheme. In the interests of the hon. Member for Guildford (Angela Richardson), who wants to see support for her constituents, in the interests of regeneration, and knowing that it takes two buses sometimes to get one and a half miles to Heathrow for my constituents as well, for work or for travel, is it time to convene a small cross-party taskforce in this place to look at how we might break through some of that and give those perspectives from our constituencies to help move this forward for the Minister?

Chris Heaton-Harris: As I hope I will outline, this project is moving forward at a decent pace, but, on extra scrutiny from this place, there will be barriers. There will be people who rightly want to scrutinise any decisions made on this and I think that would be a valuable suggestion to take forward, as the project moves forward.

It is an important project. It is currently led by my Department. It is a pathfinder project, as my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford said, seeking to harness all innovative forms of delivery and technology from the private sector to deliver a better service for passengers and ensure better value for money for the taxpayer.

As my hon. Friend said, only about 21% of all passengers travelling to Heathrow airport from the south use public transport instead of private road vehicles, and for areas such as Surrey and Hampshire, and Guildford especially, I am told that the figure is lower still, so we know that a market exists for this. In contrast, almost half of passengers and airport staff travelling to Heathrow airport from London and to the east of the airport do so by public transport.

[Chris Heaton-Harris]

Good progress is being made. Following the publication of the strategic objectives in November last year, my officials are currently finalising the pre-instituting outline business case—my Department loves a bit of jargon—to outline the case for change and the need for a scheme such as this, and to set out practically how the scheme could and should be taken forward. They continue to work closely with commercial advisers to develop commercial and financial models, with the intention of working alongside the private sector to fund, finance and deliver this scheme.

The scheme is in its infancy and as yet no route or mode has been selected, and there is also the possibility of more than one type of intervention to boost transport options. It can, however, be assumed that heavy rail will play a major part in the southern access to Heathrow.

It is clear that there is a strong case for improving transport links in the region, as I have described, and not just for airport passengers and employees, but for those who live in the wider area and would benefit from the roads being freer around Heathrow and, indeed, the extra public transport options this would bring. So while there are many different options for the scheme, we know the potential benefits are clear. First and foremost, it encourages people from their vehicles on to public transport, reducing congestion. We know this can be achieved through the creation of new and accessible high-frequency, reliable transport links with the interchanges and step-free access this scheme would bring. It also helps us to reduce the environmental impact of aviation and the associated carbon emissions, an important step on the path to net zero, and not only by providing new environmentally friendly journey options but also by utilising sustainable construction methods and materials. It will take into account any key environmental undertakings in that area being developed in collaboration with the relevant local authorities and local enterprise partnerships.

Obviously, this should—this could—help to connect communities, boost economic growth and encourage regeneration. It could provide—it would provide—greater connectivity and journey choices in south-west London, Surrey, and Hampshire to central London and help us with capacity across the south-west rail network as well. It would seek to employ the local workforce and source its apprentices locally, and look to improve trade links locally, nationally and internationally. And not just through passenger trains, because freight is also an important part of this equation, providing a much-needed boost and connection for the local and national economies.

As I said, this scheme is very much in its infancy and there is still much to be developed, but the work carried out to date and the work under way demonstrate that, if

we get this right, it will be a really positive step towards the development of transport in the south of the UK and alleviating many of the pressures outlined in this debate, working to meet the needs of so many passengers and to improve the prospects of so many locally and nationally, across the whole of the UK, who travel around that part of our country.

A scheme such as this does not come without challenges. To ensure the safety of passengers, road users and pedestrians, we will not want to increase the usage of level crossings; level crossings are a bind for any rail Minister who has ever stood at this Dispatch Box. The new platforms at terminal 5 are underground, so it will be necessary to excavate tunnels, and the scheme will be required to integrate with new and existing infrastructure, both at terminal 5 and on the south-west main line—to name but a couple of the challenges.

There is, however, already strong market interest from the private sector. Several of the groups interested have developed scheme proposals to varying degrees. The Government tested market appetite in late 2018 and, although many organisations showed interest in developing and delivering a southern scheme, none was able to progress without some form of Government support. So my officials continue to work closely with these scheme promoters, operators, construction companies and capital investors, along with the wider private sector, to harvest the innovation and insight that they can provide, and that we can learn from to build a process for securing the best, and the very best value, scheme possible. The Department will continue to develop the southern access to Heathrow scheme, working alongside Network Rail and Heathrow Airport to integrate it with the western rail link and other major transport projects, ensuring the most efficient design and delivery of the whole scheme.

