

Tuesday
15 September 2020

Volume 680
No. 101



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 15 September 2020

House of Commons

Tuesday 15 September 2020

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

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Covid-19: Fiscal Support

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): What fiscal support he is providing to mitigate the economic effects of the covid-19 outbreak. [906048]

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What fiscal support he is providing to mitigate the economic effects of the covid-19 outbreak. [906053]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak): We have provided unprecedented support worth more than £190 billion to protect public health, businesses and jobs, and the Government remain committed to supporting the economy throughout this crisis. In July, we published our plan for jobs, which announced further support for the economy, with initiatives such as eat out to help out, the £2 billion kickstart scheme and the £9 billion job retention bonus, all of which aim to support, create and protect jobs.

David Linden: I hear what the Chancellor says, but emergency food parcels for children are up 107% this year and the Trussell Trust now expects to distribute 300,000 more than expected in the fourth quarter. Given that there is a hard Tory Brexit on the horizon and the end to the furlough scheme will certainly push more people into poverty, will the Chancellor do the right thing, adhere to his moral duty and make the £20-a-week increase to universal credit permanent?

Rishi Sunak: Throughout this crisis we have endeavoured to make sure that the most vulnerable in our society get the help that they deserve, which is why results published in July showed that our interventions have meant that those on the lowest incomes have received the most support, through the temporary increase to universal credit, the hardship fund delivered through local councils and, indeed, increases to the local housing allowance to help people with their rental payments.

Joanna Cherry: The events and conferences industry was the first to be affected by lockdown and will be the last to see demand return. Many freelancers, such as my constituent Karen Colvin, have not benefited from support in the same way as other workers. Does the Chancellor have anything new to offer to people such as her?

Rishi Sunak: Many self-employed people have received the second of the self-employment income support grants—almost 3 million people have now received support through that scheme—but the hon. and learned Lady is right that the best way to provide support for people in that industry is slowly and safely to reopen those bits of our economy. My colleague the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Secretary of State is engaged with that industry to start piloting the return of business conferences and events. The situation remains under review.

Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con) [V]: My right hon. Friend has done a tremendous amount to support jobs in our country, but does he agree that many thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands, of jobs are going to be viable after covid is dealt with but will not make it unless they are provided with further targeted support after the end of October?

Rishi Sunak: As ever, I am grateful for the advice from my right hon. Friend. He is right that businesses do need support, which is why many of the interventions that we have put in place—for example, the business rates holidays and, indeed, our support for the economy and jobs through initiatives such as our stamp duty cut to catalyse the housing market—last through to next year. I hope he will be reassured that throughout this crisis I have not hesitated to act in creative and effective ways to support jobs and employment, and I will continue to do so.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Many employees, self-employed people and freelancers in sectors such as hospitality, aviation, tourism, showpeople and the arts cannot go back to normal because of the public health measures brought in by the Chancellor's Government, so will he examine the calls by the Treasury Committee to consider a targeted extension of support for those sectors? If not, why?

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Lady mentions hospitality and tourism, which is an industry disproportionately represented in Scotland. That is why the Government took steps in the summer to support the industry, with a temporary VAT reduction from 20% to 5% and, indeed, the eat out to help out initiative, both of which were targeted at helping to protect the 2 million jobs and 200,000 businesses engaged in the industry.

Alison Thewliss: That is woefully inadequate, as we head into the winter, for many of these industries that have already suffered with a low income. The Chancellor said that he would do “whatever it takes” and that “if the situation changed”,

he

“would not hesitate to take further action.”

Those excluded from support schemes, the 700,000 made redundant since March and those losing their jobs

because of the premature ending of the furlough scheme want to know whether the Chancellor will be true to that commitment or his words are worth nothing.

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Lady claims that it was woefully inadequate; the VAT reduction was the single biggest ask from the UK hospitality industry. Not only was that delivered, but it was delivered with an extra initiative, eat out to help out, which proved to provide an enormous fillip to the reopening of that part of the economy. It is also worth bearing in mind that all the businesses engaged in that industry are not paying any business rates at all until March next year.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): What estimate he has made of the level of financial support that has been provided to employees by businesses under the coronavirus job retention scheme. [906045]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay): As of 16 August, 9.6 million jobs have been protected by the coronavirus job retention scheme, helping 1.2 million businesses with a total value of £35.4 billion.

Mr Holden: Thousands of jobs in my constituency of North West Durham have been protected by the Government over this period, but my constituents are aware that such levels of taxpayer support cannot go on indefinitely and also want to see new jobs being created. Will my right hon. Friend enlighten me as to how many jobs we are looking at getting through the kickstart scheme, which is now coming forward to help to get new jobs into the economy?

Steve Barclay: The £2 billion kickstart scheme has the potential to support more than 250,000 young people and, as my hon. Friend is well aware, it is part of a comprehensive package of £30 billion of support that my right hon. Friend set out as part of his plan for jobs in the summer economic update.

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): Despite countless warnings from these Benches, the Government are pulling away the job retention scheme just at the moment when infection rates are rising again right across our country. Businesses have said it, unions have said it, and even Tory Back Benches are saying it: the one-size-fits-all withdrawal of wage support risks a jobs crisis this autumn. Will the Minister not listen and change course before it is too late?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Lady is simply wrong. What she ignores is the fact that my right hon. Friend has put in place a furlough bonus as support that goes beyond October to retain that link for employees to come back. That is part of a wider package of measures that goes alongside the furlough and stands comparison with the most generous in the world.

Bridget Phillipson: The Chief Secretary knows full well that the jobs retention bonus risks giving all the money to companies that simply do not need it. We would happily support the Government in developing a targeted, flexible wage support scheme for hard-hit sectors central to our country's future. We have been

saying this day in, day out for months now—the Government just have not been listening. Rather than stubbornly sticking to a decision made back in July, can he not accept that the situation has changed and that the Government must also change course?

Steve Barclay: There seems to be some confusion because, just last week in the debate that we had in this House, the shadow Chancellor actually recognised that the Chancellor had indeed listened with regard to the design of the furlough. In fact, they claimed credit for the role, which I salute, of the trade unions and others. So we have listened, but the reality is that the furlough pays a higher rate of people's wages than the scheme in Spain. It supports a wider range of businesses than the one in New Zealand and the scheme runs for twice as long as that in Denmark. That shows the flexibility and the willingness to listen on the part of my right hon. Friend.

Covid-19: Employment

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to protect jobs during the covid-19 outbreak. [906046]

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to protect jobs during the covid-19 outbreak. [906062]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay): The Government have put in place a £190 billion plan to protect people's jobs, incomes and businesses, one of the largest and most comprehensive economic responses in the world, and that includes the £30 billion made available under the plan for jobs.

Nickie Aiken: The Eat Out to Help Out scheme has been a phenomenal success in my constituency of the Cities of London and Westminster. More than 890,000 meals have been discounted—several eaten by myself, I hasten to add. Will my right hon. Friend comment on the amazing package of help that the Government have given to the retail and hospitality sectors? Moving forward, what policies can we hope to expect to support these vital sectors, which are responsible for hundreds of thousands of jobs in my constituency?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to recognise the effectiveness of that scheme in supporting demand. It was dismissed as a gimmick when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor launched it, but it has been warmly received by the hospitality industry. As she knows from her constituency and that of others, it is part of that wider package of support, including the cutting of the rate of VAT, which again has been a huge boost to that industry.

Mr Harper: I thank the Treasury team for the support that they have provided so far. My experience during the summer was that there was a great deal of support from local businesses for the variety of schemes, particularly those in the hospitality and tourism sectors, which are very important in my constituency. Turning to the future though, we must make sure that we provide the job opportunities that we are going to need. In Gloucestershire, we had a lift-off event last Friday, organised by my hon.

Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and supported by all six Gloucestershire MPs, where we focused on skills and training and brought together a range of employers. That is the kind of thing that I would like my right hon. Friends in the Treasury to think about supporting. It is the future we need to focus on, not the past.

Steve Barclay: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for that event. I saw the read out and how positive it had been. He is right to focus on that forward piece, using the package of measures that my right hon. Friend set out. That includes, for example, the payment to employers for each new apprenticeship—up to £2,000 for those over 25—the £2 billion kickstart scheme, but also other schemes such as the tripling in the number of traineeships. Events such as the one he mentioned are ones that I am sure other Members will wish to follow.

Eat Out to Help Out Scheme

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the eat out to help out scheme in supporting the hospitality industry. [906047]

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the eat out to help out scheme in supporting the hospitality industry. [906054]

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the eat out to help out scheme in supporting the hospitality industry. [906064]

Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the eat out to help out scheme in supporting the hospitality industry. [906066]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman): By 31 August, over 84,000 UK businesses had registered for the eat out to help out scheme and more than 100 million meals had been claimed for. By getting people back into the habit of enjoying a meal out, the scheme has helped to support nearly 2 million jobs in the hospitality sector and has played an important part in the Chancellor's wider plan for jobs.

Joy Morrissey: My right hon. Friend's eat out to help out scheme was also hugely successful in Beaconsfield, where 88,000 discounted meals were enjoyed. I cannot say what percentage of those meals were enjoyed by me personally, but one can wager. What reassurances can my right hon. Friend provide to the House that he will continue to support the hospitality industry through reductions in VAT on food and attractions until next January?

Jesse Norman: I am delighted that the eat out to help out scheme has been so enthusiastically taken up in Beaconsfield, as it has been around the country, and I thank my hon. Friend for her personal service in this important area. She will know that the Chancellor's plan for jobs and support for over 150,000 businesses and the effort to protect 2.4 million jobs are all part of a

package. To them, of course, as she will know, the Government have also added a reduced rate of VAT for tourist attractions, which will run through to 12 January next year. It all fits together as part of a wider picture of support for these very important sectors of the economy.

Steve Double: In St Austell and Newquay, almost 250,000 meals were eaten—not all by me—as part of the eat out to help out scheme, which put around £1.3 million into our local economy, so on behalf of businesses in mid-Cornwall, I thank the Chancellor for his support. August has been incredibly busy in Cornwall, but the hospitality sector faces a big challenge as we head into winter. Will my right hon. Friend consider a similar scheme to be run in the winter to help as many businesses as possible survive the winter and be here next summer?

Jesse Norman: There is a danger of a bidding contest between colleagues over the number of meals eaten under the eat out to help out scheme. I would dissuade them from that. In answer to my hon. Friend's question, however, I would say that there is this wider package. Of course the Treasury keeps all its measures under review, but it is a pretty formidable combination of VAT reductions, business rates relief and billions in tax deferrals and loans.