I am very aware of the strong benefits a southern access to Heathrow scheme will provide, not only to the passengers and employees of Heathrow airport, but to the people living in the surroundings of south-west London, Surrey, Hampshire and beyond. I look forward to working with all who are interested in developing this scheme and I am keen to move forward at pace.

I thank everybody who has taken part in this debate for emphasising the importance of this scheme and of aviation to our country. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford on securing the debate on the economic benefits of the scheme. I wish her, you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and all who work in the House a peaceful and healthy summer recess.

Question put and agreed to.

7.27 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 22 July 2020

CABINET OFFICE

Consultation on 2025 UK Border Strategy

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): When the transition period with the European Union concludes at the end of this year, we will leave the single market and customs union. As we embark on a new chapter for this country, we have the opportunity to design a future border that delivers maximum benefit to the UK.

Today, the UK Government will publish a public consultation to invite stakeholders to share ideas and evidence to help develop a 2025 UK border strategy that will deliver the world's most effective border by 2025. A border that is more streamlined and user-centric, that helps businesses take advantage of new trading relationships around the world, while maintaining high-levels of security to protect the public, the environment and public health.

Our goal is to publish a 2025 UK border strategy by the end of the year setting out a clear vision and road map that the Government and border industry, working together, can deliver.

This announcement follows the launch of the public information campaign, "The UK's new start: let's get going", and the publication of the border operating model on Monday 13 July that set out how businesses and industry can prepare for the end of the transition period.

[HCWS418]

Public Bodies 2019 and Public Appointments Data Report 2019

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Julia Lopez): My noble Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Lord Agnew of Oulton) has made the following written ministerial statement:

I am pleased to announce the publication of Public Bodies 2019 and the Public Appointments Data Report 2019 and will today be placing copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

Public bodies play a vital role in the delivery of public services for all our citizens, covering wide-ranging functions. Well-governed, effective and efficient public bodies enable the Government to deliver their priorities.

Public Bodies 2019 is an annual directory that provides a single transparent source of top-level financial and non-financial data on all Executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies and non-ministerial departments across Government.

The public appointments data report provides a breakdown of the diversity of public appointees who were in roles covered by the governance code on public appointments on 31 March 2019 and those appointed to such roles between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019. The latter data is a subset of the information published in the Commissioner for Public Appointments' annual report.

[HCWS425]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Deployment of 5G and Extending Mobile Coverage

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): Widespread, reliable mobile connectivity is essential for people and businesses. That is why the Government have agreed a £1 billion shared rural network deal with the UK's mobile network operators to extend 4G mobile geographical coverage to 95% of the UK by 2025. The Government are also investing £200 million in a programme of 5G testbeds and trials to encourage investment in 5G so that communities and businesses can benefit from this new technology.

It is essential that the planning system continues to support the delivery of the mobile infrastructure that we need. On 27 August 2019, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published a joint consultation on in-principle proposed reforms to permitted development rights in England. The consultation ran for 10 weeks, closing on 4 November 2019.

Today I am pleased to inform Members that we have published the Government's response to this consultation.

We are satisfied that the proposed reforms are necessary to support the Government's ambitions for the deployment of 5G and extending mobile coverage, particularly in rural areas, where mobile coverage tends to lag behind more urban areas. In taking forward these proposals, we will ensure that the appropriate environmental protections and other safeguards are in place to mitigate the impact of new mobile infrastructure.

Therefore, subject to a technical consultation on the detail of the proposals, including the appropriate environmental protections and other safeguards, we are intending to take forward the proposals consulted on to:

Enable the deployment of radio equipment housing, such as equipment cabinets, on land without requiring prior approval, up to specified limits and excluding on sites of special scientific interest, to support 5G deployment;

Strengthen existing masts up to specified limits to enable sites to be upgraded for 5G and for mast sharing without prior approval;

Enable the deployment of building-based masts nearer to highways to support deployment of 5G and extend mobile coverage, subject to prior approval and specified limits; and,

Enable higher new masts to deliver better mobile coverage, and mast sharing, subject to prior approval and specified limits.

These changes will benefit communities and businesses and provide greater regulatory certainty to incentivise investment in mobile infrastructure.

The mobile industry has a vital role to play in delivering these improvements and in bringing forward the infrastructure required, and we expect them to commit to further measures and assurances to ensure that the impact of new mobile deployment is minimised.

Making these changes would require amendments to existing planning legislation. Prior to any future legislative changes, we will undertake the technical consultation.

We will now develop the technical consultation, working with mobile industry representatives, relevant regulators including Ofcom, representatives of local planning

authorities and those representing protected areas, to ensure that the appropriate environmental protections and other safeguards are in place to mitigate the impact of new mobile infrastructure. This includes strengthening the code of best practice on mobile network development in England, which provides guidance to mobile network operators and local planning authorities.