Karl McCartney [V]: Given the great success of the eat out to help out scheme in Lincoln and Lincolnshire and across the country, which has led to higher spending in restaurants, will my right hon. Friend now consider further targeted support for struggling industries, such as the arts and tourism, which are drivers of the Lincoln and county economy of my constituency, not least the excellent Usher Gallery and under-pressure Drill Hall in Lincoln?

Jesse Norman: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has highlighted the great work of the Usher Gallery and the Drill Hall. As he will be aware, the Government have announced a £1.57 billion package of support for the culture sectors, which is designed to support, and will support, thousands of cultural and arts organisations across the country, including theatres, galleries, museums, heritage sites, live music venues and independent cinemas. I think that he will also know that, within that scheme, priority is given not just to organisations with a national or international reputation but to those that are central to the cultural fabric of our towns and regions. That is a very important further component.

Dr Wallis: Eat out to help out has been a massive lifeline for many pubs and restaurants in my Bridgend constituency. Some have told me that, because of it, they could remain afloat and keep people in work. What assessment has been made of the number of people and businesses in my constituency supported by the scheme?

Jesse Norman: I can tell my hon. Friend that 67 local businesses registered for the scheme and that it was used 53,000 times in Bridgend, which, while not like the heroic figures we have seen elsewhere, will have provided a very important boost to the local economy. I am sure that he will have had the experience that Members across the House will have had of walking into a café or

restaurant and having the proprietor say, “Thank you so much. It has made a vital difference at a critical time of year for us.”

Covid-19: Business Support

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to support businesses affected by the covid-19 outbreak. [906049]

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to support businesses affected by the covid-19 outbreak. [906058]

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to support businesses affected by the covid-19 outbreak. [906063]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The Government recognise the extreme disruption that the pandemic has caused businesses, which is why we have delivered a generous and comprehensive package of support, in line with best practices globally, totalling more than £190 billion. That has included grants, loans, the furlough scheme, the self-employment income support scheme, deferred VAT payments, business rate reliefs and protections for commercial tenants.

Bim Afolami: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he and the Treasury consider reviewing the rules of the furlough scheme to deal with cases where some small businesses, particularly one in my constituency, missed out on that scheme through administrative error and, in effect, paid staff when that could have been done through the furlough? Will he discuss that with me separately to see whether we could review the rules to deal with that sort of administrative mistake?

John Glen: Obviously, the scheme has helped 1.2 million employers, and that involves 9.6 million jobs. I am happy to engage with my hon. Friend on the specific example he raises. No appeal process is available for those who have made administrative errors, but if a mistake has been made by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, a complaints procedure can be followed. I will follow up on this with him personally.

Miriam Cates: This Government’s support for businesses throughout the pandemic has been wide-ranging and delivered at speed. Without the real-time information held by HMRC, it would have taken significantly longer for those grants to reach employers and many more jobs would have been lost. Digital tax administration not only helps HMRC, but cuts costs to businesses, so what is the Treasury doing to build on those successes and make the UK one of the most digitally advanced places in the world to run a business?

John Glen: My hon. Friend is right; it is incumbent on the Government, in all Departments, to look at how we can refine the way we operate, to be more effective. That is why in July my right hon. Friend the Chancellor published a 10-year tax administration strategy, setting out our vision for a modern system, which will involve extending making tax digital to more taxpayers. That is a first step, and we hope it will bring us to a world-leading situation in this country.

Holly Mumby-Croft: I have been told by businesses in my constituency that the hospitality VAT cut was a lifeline to them and helped them to continue. Will my right hon. Friend consider extending that VAT cut beyond January next year, to help those businesses with that recovery?

John Glen: Clearly, every intervention has a cost, and that measure provided support for 150,000 businesses, protecting 2.4 million jobs. As we approach future fiscal events, all contributions and businesses cases for changes will be looked at carefully by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. I am sure that he has heard my hon. Friend’s representations today.

Covid-19: High Street Businesses

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): What fiscal steps he is taking to support retail and high street businesses affected by the covid-19 outbreak. [906050]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman): As the House will be aware, in recognition of the extreme disruption caused by the pandemic, the Government have delivered one of the most generous and most comprehensive packages of support around the world. That response is so far totalling close to £200 billion. In addition to affordable Government-backed loan finance, the job retention scheme and deferred VAT, retail businesses have also received specific support, including a 12-month business rates holiday for all eligible retail businesses in England and retail, hospitality and leisure grants worth £10,000 or £25,000.

Duncan Baker: Since being elected, I have raised on many occasions the issue of the economic and social loss that online trading is having on our towns, cities and high streets, and the pandemic has accelerated that problem. Surely, must not the Government now start to consider a VAT-style online sales tax?

Jesse Norman: As my hon. Friend will be aware, many offline businesses are also extremely effective online businesses; as Adam Smith almost said, we are a nation of virtual shopkeepers. As my hon. Friend will be aware, the Government are committed to a fundamental review of business rates. We published a call for evidence in July and invited views on reform and on potential alternative taxes, including an online sales tax. Our intention is carefully to consider the merits and risks of introducing such a tax, and I encourage all Members, including my hon. Friend, to contribute their views.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): While a number of wealthier inner-city areas have received over £100 million each in rate relief and small business grants, many constituencies in the midlands and the north have been left behind, with some receiving barely a fifth of that support or even less—Dudley North, Rother Valley, Blyth Valley, Don Valley, Penistone and Stocksbridge, Wolverhampton North East, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Redcar, Sedgfield; I could go on. Is that what the Government meant by levelling up?

Jesse Norman: As the Chancellor has already highlighted, the Government’s intention has been to support vulnerable people, vulnerable businesses and vulnerable families

across the country. As he has also pointed out, the evidence appears to be that we have been very successful, with the most targeted support being most heavily felt at the lower end of the income spectrum. If numbers in the aggregate do not please the hon. Gentleman, let me simply tell him the reaction of one chief executive of a retail business in this country, who said to me that without the furlough scheme, that company alone would have laid off 30,000 people. With the furlough scheme, it has been able to continue and recover.

Coronavirus Job Support Schemes

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on levels of unemployment of withdrawing the (a) coronavirus job retention and (b) self-employment income support schemes. [906051]

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support self-employed people affected by the covid-19 outbreak. [906065]

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the financial effect of the covid-19 outbreak on people who were not eligible for either the coronavirus job retention scheme or the self-employment income support scheme; and if he will make a statement. [906067]

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support self-employed people affected by the covid-19 outbreak. [906069]

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the financial effect of the covid-19 outbreak on people who were not eligible for either the coronavirus job retention scheme or the self-employment income support scheme; and if he will make a statement. [906071]

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the financial effect of the covid-19 outbreak on people who were not eligible for either the coronavirus job retention scheme or the self-employment income support scheme; and if he will make a statement. [906080]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak): The Government have put in place a broad set of policies to support businesses and individuals through this crisis. The coronavirus job retention scheme and self-employment income support scheme have supported more than 9 million and 2.7 million jobs and people respectively. As the economy reopens, we must adjust our support to ensure that people continue to get back to work, protecting the UK economy and people's livelihoods.

Helen Hayes: The Institute for Employment Studies is now predicting 450,000 redundancies over the three months to September and a further 200,000 by the end of the year—more than double the levels seen in the 2008-09 recession. Many of those whose jobs are at risk work in the creative industries, performing arts and hospitality, which would be thriving without coronavirus. Why is the Chancellor persisting with a cliff-edge approach,

which will inflict the hardship and misery of unemployment on so many people, instead of taking a flexible approach to furlough to save good jobs for the long term?

Rishi Sunak: The furlough scheme, as it is currently constructed, is flexible. It was a key demand from business groups and unions, which we responded to. As the economy is slowly reopening over the late summer and autumn, the furlough scheme has adapted to that, allowing businesses to bring back their employees in a flexible fashion, and that is exactly what they are currently doing.

Alun Cairns: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the introduction of the self-employment income support scheme in particular, but does he recognise that it cannot continue indefinitely? Does he also agree that the self-employed are some of the most innovative individuals in our economy, and it is time to release their innovation to kick-start us?

Rishi Sunak: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Now that we have begun to reopen the economy, it is right that our support becomes differentiated and the focus shifts to getting people back to work. It is not possible to sustain this level of intervention. I fully agree with him: those who are entrepreneurial and self-employed deserve our support, and they will continue to get it as we drive our recovery out of this crisis.

Gerald Jones: Hundreds of thousands of people across the country, including many in my constituency, have not been able to get support during this pandemic. The Government have repeatedly said that it is too difficult to get support to people who are not on the coronavirus job retention scheme or the self-employment income support scheme. The Government have had six months to put something in place, so will the Chancellor outline to the House what barriers exist now to getting support to the people who have so far been excluded?

Rishi Sunak: As I have said from this Dispatch Box, we have not been able to help absolutely everyone in the exact way that they would have liked, but that does not mean that support is not available. Through considerable increases to universal credit and local housing allowance, we have provided support to the most vulnerable. Through measures such as mortgage holidays, which one in six mortgage customers have taken up in the past few months, we have ensured that everyone, one way or another, can access some degree of Government support.

Peter Gibson: Over £33 million of bounce back loans have been granted to businesses in Darlington, but many businesses in my constituency bank with new start-up, online and challenger banks and have faced some issues with accessing bounce back loans. What steps is the Treasury taking to assist with access to bounce back loans for those who need them?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend raises an important point, and we recognise the vital role that alternative lenders can play in providing finance to SMEs. We continue to work with them and the sector to see what more we can do. As he recognises, the bounce back loan scheme has proved enormously successful, and so far we have accredited 28 bounce back lenders, who have

provided loans to more than 1 million businesses. In the first instance, I urge businesses in my hon. Friend's constituency to look online at one of those 28 lenders, and see whether they can provide the loans that that business requires.

Chi Onwurah: The Chancellor, and all of us whose salaries have been paid throughout the pandemic, may find it difficult to grasp the deep sense of unfairness felt by those who, through no fault of their own, are entirely excluded from any support. Perhaps they followed their entrepreneurial dream and left a good job to start their own business, as encouraged to do by this Government, but did not file their tax returns in time. Perhaps they have an event business that has been left to fend for itself without any events. There are thousands of such people in my constituency alone. How can the Chancellor expect the country to come together to fight the virus when so many have been excluded from all support?

Rishi Sunak: I respectfully disagree with the hon. Lady. Most people in the country recognise that the Government have provided unprecedented support at this difficult time to millions of people, as well as to hundreds of thousands, if not millions of businesses. Although people may not have been able to get support in the exact way they would have wanted, across the spectrum, whether through the welfare system and local authorities, or through banks and the provision of credit, we have ensured that some form of support is available to the vast majority of the British public.

Tracy Brabin: It is now been six months during which 3 million self-employed people have been excluded and locked out of the coronavirus support schemes, and it is no coincidence that this week the Trussell Trust announced an unprecedented need for support. Nearly half of those people are first-time users, and if the forecasts are right, the situation will only get worse, with six emergency food parcels being delivered every minute as we get to winter. I implore the Chancellor to tell hon. Members what he will do to support those who are excluded, so that this disaster does not turn into a catastrophe for families around the country.

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Lady is slightly confused. On one hand she speaks about people who were not eligible for the self-employment scheme, but those who were excluded earned more than £50,000 and were in the top 5% of all earners, with an average median salary of £200,000. In the same question she speaks about targeting support to those who cannot afford food. She should figure out which issue she cares about.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): When the circumstances change, policies should adapt. Infection rates are growing, local restrictions are becoming more common, and this morning's figures show levels of unemployment at a two-year high, and rising, particularly among the young. France and Germany have extended their employment support for a further year. Is it time to reconsider the jobs cliff edge that is approaching at the end of next month, and at least to extend employment support to those sectors that cannot yet go back to work, and areas hit by local lockdowns, so that businesses and workers are not punished for doing the right thing?

Rishi Sunak: The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the increase in cases, which is why the Government have taken steps to ensure that we remain in control in suppressing the virus. He talks about local lockdowns, and he will have seen the announcement last week about extra business rates support for businesses that find themselves in those areas, with a payment of up to £1,500 per three weeks of lockdown. He mentioned other countries. He is right about Germany and its scheme, but it is worth bearing in mind that Germany has had such a scheme, in co-operation with businesses and through its social security system, for more than a decade.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): As you might expect, Mr Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee is already beginning the reckoning of costs, and there is a cost to the Exchequer from all those people who were self-employed, or employed on short-term contracts, and who received no support. Ultimately, the state still has to support those people, and no tax comes in from them. Will the Chancellor go back to the drawing board and consider the long-term issue of the cost to our country of not supporting people who have a good track record with HMRC and who could be supported? They have lived on fresh air for all these months.

Rishi Sunak: I hear what the hon. Lady says and will certainly reflect on it. I refer her to my response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Miriam Cates) about the importance of a digital taxation system, which I know the hon. Lady's Committee will have an interest in. As throughout this crisis, our ability to respond in the way that we would want to is often limited by the information that we hold. My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has put out a 10-year tax administration strategy that will ensure that our tax system collects in real time the information we need about people and businesses up and down this country, so that, should something like this happen again, the Government can respond in the way that they would want to, as quickly as possible.

Online Sales Tax

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on introducing an online sales tax. [906052]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman): The Chancellor has regular discussions on a range of topics with Cabinet colleagues. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, the Government are committed to a fundamental review of the business rates system in England and have launched a call for evidence inviting views on reform. That review will also consider the merits and the risks of introducing an online sales tax.

Mr Carmichael: Online shopping offers a range of choice and opportunities for many of my constituents and other people throughout the highlands and islands that they simply cannot get from local shops, but it

often comes with the whammy of delivery charges that make the purchase itself look small, or a refusal to deliver at all. An online sales tax could be an opportunity to give a small tax break to those making online sales who deliver as a universal service with a single price across the whole country. Will the Minister consider that along with his other considerations?

Jesse Norman: I am very grateful for the suggestion. Now that the right hon. Gentleman has placed it on the public record, I will ask my officials to look more closely at it and to engage with him on it. He will know that we have already introduced, in a quite different context, a digital services tax. We are open to these potential ideas. We will be looking very carefully at this area. Intelligent and well thought through feedback is always of great interest to us.

Export Costs: Northern Ireland to Great Britain

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): What discussions officials from (a) his Department and (b) HMRC have had with businesses in Northern Ireland on potential additional costs for exporting goods to Great Britain from Northern Ireland under the withdrawal agreement. [906055]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman): The Government have been actively engaging with businesses and fully committed to providing them with the information and support needed to prepare for the end of the transition period in Northern Ireland. As was set out in the Command Paper, the Government's position is that there should be no additional process, paperwork or restrictions on Northern Ireland goods arriving in the rest of the UK.

Sammy Wilson: While I welcome the provisions of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill debated yesterday, they do not cover the issue that the EU is demanding that goods coming into Northern Ireland have tariffs imposed on them until it is proven that they have not left Northern Ireland and gone into the EU. This is damaging to business, because it requires additional paperwork, will affect cash flow, and will put up costs. Given that the Government are committed to keeping Northern Ireland in the UK customs union, that the Act of Union says that there should be no tariffs on trade between countries within the United Kingdom, and that 75% of goods do not leave Northern Ireland once they enter anyhow, will the Minister give a commitment to ensuring in the Finance Bill that the EU demand for those tariffs to be collected will be removed so that Northern Ireland businesses are not disadvantaged?

Jesse Norman: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, these topics are currently very live matters of discussion between this country and the EU, and I am not going to comment on that. However, we are, as a Government, very engaged with this issue across a number of different Departments, and we will be looking to support the principles and positions set out in the protocol as we go forward.

Energy-Efficient Homes: Support

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): What financial support he is providing to upgrade the energy efficiency of homes. [906056]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Kemi Badenoch): The Government recognise the importance of energy efficiency in achieving our climate change objectives and tackling fuel poverty. That is why in July my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced over £2 billion of new funding to upgrade homes through the green homes grant scheme. In addition, we have a range of policies in place to support home energy efficiency improvements.

Mr Wragg: What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the benefits of this ambitious £2 billion scheme for home insulation, and when will my constituents be able to access it to make those improvements to their homes?

Kemi Badenoch: From the end of September, homeowners and landlords across England, including in my hon. Friend's constituency, will be able to apply for vouchers to fund at least two thirds of the cost of upgrading the energy performance of their homes. In addition, Greater Manchester Combined Authority has the opportunity to bid for part of the £500 million being made available to local authorities to help low-income households directly.

Official Development Assistance

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Whether he is responsible for the allocation of official development assistance to Government Departments other than the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. [906057]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay): Yes, Her Majesty's Treasury is responsible for the allocation of ODA across all Government Departments. The comprehensive spending review will determine all ODA budgets.

Mrs Latham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but how can we ensure that all money spent qualifies for ODA categorisation and is particularly focused on relieving poverty?

Steve Barclay: I know my hon. Friend takes a close and expert interest in this issue, not least through her work on the relevant Select Committee. Individual Departments are responsible for ensuring that all money spent as ODA meets the criteria of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, and that it is spent through the powers of the International Development Act 2002, which requires funding likely to contribute to a reduction in poverty.

Low-income Families

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): What fiscal steps he is taking to help families on low incomes during the covid-19 outbreak. [906059]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay):

The Government are committed to all groups in society, including the most vulnerable, facing the challenges caused by covid-19. That is why we have put in place an unprecedented package of support, including the job retention scheme, the self-employed income support scheme and a package of welfare measures that the Office for Budget Responsibility estimates to be worth in excess of £9 billion.

Stephen Crabb: The commitment of this Government to ensuring that the most vulnerable in our society are protected through this crisis cannot be questioned. The scale of the intervention has been remarkable, but may I encourage the Chancellor and the Treasury team, as they begin making their plans for next year's spending, to bear in mind the importance of the increase in universal credit that we made at the beginning of the pandemic, and to ensure that we keep it in place, because many more families will be relying on it in the months ahead?

Steve Barclay: My right hon. Friend is a passionate champion of this issue. He will have seen from the answer given earlier by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that the distribution analysis at the time of the summer update illustrated that the measures taken by the Chancellor had protected the poorest households the most as a proportion of income. I know that he will have listened closely to my right hon. Friend's representations.

Local Authority Funding

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) [V]: What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the adequacy of funding for local authorities during the covid-19 outbreak. [906060]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay)
rose—

Afzal Khan: Analysis undertaken by 10 Greater Manchester councils and combined authorities shows that the impact of coronavirus and the actions taken to manage the pandemic will be in the region of £732 million by the end of 2021. The Government have promised to level up the country, and it is time to make good on that promise, so will the Minister give Greater Manchester and its councils the resources they need to lead the recovery and build back better?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the importance of levelling up across the United Kingdom. It is a key objective of this Government. That is why we are backing councils with the resources they need to meet the challenges caused by coronavirus. That includes more than £3.7 billion of grant funding so far, to address many of the pressures that they face.

Social Care Workforce Special Payment Scheme

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the Welsh Government's social care workforce special payment scheme. [906068]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay):

Spending on devolved matters is a matter for the Welsh Government. The UK Government do not set the levels of pay for care workers in England, but we are focused on ensuring that the social care system is funded, so that providers pay a fair wage.

Jessica Morden: Can the Minister tell my constituents who are care workers why, when they have worked their hearts out and been given a £500 thank you by the Welsh Labour Government, this Government see fit to deduct money from them, leaving those on universal credit with around £125? That is just mean-spirited.

Steve Barclay: The hon. Lady should point out to those same workers that this Government have allocated an unprecedented £4 billion of guaranteed funding to the Welsh Government to enable them to allocate funding under what is a devolved matter. If she is drawing attention to the fact that there is a shortfall in what she feels should be going to care workers in her constituency, she needs to address why more of that £4 billion is not being allocated to care workers in what is a devolved issue.

Manufacturers: Support

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on sectoral support for manufacturers during the covid-19 outbreak. [906073]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Kemi Badenoch):

The manufacturing sector has a key role to play in the Government's ambitious agenda to build back better, which is why last week I met representatives of the UK's major manufacturing trade associations to hear their views directly. To support the sector, we continue to provide extensive support for research and development as part of our commitment to increase it, economy-wide, to 2.4% of GDP by 2027.

Lucy Powell: Many of the communities that voted for Conservative MPs for the first time in the recent election rely on our key manufacturing sectors such as aerospace and automotive for jobs. Given that the Government were prepared to create a £3 billion demand stimulus for the housing market, which was not as adversely affected by the pandemic, why will they not do a lot more to protect those jobs and communities with a demand stimulus for aerospace and automotive, which is desperately needed?

Kemi Badenoch: The Government are acutely aware of the demands required across various sectors. The hon. Lady mentions the aerospace and automotive sectors, which the Government are supporting with over £8.5 billion through the covid corporate financing facility, grants for research and development, loans and export guarantees expected over the next 18 months. There is also further support in place for the automotive industry through the Budget, in which the Government committed over £1 billion to promote the uptake of ultra-low emissions vehicles, including up to £500 billion to support the roll-out of a superfast charging network. Those amounts will help those various sectors.