As planning law is a devolved matter, any future legislative changes will apply to England only, but we will continue to work closely with the devolved Administrations to ensure that the planning regime continues to support the deployment of mobile infrastructure.

[HCWS422]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

London Croughton Annex

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): I informed the House on 20 December that I had instructed my officials to discuss with the United States a revision of the immunity arrangements at the Croughton annex for US personnel and their families, following the road collision of 27 August 2019 in which Harry Dunn was killed. As I set out previously to the House, the status of US staff under the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations (VCDR) at the Croughton annex is the subject of special arrangements between the UK and US Governments, captured in exchanges of notes dating back to 1995. Those arrangements contained a waiver of immunity from criminal jurisdiction for US staff outside the course of their duties, but no such waiver for their family members.

I am glad to inform the House today that we have concluded those discussions with the US and agreed a revision of the arrangements. I welcome the constructive engagement of our US allies in these discussions.

First and foremost, the US waiver of immunity from criminal jurisdiction is now expressly extended to the family members of US staff at the Croughton annex, thus ending the anomaly in the previous arrangements and permitting the criminal prosecution of the family members of those staff, should these tragic circumstances ever arise again.

Secondly, the waiver from criminal jurisdiction now extends also to all embassy staff serving at the Croughton annex in respect of acts outside their official duties, not just administrative and technical staff.

Thirdly, the revised arrangements contain a further and new waiver in respect of inviolability. The Vienna convention on diplomatic relations not only provides for immunity from jurisdiction, but also provides for the separate privilege of inviolability, including complete protection from arrest and detention. The earlier Croughton arrangements contained no waiver of inviolability. This is addressed in the revised arrangements.

I am therefore pleased to report to the House that we have secured the agreement of the US so that the Croughton arrangements could not in future be used in the same way as in the tragic case of Harry Dunn. These changes took effect by way of an exchange of notes on 20 July.

Separately, we have continued to press the US on the need to improve road safety at RAF Croughton. I welcome the steps taken by the US base commander to

extend mandatory requirements for driving training and instruction for all US staff on the base, and the improvement of road signage within the base and vehicles of staff to remind them to drive on the left.

I welcome the action of local authorities to add added extra signage outside the base to remind drivers to drive on the left.

I am pleased to inform the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has launched a safety review of roads around the 10 US visiting forces (USVF) bases in England. This entails working with the Ministry of Defence, Highways England and respective police and local authorities—in the case of Croughton, the Northamptonshire police and South Northamptonshire Council.

We have the deepest sympathy for Harry Dunn's family. No family should have to experience what they have gone through and I recognise that these changes will not bring Harry back. However, I hope that the knowledge that the Croughton arrangements have been revised and that a family in their position would now see justice done brings some small measure of comfort.

[HCWS419]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hong Kong: British National (Overseas) Visa and Suspension of Extradition Treaty

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The decision of the Chinese Government to impose its national security legislation on Hong Kong is a matter of deep regret to this Government. This legislation and its strict implementation constitutes a clear breach of the 1984 Sino-British joint declaration, undermining the “one country, two systems” framework. It cannot be ignored.

I set out here the Government's plans for a new Hong Kong British national (overseas) (BN(O)) visa and for the suspension of our extradition treaty with Hong Kong.

Hong Kong BN(O) Visa

Before the handover of the UK's responsibilities for Hong Kong, we created the British national (overseas) (BN(O)) nationality status, which was opened to people in Hong Kong, through a registration process, to those who had British dependent territories citizenship. This status recognised the special and enduring ties the UK has with those people as a result of our role in Hong Kong before 1997. Now that China through its actions has changed the circumstances that BN(O) citizens find themselves in, it is right that we should change the entitlements that are attached to BN(O) status. I have decided to significantly improve those entitlements, to reassure BN(O) citizens that they have options to live in the UK if they decide that is an appropriate choice for them.

Today I am laying before the House a Command Paper (CP 280) providing further detail on a new bespoke Hong Kong BN(O) visa, covering eligibility, conditions and entitlements, the application process, timing, the position for BN(O) citizens in the UK, and arrangements for BN(O) citizens arriving at the border.

BN(O) citizens in Hong Kong are in a unique position, which is why I have designed a policy that is specific to them in the wider immigration system. It will not set a

precedent. It is a proportionate response to the situation that has arisen. The UK is entitled to decide on the rights attaching to BN(O) status, which it has previously conferred, and that is what I am doing with these changes.