Topical Questions

[906104] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak): This Government's comprehensive and generous package of support in response to the coronavirus has protected millions of livelihoods and supported hundreds of thousands of businesses up and down the country. Our plan for jobs announced in July will protect, create and support jobs, notably through our recently launched kickstart scheme, as we look to get the UK economy back on its feet.

Patricia Gibson: Scottish Government analysis has revealed that ending the transition period in 2020 could cut £3 billion from the Scottish economy over the next two years—on top of the impact of coronavirus. With the UK Internal Market Bill making the risk of a no-deal Brexit even greater, what reassurances can the Chancellor give to my constituents and the people of Scotland that there will be no real-term spending cuts that will inflict even greater damage on our economy?

Rishi Sunak: The Government and I remain committed to getting a deal and will continue to engage constructively with our European partners in pursuit of that aim. With regard to funding for Scotland, I can tell the hon. Lady that the Scottish Government have received £6.5 billion in advance of it being called for, so that they can provide the support required to their residents.

[906105] **Shaun Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Con): Innovation has been at the heart of the story of the Black Country for over 150 years—and nowhere is this more true than in companies such as Thomas Dudley in Tipton in my constituency and Stephens Plastic Mouldings in Oldbury. Given that these are the types of businesses that will help us as we come out of the pandemic, what work is my right hon. Friend doing with manufacturers and exporters in the Black Country, and with local stakeholders such as the West Midlands Combined Authority and West Midlands Mayor Andy Street, to show that they have the support they need to thrive and survive post pandemic?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Manufacturing and exports, especially from the west midlands and the Black Country, will play a key part in driving our recovery. I am pleased to tell him that the Exchequer Secretary is shortly meeting with the Mayor, Andy Street. That comes on top of our plans to provide £1 billion to develop the UK supply chain for electric automotive vehicles over the next five years, and £850 million of allocations from the local growth fund for his region.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): The Chancellor will be aware of concerns that the UK risks a slower recovery than comparable economies for self-inflicted reasons. Despite the devastating impact on jobs, the Treasury Front Benchers have yet again today—six times—rejected targeted wage support. Economists are concerned about this Government's inability to get a grip on the public health crisis, which evidence from the

Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies suggests stems in part from a failure to adequately support people who have to self-isolate. Rumour has it that the Chancellor is blocking attempts to improve sick pay, so I put it to him: can he put himself in the shoes of those low-paid workers who often have to choose between paying their rent and bills, and putting food on the table for their kids? If these workers are advised to self-isolate, they get £95.85 a week—and that is if they are even eligible for statutory sick pay. Surely the Chancellor must agree with the Secretary of State for Health that statutory sick pay is not enough to live on.

Rishi Sunak: From the beginning of this pandemic, we have made changes to the operation of statutory sick pay and our welfare system to ensure that those who are isolating in any circumstance receive support from day one, and that we improve flexibility, particularly for the self-employed, through the removal of the minimum income floor. As the hon. Lady knows, we are also trialling incentive payments in local lockdown areas.

Anneliese Dodds: I did not ask the Chancellor about the precise details of delivery and I did not ask about the scope; I asked him about the value of statutory sick pay. He needs to get a grip on this issue. If he fails to do so—and the blockage appears to be his responsibility—then we will see additional localised re-impositions of lockdown, with all the implications that has for jobs and businesses. Please, Chancellor, get a grip on this issue.

There are two other reasons why economists are worried about the UK's recovery. First, of course, there is concern about our future as a trading nation. Both of the Chancellor's predecessors warn that the threat to override the withdrawal agreement could damage our country's reputation and prosperity. Why do those former Chancellors appear to be more concerned about our country's economic prospects than the current one? The second reason for concern stems from the prospect of premature spending cuts or tax rises. According to the *Financial Times*, it is politics that could drive the Chancellor towards early tax rises, so will he rule them out for the rest of this year?

Mr Speaker: Order. I do want the Chancellor to answer, but we will have to shorten the questions.

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Lady talks about our place as a trading nation. She may have missed the news last week that this country has concluded an enhanced free trade agreement with Japan. I pay enormous tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade for concluding a deal that will be better for British businesses, particularly in the areas of the economy we do so well on such as digital and services. It will protect more of our great agricultural produce, open up more markets for our businesses to sell to and reduce prices for British shoppers. That is what the future of global Britain looks like.

[906107] **Joy Morrissey** (Beaconsfield) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his support for local businesses in Beaconsfield and across the UK. What provision or safety net is he creating for local businesses that may be affected by lockdowns across the country?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point and I thank her for it. She will know that some of the interventions we have already put in place last through into next year, for example the removal of the need to pay business rates for businesses in hospitality, which has been particularly affected. She may be reassured to know that we recently introduced the new business support grant for businesses forced to close as a result of local lockdown, where the Joint Biosecurity Centre gold command has instituted that measure, and those grant payments will be available up to £1,500 per few weekly cycles.

[906109] **Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): The aviation industry is on its knees: airports are deserted, planes are grounded and travellers are frustrated. In large part, the plight of the industry is due to the inconsistent, illogical and contradictory policies being followed by the Government to attack coronavirus. Will the Chancellor consider what actions he can take to support this vital industry, which we depend on for our connectivity, by either reducing or suspending air passenger duty, or through targeted job support?

Rishi Sunak: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the importance of the aerospace industry to our economy. It is, in common with aerospace industries across the globe, suffering a deep depression in demand for all the obvious reasons. He can rest assured that we engage regularly with the companies in that sector. In particular, to support their future success, we are investing heavily in R&D alongside those companies to make sure we remain on the cutting edge of advanced manufacturing capability.

[906108] **David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the benefits of the Government's tax-free childcare scheme, which gives eligible families a 20% contribution to the cost of childcare and works alongside the 30 hours funded childcare that is available to working families, cannot be overstated as the economy reopens to my constituents and across the UK?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the importance of good childcare and he is right to highlight that the Government support people with 20% of their childcare costs up to a cap of £2,000 through tax-free childcare. I can also tell him that, in recognition of the importance of this issue, we made some adjustments to how tax-free childcare operated during the pandemic, so that if someone's income fell below the minimum income requirement as a result of what was happening they would continue to receive financial support up until the end of October.

[906113] **Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): At the end of August in my constituency, there were 2,000 more people unemployed than there were in March. The number of 18 to 24-year-old claimants has almost doubled. If history teaches us anything, it is that young people and those living in deprived areas will be more adversely affected by any downturn in the economy. What special measures is the Chancellor considering putting in place for young people in areas like mine, which are the most deprived?

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the disproportionate economic impact that this crisis will have on young people. I have spoken about that from the Dispatch Box before, and he is right that we should focus our attention on them. That is why, in our plan for jobs, we outlined the kickstart scheme, which will initially make available fully-funded Government job placements for a quarter of a million young people at risk of long-term unemployment. I am confident that many young people in his constituency, like all of ours, can benefit from that scheme, and I urge him to work with his local businesses to get them signed up to the scheme and take on a young kickstarter.

[906110] **Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): I recently had the pleasure of visiting Smart Display, a great Calder Valley business in the events and exhibitions sector, which supports over 28 employees. While it praises the sterling work done by my right hon. Friend to support businesses through furlough, CBILS—the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme—and rate relief, many businesses in its sector were among the first to close and will be the last to reopen, with many exhibitions not planned until next year. Can my right hon. Friend take this into serious consideration during the Budget process to see what additional measures he could take to support these businesses, which are the hardest hit financially by the pandemic?

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay): My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the particular impact on that sector. It is something we are engaging on closely with it, and I am very happy to continue to have dialogue with my hon. Friend on the issue.

[906116] **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: Tackling the covid crisis relies on us all doing the right thing, but for many that is just an impossible choice financially, as we heard from the shadow Chancellor. The lowest-paid workers who self-isolate must do so on statutory sick pay of £190 in total for two weeks. Can the Chancellor even begin to imagine how impossible it is to bring up a family for a fortnight on about the same amount as the cost of his £180 high-tech coffee cup?

Steve Barclay: I think my right hon. Friend addressed this in his reply to the shadow Chancellor. The key issue is to look at the package of measures the Government are putting in place. First and foremost among those is retaining people's link to employment. That is the most important issue. Alongside that, the measures on welfare, including support for businesses that are in lockdown, are part of the comprehensive response, and statutory sick pay is one of a suite of measures.

[906111] **Holly Mumby-Croft** (Scunthorpe) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that the best way to stimulate our economy is through measures that create jobs and help people back into work?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is the underlying principle behind furlough—to enable the labour market to bounce back, with jobs in businesses that were viable before the pandemic being able to recover quickly. It is also part of the three-phase strategy that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has set out. The second phase is to concentrate on skills to

create jobs, protect jobs and support jobs, and to enable those workers to come back into the economy and for the economy therefore to recover quicker.

[906125] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): The Government will be aware of the significance of the sale of Cambridge-based ARM to American chip maker Nvidia. Will the Government intervene both to secure the headquartering and jobs in Cambridge, but perhaps more significantly, to get an exemption from the American CFIUS—Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States—rules, which give the American Government such leverage? Why on earth would we want to throw away such a bargaining chip in advance of trade negotiations?

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The hon. Gentleman is right to raise ARM, which is obviously a key employer in his constituency. The Government are taking a very close interest in this transaction. It was pleasing to see yesterday that parties close to the transaction said that the headquarters would remain in Cambridge. It is a matter we are engaging very closely on, and I am very happy to engage with him personally on any questions arising from that.

[906112] **Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): Bounce back loans have been vital to many businesses in Crewe and Nantwich. Although they appreciate the help they have had from the scheme, some have been left waiting too long to access the support. For example, Axis Boats in my constituency waited eight weeks. Until it approached me and we worked together on it, it was not able to get the finance. Will my hon. Friend agree to meet me to discuss examples such as this and to ensure that banks are fully playing their part in getting people access to this support?

John Glen: My hon. Friend is right to raise this point, which he has raised before. In his constituency, 1,400 businesses have benefited from the bounce back loans from 28 providers across the country, but I am happy to engage with him in relation to the number of cases he has dealt with and see what interventions can be made at this time.

[906130] **Zarah Sultana** (Coventry South) (Lab): The likes of Amazon, Facebook and Google have seen their profits soar during the pandemic. Using accounting tricks, these companies avoid paying their fair share of tax, which is how Amazon UK's pre-tax profits have risen by 35%, while its tax bill rose by less than 3%. Will the Chancellor promise to keep the digital services tax and promise that it will be billionaires and the multinational corporations who will pay for coronavirus spending, not workers and small businesses who have been hit so hard?