My offer to BN(O) citizens is therefore a very generous one. There will be no skills tests or minimum income requirements, economic needs tests or caps on numbers. I am giving BN(O) citizens the opportunity to acquire full British citizenship. They do not need to have a job before coming to the UK—they can look for work once here. They may bring their immediate dependants, including non-BN(O) citizens.

At the same time, it is not an unconditional offer. BN(O) citizens will need to support themselves independently while living in the UK; they must meet strict criminality checks and stay of good character; they will need to pay visa fees, the immigration health surcharge and, if they subsequently apply for citizenship after they become settled, the fee and meet the criteria. These are reasonable things to ask of BN(O) citizens, and BN(O) citizens will need to ask themselves whether coming to the UK to put down roots here is the right choice for them. It is a choice I am making available and I welcome warmly all those who decide to take it.

We are planning to open the Hong Kong BN(O) visa for applications from January 2021. BN(O) citizens do not need to hold a BN(O) passport in order to apply for the visa—so there is no need to apply for or renew a BN(O) passport specifically for this purpose. All BN(O) citizens will need a visa to be able to settle in the UK.

We understand there will be cases where the children of BN(O) citizens will not normally be eligible because they were born after 1997 (so are not BN(O) citizens) and are over 18 so they would not normally be considered as a dependant in the UK's immigration system. Therefore, in compelling and compassionate circumstances, and where applications are made as a family unit, we will use discretion to grant a visa to the children of BN(O) citizens who fall into this category and who are still dependent on the BN(O) citizen.

If the above does not apply then the existing youth mobility scheme is open to people in Hong Kong aged between 18 and 30, with 1,000 places currently available each year. Individuals from Hong Kong will also be able to apply to come to the UK under the terms of the UK's new points-based system, which will enable individuals to come to the UK in a wider range of professions and at a lower general salary threshold than in the past.

The Home Office looks forward to receiving applications for this visa.

Extradition

The imposition of new national security legislation has significantly changed the assumptions underpinning the 1998 agreement for the surrender of fugitive offenders, our extradition treaty with Hong Kong. The Government remain especially concerned about articles 55 to 59 of the law, which could give mainland authorities the ability to assume jurisdiction over certain cases and try those cases in Chinese courts.

The national security law provides no legal or judicial safeguards in such cases. The decision can be made by the mainland authorities with no reference to the Hong Kong Government. Other than access to a lawyer, there are no legal or judicial safeguards in such cases and

mainland systems of investigation, trial and punishment, about which the international community has long standing concerns, would apply. If China applies that legislation extraterritorially, it will pose a risk not only to Hong Kong residents who travel abroad, but potentially to British and other nationals travelling into Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Department of Justice has therefore been notified of our intention to suspend the extradition treaty, immediately and indefinitely, until the UK is sufficiently assured that the new National Security Agency established by China in Hong Kong will not be able to initiate extradition requests to the UK, that extradition requests will not be sent in relation to newly created offences under the national security law; and that people extradited from the UK could never be transferred from Hong Kong to mainland China without the UK's explicit consent.

The suspension will protect those resident in the UK, including those who may soon be here by virtue of the new immigration route, from unwarranted pursuit through the provisions of the extradition treaty.

[HCWS421]

Independent Office for Police Conduct: Annual Report and Accounts

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): I am today, along with my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Jesse Norman, publishing the 2019-20 annual report and accounts for the Independent Office for Police Conduct [HC 511]. This will be laid before the House and published on www.gov.uk. The report will also be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS423]

Police and Crime Commissioner Model: Review

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): I wish to set out to the House details of a review into the role of police and crime commissioners.

The Government's manifesto committed to strengthening the accountability of PCCs and expanding their role. Police and crime commissioners were introduced in 2012 to give the public a direct say over policing in their area. Since coming into post, they have brought real local accountability to policing and are working to give local communities a stronger voice.

After eight years, it is right that we step back and consider how we can continue to evolve the PCC model. It is important that PCCs are strong, visible leaders in the fight against crime and have the legitimacy and tools to hold their police forces to account effectively.

To deliver this commitment, I am today announcing a two-part internal review into the role of PCCs.

Part 1 will commence in late July and report to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and myself by October 2020. It will be focused on changes required to strengthen the model, which, where possible, can be delivered ahead of the 2021 PCC elections. In particular, it will consider how to strengthen the accountability, resilience, legitimacy and scrutiny mechanisms of the existing model to drive up standards; identify and share best practice across the sector; and examine the effectiveness of the relationship between PCCs and chief constables and the checks and balances currently in place.