Rishi Sunak: It is right that companies pay the tax that they owe the Exchequer so that we can fund the public services that all our constituents rely on. That is why this Government instituted the digital services tax for online companies, which came into force this year. We remain committed to that tax, although we work with our partners around the world to replace our unilateral one with a multilateral solution through the OECD that will properly tackle this issue once and for all.

[906114] **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Businesses in Rugby and Bulkington have told me universally how they welcome the measures that the Government have introduced for their speed and their breadth, but they know that the coming months will be difficult for trading and there are tough times ahead. Which of the Government's measures, given limited resources, does the Minister think are the most appropriate to support businesses over the next few months?

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Kemi Badenoch): The Government have a range of schemes that have been supporting businesses throughout the pandemic, as my colleagues have mentioned time and time again. If my hon. Friend has specific requests from the businesses in his constituency, I am very happy to discuss those with him so that we can work out the best way to continue to spur economic recovery.

[906131] **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Does the Minister recognise that while the proposed changes to small breweries tax relief may well benefit members of the Small Brewers Duty Reform Coalition, they will work against the interests of fledgling micro-breweries, such as Attic Brew in my constituency? Will the Minister look again at the impact of the changes on those small, but job-creating businesses?

Kemi Badenoch: We have been looking at this relief for several years now, and the changes that we have made are going to benefit the vast majority of brewers. The smallest brewers will be exempt from most of the changes, and those brewers who have been unable to grow will now be able to do so. We had a long consultation and quite a few brewery groups have been very supportive of this change. We will have further announcements to come after the next technical consultation on this relief.

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 now suspending the House for a few minutes.

12.32 pm

Sitting suspended.

Coronavirus

12.37 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to update the House on his response to coronavirus.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Coronavirus exists only to spread, and yesterday the World Health Organisation once again announced a record number of cases globally. France and Spain have both reported daily figures of over 10,000 positive cases and increasing hospitalisations. Here in the UK, we saw around 2,600 new cases yesterday, and last week medical advisers advised that R is above 1. The epidemic is growing.

There are signs that the number of cases in care homes and the number of hospitalisations is starting to rise again, so last week we acted quickly, putting in place new measures—the rule of six, which came into force yesterday. We do not do this lightly, but the cost of doing nothing is much greater.

Testing also has a vital part to play. Everyone in this House knows that we are doing more testing per head of population than almost any other major nation, and I can tell the House that we have now carried out over 20 million tests for coronavirus in this country. As we expand capacity further, we are working round the clock to make sure that everyone who needs a test can get a test. The vast majority of people who use our testing service get a test that is close to home, and the average distance travelled to a test site is now just 5.8 miles—down from 6.4 miles last week; but the whole House knows that there are operational challenges, and we are working hard to fix them.

We have seen a sharp rise in people coming forward for a test, including those who are not eligible. Throughout this pandemic, we have prioritised testing according to need. Over the summer when demand was low, we were able to meet all requirements for testing, whether priorities or not, but as demand has risen we are having to prioritise once again. I do not shirk from decisions about prioritisation. They are not always comfortable, but they are important. The top priority is, and always has been, acute clinical care. The next priority is social care, where we are now sending over 100,000 tests a day, because we have all seen the risks this virus poses in care homes. We will set out in full an updated prioritisation, and I do not rule out further steps to ensure our tests are used according to those priorities. It is a choice that we must make.

Finally, to defeat this virus in the long term needs effective vaccines and treatments. I am delighted to say that over the weekend the trial of the Oxford vaccine restarted, and I can tell the House that we will now be trialling a promising new antibody treatment on coronavirus patients in the UK. The challenges are serious. We must work to overcome them, optimistic in the face even of these huge challenges, and to keep this deadly virus under control.

Jonathan Ashworth: I am grateful for advance sight of the Secretary of State's answer. That was decent of him.

Yesterday LBC revealed that there were no tests available in covid hotspots, including Rochdale, Pendle and Bradford. Over the weekend in Bolton, where infections are the highest in the country, a mobile testing centre failed to turn up. Meanwhile, in Bury hundreds queued for five hours for a test. In Walsall, a father with his sick child travelled 76 miles to an appointment in Wales, only to find on arrival that tests had run out. Increasing numbers of teachers and pupils are not in school. In hospitals, operations are cancelled while NHS staff are stuck in limbo, waiting for tests.

The Secretary of State blames increased demand, but when tracing consistently fails to reach 80% of contacts, when less than 20% of those with symptoms self-isolate properly and there is a lack of financial security, infections rise. When schools reopen and people return to workplaces and social distancing becomes harder, infections rise. Extra demand on the system was inevitable. Why did he not use the summer to significantly expand NHS lab capacity and fix contact tracing?

Just as demand is increasing, the ability to process tests is diminishing. Post-graduate students working in the Lighthouse labs are returning to university, so why did the Secretary of State not plan for the inevitable staff shortages in the Lighthouse labs? Those commercial pillar 2 labs, *The Sunday Times* revealed at the weekend, have a huge backlog of 185,000 tests. Thursday's data revealed that 65,709 test results were not returned by the end of the week. Care home residents now wait an average of 83 hours for their result. The Prime Minister promised us a 24-hour turnaround for results, so what is going on? What is the current backlog and what is the timeframe for clearing it?

We were promised a world-beating system, so why are we sending tests to Germany and Italy for processing? But, most importantly, people want to know when they will get a test and when this mess will be fixed. Today there will be thousands of ill people trying to book a test, only to be told none is available. When will people be able to book a test online again, or has the online booking system been deliberately disabled? When will ill people no longer have to travel hundreds of miles for a test that should be available on their doorstep? When will pupils and teachers out of school get access to testing, so they can get back to school? When will NHS staff have access to regular testing, so they can focus on their patients and not be sitting at home?

We are at a perilous moment. Imperial College estimates the virus is doubling every seven to eight days. We all want to avoid further restrictions or another national lockdown, but when testing and contact tracing break down, the growth of the virus cannot be tracked. The Prime Minister promised us whack-a-mole, but instead his mallet is broken. The Secretary of State is losing control of the virus; he needs to fix testing now.

Matt Hancock: Well, the good news, in responding to that, is that capacity for testing is at a record high. The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of testing in the top 10 local authorities—well, I have got the figures here. Yesterday, we processed 9,278 tests just in pillar 2—so outside of the NHS testing capacity—in just those top 10 local authority areas. Just yesterday, we processed 1,428 tests in his own local authority area.

The good news is that capacity is at record levels and that a record number of people are able to get tests. I do not deny that it is an enormous challenge. When a service is free, it is inevitable that demand will rise. The challenge is to make sure that we prioritise the tests that we have as a nation for those who most need them, as I set out in my answer.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the backlog, which is actually falling and is less than one day's processing capacity. He also asked about our being able to have testing capacity so that we can re-enable the economy and get things going. As he well knows, there is a huge effort to expand—using the next generation of technologies—the tests that we need to deliver to reopen parts of the economy, and we will deliver on that.

We will deliver on the challenges of today. I do not deny those challenges, but I face the facts in order to deliver on those challenges, rather than simply complaining. The hon. Gentleman should welcome the record capacity and the contact tracing, which are playing their part in responding to the virus.

Mr Speaker: Let us hear from the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): A week ago today, the Secretary of State told the Health and Social Care Committee that he expected to have this problem solved in two weeks. Since then, in my constituency, two Farnham residents have been sent to Bristol for their tests, a councillor has been sent to the Isle of Wight for her test and a teacher who tested positive had to wait a week for her results. Is the Secretary of State, given the efforts that his Department is making, still confident that in a week's time we will have this problem solved?

Matt Hancock: I think that we will be able to solve this problem in a matter of weeks. In his constituency yesterday, 194 people got their tests. We are managing to deliver record capacity, but as he well knows, demand is also high, and the response to that is to make sure we have prioritisation, so that the people who most need them can get the tests that they need.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: With covid cases doubling every week, it is clear that laboratory capacity for diagnostic testing is not keeping pace with demand, leading to testing slots being cut. For example, only 70 new covid cases were reported in Scotland yesterday, yet 267 were reported today, many from tests carried out over the weekend. With a reported backlog of 185,000 tests, is the Secretary of State not concerned that results will not be received quickly enough to allow timely contact tracing, and that the delay in data means that new outbreaks will not be identified until they are out of control? Last week, the Secretary of State appeared to accept that additional NHS funding could allow hospital laboratories across the UK to rapidly increase their testing capacity, so can he confirm whether he plans such an approach, and on what timescale?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I think it is important that we expand the NHS labs, and that we work across the whole of the UK to get the testing capacity needed. For instance, in Scotland, when there was a surge in demand for tests last month, we diverted more of the UK's

capacity to support people in Scotland, and we currently deliver more tests per head of population in Scotland than in the UK as a whole. In the tone of the hon. Lady's question, it is absolutely necessary to work together, across party lines, between the Scottish devolved Government and the UK Government, to make sure that we get the support to the people of Scotland as to every other part of this country.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): May I ask the Secretary of State about the rule of six? Many of my constituents struggle to understand why they can play five-a-side football but two connected families of five each cannot meet. Will the Secretary of State look at flexibility when local rates permit, and also at excluding under-12s from the rule? Christmas is just around the corner. I know he has to think of the health of the nation, but I really urge some flexibility on the part of the Government.

Matt Hancock: Of course, I do worry first and foremost about the health of the nation, and we need a rule that is super-simple. Children do transmit this virus, and we have made the decision to keep the rule as simple as possible considering all those risks. I understand where my hon. Friend is coming from. We take a different approach in different areas according to the extent of cases locally, and that is an important tool in our armoury.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Like many other Members, I have been inundated with emails from doctors, teachers and parents unable to access the tests that they desperately need. Several of them have been advised that if they put an Aberdeen postcode into the system, they can get a test in Twickenham—and they have succeeded. How on earth is a world-beating test and trace system functioning like this, and what is the Secretary of State doing to fix it? In the meantime, does he recommend that I tell constituents who desperately need a test to game the system in that way?

Matt Hancock: No; in fact, it is incumbent on us all to take a responsible approach and tell our constituents that tests are available in large numbers, that the average distance travelled is 5.8 miles and that people should take this seriously and not game the system.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I am grateful to the Government for all that they are doing to fight covid-19 and keep the population safe. May I ask my right hon. Friend if there is a formal trigger for easing the rule of six and measures like it?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and it comes to the point that was previously made about Christmas. Of course, we will keep the rule of six in place only for as long as is absolutely necessary for health reasons. The vaccines and treatments that I spoke about and the mass testing regime are all important in trying to find a way through this virus with a minimal impact on the economy, education and people's social lives. There is not a formal rate at which we will make that review; we keep everything under control, and I have no doubt that we will constantly debate the matter in this House in order to ensure that we come to the right decision.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State is in danger of believing the global figures without looking at the reality on the ground. In my borough, which has been working hard with the Government to keep an outbreak down, we have two walk-in test centres, which have been advertised as such to reach the digitally divided and make sure that people can get tests quickly. Over the weekend, staff from Deloitte—a private company running this public service—told people that they could no longer walk in. That was not communicated to the local authority, so the service was still being advertised as walk-in, and more than 90 people were turned away from one test centre alone. This is a fiasco of the Government's making, and the Secretary of State could intervene now to make sure that, at the very least, there is communication. I hope he will release the correspondence between Deloitte and the Department of Health and Social Care so that we can see exactly what has happened.

Matt Hancock: I will happily look at that individual case. Of course, there are many hundreds of tests being done in the hon. Lady's constituency, as well as across London. I can look at the individual point and make sure that communications occur as necessary.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): We have heard case after case of failure when it comes to testing. I have heard from parents, teachers and a vicar in Luton North all saying that there are no walk-in tests, no drive-through tests and no home kits available when they need them. The Secretary of State talks about capacity, but what we need is access to testing. Capacity is nothing without access to testing. When can people with symptoms expect to be able to get tests when and where they need them?

Matt Hancock: The vast majority of people do. In Luton yesterday, 484 people got tests. I agree with the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) that we should follow the data.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I congratulate the Government on their efforts to increase testing capacity and on working with local authorities to do so. As a result of the soaring number of covid cases in Manchester, however, some people are still unable to get the testing they need. We know that children are back in schools now and that schools are natural incubators of colds and tummy bugs, which mimic some of the covid symptoms. As the flu season gets going, will the Government look at the guidance they are giving to schools and people about how to access those tests?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely; of course I will do that. We have put significantly more testing into Stockport and my hon. Friend's constituency: 720 tests just yesterday. One reason for that is the higher rate in Greater Manchester. She makes an important point about ensuring the capacity so that tests can be there when someone has the symptoms of coronavirus, but it is also incumbent on schools to send pupils for testing only when they have the symptoms of coronavirus, to make sure we can prioritise the testing for the symptomatic people who really need it.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am enormously grateful to the Secretary of State and the Minister for the help he provided over the weekend with Vaughan

Gething, trying to get the mobile testing centre in Porth, which has now moved to Clydach, fully functioning in the Rhondda, not least because we have a very high number of infections at the moment and are trying to work out what the specifics look like in terms of a potential lockdown.

Today, however, the best part of 60 people turned up for a test, having made an appointment in Abercynon, only to be told there were no test kits but that there might be some available that afternoon so to try again later that day. Still people are being told to go to Aberdeen. I do not know if it is just the alphabet—people think that Aberdeen is near Abercynon—but it is a very long way away. I also gently say to the Secretary of State: I know he knows there is a problem here, but trying to rebut every argument with, "Honestly, we've got more people doing more stuff and people need to get with the programme", and all of that, just does not wash with the public. There is a danger, if he does too much of that, that people will simply say, "We can't trust you any more".

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman is right: we spoke over the weekend and worked hard to get those mobile testing units into the Rhondda, where there is a significant outbreak. It showed the effectiveness of people working together to deliver solutions. I do absolutely acknowledge the challenge, but I also urge everybody to ensure the message gets through to people in the Rhondda and across the country that tests are available. I use these figures to demonstrate that hundreds of people in every constituency are getting tests. I want people across the country to know that we understand there are challenges and are working incredibly hard to fix them but that tests are available.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): My disabled constituent Ian Kenny has been trying to get a home test since 8 September. He cannot drive so he cannot get to a test centre. He has symptoms but has been told there are no home tests available. Until he can prove he does not have covid, he cannot access the hydrotherapy he needs or go back to work. What reassurance can my right hon. Friend give Dr Kenny that he will be able to get a test? He speaks today of prioritisation and difficult choices, but disabled people living in their own homes must be a priority and must not be forgotten.

Matt Hancock: Absolutely, and I will of course be happy to look into the case in detail. Such cases, where there is a clinical need, should be at the top of the prioritisation. We have set out the prioritisation and will continue to update it to make sure it matches the latest science. My right hon. Friend has made her point and I will make sure the matter is looked into.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Secretary of State is certainly a very busy person. Will he outline what steps have been taken, in co-operation with the Department for Education, to see that school bubbles that have a positive case are returned to school as a matter of urgency? The reason I bring this to his attention is simply that if one child in a household has a classmate with covid-19, and they are tested and are proven not to have it, they are sent home with their

mother, but other children in the same households go to different classes in the school. It seems a bit absurd, does it not?

Matt Hancock: If somebody tests negative in a school environment, as in the example the hon. Gentleman gives, the school can of course carry on as normal because there is no sign of covid. I will double check that the guidelines around exactly that circumstance are clear and will speak to the Department for Education.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): To what extent is there a possibility that it is the exponential increase in testing itself, in identifying genuine new cases, and the very significant possibility of false positives, that is giving a distorted impression of the trajectory of the disease?

Matt Hancock: I like my right hon. Friend very much and wish that that were true. The reason why the Office for National Statistics does the surveillance testing is to ensure that we are constantly looking, on a national representative sample, at what the case rate is, as well as, of course, using the tests, and as we increase the testing numbers, we will inevitably find more of the cases that are there. The ONS survey published on Friday shows a rise in the numbers commensurate with the rise in the numbers of tests that have come back positive, and that does take into account the point about false positives, which is an important one.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Work is under way to set up a walk-through testing centre at Glasgow Caledonian University in my constituency, but with universities now returning, what additional capacity is being put in place to deal with what could be an additional surge of tests that need to be processed?

Matt Hancock: We are working with universities to try to ensure that testing is available as appropriate. Of course, that has to follow the wider prioritisation, but it is very important that universities right across the UK are ready for the return of students, including with testing, where that is appropriate, and we are working on that right now.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): My constituents are sharing the same experiences as those of my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), so I encourage my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to do everything he can on testing capacity.

May I ask him about the rule of six? If someone is lucky—or unlucky—enough to have four very young children, under the rules they are not allowed to meet another household at all. I do hope that the Government will keep the rules under careful review and look at every possible way to make them as fair as possible for every family.

Matt Hancock: I understand my right hon. Friend's point. We do understand the impact of the rules that we have to put in place. It is the same around the world: the rules that need to be put in place to deal with a pandemic are not pleasant ones or ones that anybody would want to have in force, but unfortunately they are necessary to

save lives. Sadly, we are seeing the consequences, including in some of our closest neighbours, of what happens if we do not take the action that is needed.

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): Although I am sure that many ordinary people were thrilled to learn that the Government's rule of six does not apply to so-called sports such as grouse shooting, for which up to 29 people can mingle, expectant mothers in my constituency and throughout the country are unable to take their partners to crucial checks during pregnancy. Currently, individual health trusts are left to make decisions on this issue, leading to a postcode lottery. Is it not time that the Government stopped passing the buck, as they did to school leaders, and instead provided national leadership across the country on matters as vital as maternity care?

Matt Hancock: I have a huge amount of sympathy with the case that the hon. Lady makes. In fact, last week we changed the guidance on this issue to allow partners to go with pregnant women to these sorts of tests and, of course, to the whole of the birth. The Minister for Patient Safety, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries), is responsible for this issue and leading on it, and we have made some significant progress in the past week. I commend the campaigners who are pushing so hard to make sure that each hospital follows the new guidance so that people can have a loving partner with them during these very special moments.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): On the rule of six, I completely agree with my right hon. Friend about the importance of clarity and simplicity. Early on in the pandemic, we saw some of the problems that arise when different rules kick in in different parts of the United Kingdom. On that point, is there not a strong case for having one simple, understandable rule of six that applies right across the country and has high levels of public support? To that end, I encourage my right hon. Friend to keep an open mind about the rule of six that is in place in Wales and Scotland and the exemption of small children.

Matt Hancock: I absolutely keep an open mind on all these things. We are constantly looking at the evidence and data, and updating policy accordingly. We have made the decision on the basis that I explained. Of course, I understand the other point of view, but the cause of simplicity and clarity of explanation won the day.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): My constituent in Barnsley has been trying for seven days to get a test for her teenage son after he was sent home from school with a temperature. She has been offered a test in Bolton, Edgbaston and Oldham, and nearly 400 miles away, in Inverness. When will the Secretary of State stop denying that there is a problem, apologise to my constituent and sort out access to testing, once and for all?

Matt Hancock: I ask the hon. Lady to get in contact with me about that individual case; 686 people in Barnsley got tests yesterday, and I am sure we can ensure that her constituent gets that test.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): As demand for testing increases, some of my constituents are struggling to get slots, are having to travel significant distances or are even being turned away from mobile test centres. So will my right hon. Friend confirm whether the Government's plans to increase capacity are aiming for 10 million tests a day or the 2 million to 3 million that Sir John Bell talked about this morning? As part of that welcome boost, will my right hon. Friend look carefully at my request for a public testing site in King's Lynn?

Matt Hancock: I will absolutely look at my hon. Friend's request on King's Lynn. Thankfully, after an outbreak a couple of weeks ago, the number of positive test results in Norfolk has come right down. I commend the work of Norfolk County Council, my hon. Friend and colleagues from across Norfolk, who have done so much to ensure that the public messages get through. On the "moonshot", we do not have and have not had any plans for 10 million tests a day, but we do have a goal to get to the millions of tests a day when we can. That is dependent on new technology, so that is what we need to drive forward. It is vital for this country, for the resolution of exactly the problems we are talking about today, and then for expanding testing availability more widely that we really embrace those new technologies.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): Yesterday, I was contacted by an NHS nurse who had spent the weekend unsuccessfully trying to get a test for her symptomatic seven-year-old. On Friday, I visited the new Brinnington test centre in my constituency. It was very quiet, yet it seems to have been unable to offer a test to a nurse, who, it seems, will now need to take time off work. Is that what world-beating looks like? What is going on?

Matt Hancock: Again, I am happy to try to solve the individual issue for the nurse, not least because the figures that I read out for Stockport do not include the NHS capacity, which is there for NHS staff in order to resolve exactly the sort of issue that the hon. Gentleman talks about.