We will also use part 1 of the review to help us map out our longer-term ambition for the expansion of the PCC role. In relation to fire, the Government are clear that further reform of fire and rescue services is required in order to respond to the recommendations from phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower inquiry and to build on the findings from Sir Tom Winsor's state of fire and rescue report, both of which demonstrate the clear challenges and improvements required in professionalism, people and governance. The review will consider further options and opportunities to strengthen fire governance and accountability, drawing on the lessons from the first cycle of fire governance transfers to PCCs.

The review will also be fully aligned with the Government's commitment to expand the benefits of devolution across England through the local recovery and devolution White Paper. Mayors of combined authorities should be powerful local figures with the ability to drive public safety, as well as economic growth and local recovery. We plan to develop the role of PCCs with that longer-term trajectory in mind, building on the models in London and Greater Manchester.

I would like to be clear that neither part 1 nor part 2 of the review will consider a wholly new governance model for policing or examine the 43 police force model.

An advisory group will support part 1 of the review, comprising senior external stakeholders with expertise in the policing and fire sectors. It will also be important that the public's views on those who represent them in policing are heard and the review team will seek to engage a sample of citizens and local and national victims' groups as appropriate.

Part 2 of the review will commence after the 2021 elections and will allow us to consider further ways to strengthen and expand the role of PCCs, including the role PCCs play in tackling reoffending to help reduce crime. It will focus on longer-term reforms and the potential for wider efficiencies to be made within the system with a view to implementation ahead of the 2024 elections.

I will place a copy of the terms of reference for part 1 of the review in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS416]

UK Anti-corruption Strategy: Year 2

The Minister for Security (James Brokenshire): Today, I am publishing the second annual update on the UK anti-corruption strategy 2017-22. The Government are committed to providing an annual written update to Parliament on progress.

The UK anti-corruption strategy provides a framework to guide Government anti-corruption policies and actions. This update sets out the significant progress that the UK has made on implementing many of the commitments of the anti-corruption strategy during 2019, while recognising that a more challenging global environment has led to some areas of more limited progress. Corruption undermines our national security and prosperity. It corrodes trust in our institutions and threatens our borders. Without strong anti-corruption measures it is harder for British businesses to compete in the new and emerging markets we are starting to foster.

The year 2 update demonstrates that the Government are determined to deliver on their commitment to combat corruption in order to keep our citizens safe, to help secure a more prosperous society and to strengthen

trust in our domestic and international institutions. The unprecedented challenge posed by covid-19 only heightens the relevance and urgency of this activity. The Government will continue to combat corruption and to promote integrity and transparency at home and overseas, working with international allies and through multilateral institutions to address existing and emerging threats, raise standards and promote collective action.

I have written to the devolved Administrations as the update is of direct interest to them.

A copy of the year 2 update report will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and also published on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS420]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Affordable Homes Guarantee Scheme 2020

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): Today, I am laying before Parliament a departmental minute setting out the details of a contingent liability that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government intends to incur under the Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Act 2012. The contingent liability will be created by a new £3 billion affordable homes guarantee scheme.

The new affordable homes guarantee scheme—announced at spring statement 2019—will be delivered by a delivery partner on behalf of the Ministry under the oversight of Homes England. The delivery partner is being appointed through a fair, open and competitive procurement process, and we have appointed a preferred bidder with whom we will agree the detailed operational arrangements. We plan on awarding the contract over the coming weeks and for the scheme to be open for business by the end of the year. In delivering the scheme, the delivery partner will raise capital from bond market investors and on-lend the proceeds to registered providers of affordable housing in England. The Ministry will guarantee both the proceeds to bond investors and payments by borrowers to the issuing entity.

Through the scheme, the Government will boost investment in providers of affordable housing and support the delivery of a significant number of new affordable homes for those whose housing needs are not currently met by the market.

[HCWS424]

PRIME MINISTER

Machinery of Government: Data Use

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): I am making this statement to bring to the House's attention the following machinery of Government change.

Government use of data

Responsibility for Government use of data has transferred from the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) to the Cabinet Office. DCMS will retain responsibility for data policy for the economy and society. This change will help ensure that Government data is used most effectively to drive policy making and service delivery. The change is effective immediately.

[HCWS417]

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 22 July 2020

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Endangered Species: Developing Countries

The following is an extract from the Adjournment debate on 20 July 2020.

James Duddridge: Since its inception, the facility has supported the management of over 3,300 protected areas covering 860 million hectares, and in totality the projects have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 27 billion tonnes.

[Official Report, 20 July 2020, Vol. 678, c. 1971.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the Adjournment debate tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling).

The correct response should have been:

James Duddridge: Since its inception, the **global environment** facility has supported the management of over 3,300 protected areas covering 860 million hectares, and in totality the projects have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by **2.7 billion tonnes**.

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Wednesday 29 July 2020**

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