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): Cancer Research UK estimates that the screening backlog because of covid-19 might mean that as many as 3 million people are waiting. Will the Secretary of State update us on the work he is doing to ensure that all areas of the NHS are able to carry out screening programmes and on the work he is doing to reassure people that it is safe to attend these screening tests?

Matt Hancock: That is an incredibly important subject, as we need to make sure we get the screening available. It ties into the questions on testing, because prioritising testing for those about to have NHS procedures, be they diagnostic, such as screening, or an operation of some sort, is so important, for instance, in making sure that we tackle the backlog in cancer cases that inevitably built up. We are tackling that backlog and it is down by about half. I am happy to work with my hon. Friend and all others in this House to make sure that people get the early diagnosis of cancer that can so often be lifesaving.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) [V]: The Secretary of State will be aware of a recent survey which found that one third of

children feel more anxious, sad and stressed now than before lockdown. The charity Action for Children has therefore asked the Government to prioritise children's mental health in covid-19 recovery planning and provide adequate funding to meet this demand. Could he tell the House exactly what he has done about that and when we can expect him to announce a covid recovery mental health strategy?

Matt Hancock: This is an incredibly important subject, and I commend the hon. Lady for raising it and for her work on it, along with many Members across the House. We are putting more funding into mental health, and paediatric mental health in particular, to ensure that we tackle the inevitable consequences of the pandemic.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): "Hands, face, space" has been the public safety message for weeks now. However, I feel that the public are not as safe as they could be. What thought has my right hon. Friend given to ensuring that face masks and hand sanitiser offer the fullest protection by regulating for the need to meet set safety criteria, whether that be the British Standards Institution standard or the World Health Organisation formula for hand sanitiser, so that we are all as safe as possible using these mitigating factors?

Matt Hancock: We do have a standard for clinical masks, but for the widespread use of face coverings, we do not set a standard, because the evidence is that for the general public, using a face covering can make a big difference without drawing on the supply of clinical masks for personal protective equipment. Standards are set by the European Union that define what can be put into a hand sanitiser, but I am happy to work with my hon. Friend on the details if that needs to be strengthened.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): A world-beating app that is nowhere to be seen, the national R rate rocketing and local testing all but impossible—in Ealing, we would be lucky to get offered a test in Aberdeen—all bode ill for the start of the educational year. With press reports swirling around that there are hundreds of school outbreaks already, can the Secretary of State tell us exactly how many of those there are? Can he up the number of testing kits that schools are supplied with from 10 a piece? As universities go back, which means that people will be moving around bits of the country with different infection rates, can he ensure that everyone on campus gets a test, whether they have symptoms or not? We cannot let education be the next care homes crisis.

Matt Hancock: The hon. Lady raises important points. It is important to note that in Ealing, 462 people got a test yesterday, so tests are widely available in Ealing. The other issue she raises about ensuring that schools and universities have access to testing is important within the prioritisation. As she knows, we have sent tests to every school for use in exceptional circumstances when they need them. It is very important that those tests are used when people are symptomatic, rather than asymptomatic.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): Last week, a mobile covid testing centre was set up in Ashfield, which helped hundreds of my constituents to get a test, but over the

weekend, several constituents said that they struggled to book online due to the demand. Will my right hon. Friend advise the people of Ashfield what more can be done to ensure that everyone in my constituency who needs a test gets a test?

Matt Hancock: We have put the extra capacity into Ashfield that my hon. Friend talks about, and I am delighted that the number of people in Ashfield who are getting a test has therefore increased. We have to get to a position where everybody who needs a test can get a test, ensuring that we follow the prioritisation. I look forward to working with him to fix the problem in Ashfield and across the country.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): In Warrington we have seen spiking numbers, with over 200 confirmed cases in the most recent weekly figures. Our rate is now the sixth highest in England, and we have real issues with demand for testing far outstripping local capacity. Can the Secretary of State outline what additional support he will give to Warrington Borough Council to increase our testing capacity, so that we do not have to go back into lockdown like our Greater Manchester neighbours?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely. The hon. Lady is right to raise the concerns in Warrington about the increase in the number of people testing positive. I am happy to work with her, Warrington Borough Council and my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) to ensure that we get the best possible response, including putting in that extra testing.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Traditionally, the start of the autumn term is the peak for returning schoolchildren showing signs of colds and sniffles. I am now increasingly getting reports from my constituency of young children being turned away or returned from nurseries and primary schools if they display any cold symptoms. I am afraid that I have to tell the Secretary of State that testing is not at a record high in my constituency, because of capacity being moved up north and to hotspots, despite Worthing now being on the watch list because of a single outbreak of 23 people not abiding by the regulations. I heard yesterday from a constituent who had been referred from the Sussex coast all the way to Aberdeen. Can he not forget those very young children and the huge impact that they can have on families and schools if testing is not properly available for them?

Matt Hancock: Yes, of course. It is so important in Worthing, as it is across the rest of the country, that we prioritise the testing that we have. My hon. Friend is quite right that, when schools go back, children often do get a cold, a non-coronavirus illness—a normal illness if you like. Obviously, that is contributing to the increase in demand, as well as people who are not eligible coming forward. That is one reason why we have been building capacity throughout the summer, and I look forward to working with him to make sure that we solve the problems in Worthing.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: Greater Manchester is a covid hotspot. The nearest testing centres to me are: Hyde, one and a half miles;

Ashton, three miles; Brinnington, three miles; Belle Vue, four miles; Etihad Campus, five miles; Oldham, nine miles; and Manchester Airport, 11 miles. They might be testing there, but local people cannot get slots. Instead, too many of my constituents have been allocated: Telford, a 152-mile round trip; Llandudno, 174 miles; Leicester, 216 miles; Glasgow, 450 miles; and Aberdeen, a 716-mile round trip. My constituents do not want to become superspreaders, so why is this world-beating system going so spectacularly wrong for them?

Matt Hancock: As the hon. Gentleman outlined in his question, we have put an enormous amount of testing into Manchester. There is availability in Manchester because there is a prioritisation on testing. Because it is such an outbreak area, we have put in a huge quantity of tests. As I have said repeatedly, there are operational challenges, but thousands of people are being tested in Manchester every day, to get a grip of the outbreak there.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend has my sympathy and support as he discharges his duties. He is well aware of the position across the west midlands and, in particular, in the royal town of Sutton Coldfield, where we do have testing difficulties. I am very concerned to hear today that Ley Hill Surgery has no fewer than four GPs who are having to self-isolate and cannot get a test. May I make two points to him? First, I join with those who want an exemption for informal childcare, so that parents in certain circumstances can still go to work. Secondly, I ask him to look at a system whereby all Members of Parliament get access to regular infection rate details both by local government wards and by postcodes?

Matt Hancock: I am very grateful for my right hon. Friend's support. I am working very closely with him and with the other Birmingham MPs, because there is a serious challenge in Birmingham and in other parts of the west midlands. On the point about getting the data down to a ward level, I will absolutely ensure that he gets that data. We look at it down to a lower super-output area level, and we publish that data weekly. I will ensure that it gets to him and that we get the full details of exactly how many cases there are in each part of Birmingham. I recognise that, while Sutton Coldfield is in the Birmingham local authority, it has a distinct geography within that area. As he knows, both from our discussions and from how we have acted in other parts of the country, we will take action on a sub-local authority area where that is supported by the data. Unfortunately, for now, we do have that local action in Sutton Coldfield, but we keep it constantly under review.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Has the Secretary of State seen today's analysis revealing the terrifying scale of the backlog in cancer treatment and diagnostics? It is now clear that it would take the system operating at 135% capacity for six whole months just to catch up with where we were in March. Until then, the tragic reality is that people in my constituency and around the country will be unnecessarily losing their lives. I beg him to urgently meet the clinician-led Catch Up With Cancer campaign so that we can give him the solutions to boost cancer services and save tens of thousands of lives.

Matt Hancock: I am very happy to meet the campaign. Of course I have seen the reports. I feel very strongly about this. We have worked very hard to get through the backlog, and we are making progress against that backlog. Nevertheless, I am happy to look at anything we can do to speed that up, so I look forward to listening to the details of what we can do.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, sporting venues are suffering financially because of the restrictions, and it does not help when planned pilot events are cancelled at the last minute. Who takes the decisions on whether to allow pilot events to carry on—is it done centrally, locally or a combination of both? There is a feeling that there is some confusion.

Matt Hancock: My colleague the Culture Secretary is responsible for the programme of pilot events. For a pilot event to go ahead, it needs both the support of the local council and to have been advised as covid-secure by Public Health England. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport takes the lead. As the MP for Newmarket—one of the four towns in my constituency relies on sport, as do the livelihoods of thousands of my constituents—of course I understand the impact, in exactly the same way that my hon. Friend does, as the MP for Cheltenham racecourse. I speak a lot to the Culture Secretary and the Prime Minister about this subject. I hope that we can get as much going as fast as possible, but safely.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I understand that it is not dead easy, but rather than come here and give us big numbers about tests completed or the average journey, why does the Secretary of State not listen to what people in all parts of the House are telling him today? Why does he not try to understand what it is like to be a parent in special-measures Birmingham who is directed to Oldham for a test when there is a walk-in centre two miles down the road virtually empty? Will he just recognise that there is a problem and tell us what he is going to do to try to put it right?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I absolutely recognise that there are challenges: I set them out in my initial answer and have done repeatedly. I urge colleagues in all parts of the House, and the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have huge respect, to accept that we are only going to solve these problems if we use the data as our guide.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): I have constituents in Scunthorpe who have struggled to access a face-to-face GP appointment. Can my right hon. Friend reassure those constituents that, should they need one, they will be able to have one?

Matt Hancock: Yes. There is no greater supporter than me of the ability to access medicine by telemedicine. It is an incredibly important option that is available and should be a choice for our constituents. We have made access by telemedicine the default method unless there is a good clinical reason not to use it. It is, however, as I have always set out, critical that there is face-to-face access as well. The NHS has written to all GPs to explain that while telemedicine should always be available, and that option should be available where it is clinically

right, face-to-face appointments should also always be available and are absolutely necessary. The combination of the two is the future of the NHS.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): People in Sandwell and Birmingham certainly want to know why their whole boroughs are being suddenly locked down and not just the currently affected areas within them, but they also need a plan on how we are going to contain the virus without paralysing society and the economy. We may have to coexist for years with the virus, as countless societies and countries have had to live with many awful diseases over millennia, and even now today, so when are we going to transit from reactive risk avoidance to prudent risk management?

Matt Hancock: We absolutely need to control this virus. I very much hope that we will make very significant progress, through treatments and vaccines, within the sorts of times that I set out previously—definitely in less than a millennium. I think that we will make significant progress in the coming months. However, in that time, we do have to control the virus.

We took the action in Sandwell having looked carefully at the data. Working with the right hon. Gentleman's local authority, we also looked carefully at whether we should only put some parts of Sandwell under local measures—in particular, the Smethwick area was much more significantly affected earlier on—but it was clear that the virus was spreading throughout Sandwell, so working with the local authority, we decided to take local action across the whole district. That is the sort of action that we have to take.

The strategy that I have set out many times at this Dispatch Box is that social distancing is the first line of defence: the rule of six, and hands, face and space. The next line of defence is testing and tracing, which is why it is so important that we have record testing capacity and are trying to boost that further. The next line of defence is local action and ensuring that we do take that local action where necessary, even though it is uncomfortable to do so.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his visit to Shotley Bridge in my constituency yesterday and look forward to working with him on the campaign for a new community hospital in the coming months. I welcome the massive increase in testing, including the mobile testing unit that has been at Consett AFC over the past few days. Across the north-east more broadly, we are seeing an uptick in the virus. The Secretary of State has now had meetings with various north-east councils on this issue, and I encourage him to give local authorities the powers they need to enable targeted local action in the north-east if necessary.

Matt Hancock: It was a real pleasure to be in Shotley Bridge yesterday, to meet my hon. Friend there and to visit Shotley Bridge Hospital. He and the whole House know that we will build 40 new hospitals, so it was interesting to see the plans that are in place. I will absolutely take away his point about the rise in cases in the north-east. The seven north-east councils have written to me with a proposal for tackling that increase. I have been studying their proposal and will make an announcement as soon as a decision has been made.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): We have heard about people in England registering as coming from Aberdeen and perhaps other places. Is the Secretary of State not concerned, as I am, that this may completely undermine the data and any resultant decision that is taken to act on and manage what might appear to be a Scottish outbreak?

Matt Hancock: Obviously, I talk to the Scottish Government, who are responsible for local action in Scotland. We work as closely as we can to try to bring both the UK capacity and the local capacity to bear. We have put much more testing in Aberdeen, which is right, and I support the Scottish Government in the action that they take to bring down the number of cases there.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on the biggest testing regime in this nation's history? Twenty million tests is a monumental feat. That said, it would be wrong of me not to highlight the calls that my office received at the tail end of last week and yesterday, with people in Cornwall unable to access tests. What progress is he making on expanding the number of tests in Cornwall so that my constituents can access them?

Matt Hancock: There have been more than 600 tests a day in Cornwall over the past couple of days, so people in Cornwall can access tests—and it is very important, if they have symptoms, that they continue to do so—but of course I acknowledge the challenges that have been faced as well. We want to increase testing capacity right across the board. Sometimes we have to discuss difficult issues in this House, but I am pleased to say—especially with so many people having gone to Cornwall over the summer, because, as I can personally attest, it is such a wonderful place to have a summer holiday—that the case rate in Cornwall has stayed really low. I pay tribute to everyone in Cornwall for the work that they are doing on social distancing, on hands, face and space, and on being cautious and careful to stop the spread of the virus. Let us hope that that remains the case.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): There are three testing centres in Coventry, but constituents have told me of their distress and despair that they cannot access a test. Some cannot book a test anywhere, while others have booked only to be turned away at the centres. There are also cases of people in Coventry being directed as far away as Inverness. The Government have had six months to get testing sorted, and this is a complete and utter farce. The Secretary of State's quoting figures is not good enough, so when will this mess be fixed and when will my constituents be able to access the tests that they need?

Matt Hancock: Of course, as the hon. Lady well knows, we are working both to increase capacity and to ensure that we have prioritisation so that the people who need a test most can get access to those tests. I am sure she will agree that it is important not only to listen to voices and the stories of those people who have had difficult experiences, but to ensure that we look at the facts on the ground. There were 762 people yesterday who got a test in Coventry, and that is an increase over the previous week. I am really pleased that we are able to do hundreds of tests a day in Coventry, but I appreciate that we need to keep expanding capacity.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I am really keen that we proceed on the basis of reliable and agreed evidence, so what would the Secretary of State say to people who point to Sweden as an example of how we can control the virus and minimise the impact on the economy and our social lives?

Matt Hancock: I have looked very closely at the situation in Sweden, and the challenge is that Sweden brought in significant laws curtailing social activity and that the population in Sweden followed more closely more than in almost any other country in the world a lot of guidance that was not enforced by law. The case rate in Sweden was also higher than in other geographically comparable countries.

The conclusion I have come to is that the approach we are taking, where we look around the world, learn from similar countries and take action where necessary, is the best way to control the virus and protect the economy. The rule of six is designed to try to restrict the transmission where we see it happening most, which is in social circumstances, and to protect the economy as much as possible by keeping the economy open within those social constraints. We are constantly vigilant and we are looking around the world for other examples of where we might be able to make changes. As my hon. Friend knows, we have made changes to our approach as we have learned throughout this unprecedented pandemic.

James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: My constituent Rachel has an 11-year-old daughter who came down with covid symptoms on Sunday. All her family have spent days self-isolating and desperately trying to book a test. At one point, they were directed to Wales, which is a six-hour round trip. At the same time, Rachel has seen private tests for £140, and often much more, that seem to be easily available. Does the Health Secretary think that this disparity is acceptable?

Matt Hancock: We do not recommend any private tests that are not signed off and verified. Therefore we are providing as many tests as we possibly can with a growing capacity. If the hon. Gentleman writes to me with the details of that individual case, I will absolutely look into it and make sure that one of the hundreds of tests that are being done in Ealing today is available for his constituent.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): Having raised the issue of testing capacity in Buckinghamshire last week, I am enormously grateful to my right hon. Friend for the supply of two mobile testing units this week, in the town of Buckingham and in neighbouring Aylesbury, but like many hon. and right hon. Members I also continue to receive a lot of emails every day from constituents unable to access testing, so will he update the House on progress for a permanent uplift in the capacity for Buckinghamshire residents?

Matt Hancock: Yes, of course. My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue, and we have put more testing into Buckingham. There are hundreds of tests available across Buckinghamshire for his constituents and others, and we are working hard to ensure that the overall capacity has increased as well. Our constituents understandably want to get access to a test whenever they

[*Matt Hancock*]

want one, and I understand that yearning, but we have to prioritise and, as I said in my opening answer, we have to put NHS and social care needs at the top of the list. I make no bones about that prioritisation, but at the same time we need to get overall capacity up, which is what we are working incredibly hard to do.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Like elsewhere, the numbers in Harrow with covid are on the rise. Tests are available for key workers, but I am told that parents and their children cannot get a covid test “for love nor money” in Harrow or near Harrow. I say gently to the Secretary of State that that does not yet feel like a world-leading test and trace system. Will he take a specific look at the circumstances in Harrow, and in particular why the nearby test centre at Heathrow is so unused at the moment?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman makes an important case for Harrow and I am very happy to take a look at Harrow specifically. The capacity constraint is in the labs, rather than the centres. We have the centres available to be able to process a huge amount of tests. We have record capacity in the labs, but it is in the labs where there is the constraint. We are bringing in more machines. More are being installed all the time, which is why capacity is constantly going up. Nevertheless, we clearly need to keep driving at that, because demand is going up as well.

Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con): We need to use every tool at our disposal to stop the spread of coronavirus. I welcome the news that the NHS contact-tracing app will be available by the end of the month, and I welcome the news that it will be available throughout England and Wales. Will my right hon. Friend join me in urging businesses in Bridgend to get prepared with the NHS QR code scan poster?

Matt Hancock: Yes. The NHS covid-19 app, which will be available this month, will, as one of its features, ensure that people can go to a pub, restaurant or hospitality venue and scan the QR code quickly. Contact details will then be safely collected in case they are needed for contact tracing purposes. We are making the scheme mandatory. It has been very successful voluntarily and we are going to roll it out mandatorily, so I urge hospitality businesses in Bridgend, and right across England and Wales, to download a QR code for themselves and put it where it is very easy to use and obvious, so that all of us, when we go to the pub in Bridgend or anywhere else, can very easily scan in. If there is an outbreak, we can then contact trace that outbreak and keep the virus under control.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I do not underestimate the challenges the Health Secretary has faced over the past few months, but six months on, after many, many warnings of the likelihood of a second wave and of what would happen without a fully operational test, track and isolate system in place before lifting the lockdown, unfortunately the Government are still not getting the basics right. That is happening in my constituency in Oldham. We did not have a mobile testing unit turn up and we are still not getting the data we need to trace covid-positive cases.

For starters, will the Secretary of State sort out the private contractors for the national test and trace system; make sure that public health directors are getting timely, high-quality data on covid cases, including occupational workplace details; and, fundamentally, make sure our local authorities have the resources they need to trace all contacts, and ensure restrictions are understood and observed?

Matt Hancock: The answer is yes. In Oldham in particular, where there has been a very serious outbreak, making sure we have that connection between the national system and the data flowing through to local contract tracers is incredibly important. We are working on some innovative solutions proposed by the local authority and others in Manchester to enhance that system as much as we possibly can to keep control of the virus.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): Lots of my constituents in Winchester have had tests, and the Government deserve credit for that, because we as a country started from a position where we did not have a system in place. The Health Secretary had to create a system from scratch, and he had great help in that from the private sector. We certainly should not be denigrating that; we should be thanking it and expanding on that help. Given the operational challenges that the Secretary of State spoke about, I wonder whether GP surgeries, or even our wonderful community pharmacists, could be part of the solution for front-door testing. What is the cross-Government superhuman effort part II to increase lab capacity—AstraZeneca was very helpful in part I—as that seems to be the challenge outlined by my right hon. Friend?

Matt Hancock: We are increasing that capacity, and we are bringing in new technologies to those labs to expand on that. My hon. Friend is a great expert in this issue and makes a really important point. The current technology works best in labs—people send a swab to the lab and get the result back, but there is a huge amount of logistics around that. We want technologies that can be in a pharmacy or a GP service, so that people get the test result back straight away. When such technologies come on stream—I am optimistic about this, as I am about a lot of things; I do not think I could do this job at the moment without being optimistic—that will give us a chance to get testing out into the community at every level.

We need to tackle problems such as the challenges you have in Chorley, Mr Speaker—you rightly brought them to my attention in your role as a local MP, as we all are—not by having a big national system, but through solutions that are deeply embedded in the community. When we have the technology to do that, we will be in a stronger place, and we are putting every possible effort and support behind people to try to make that happen.

Mr Speaker: I am pleased you are bringing me back into it. We still have a lab at Chorley Hospital that you can use if you get on to it.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): We have had a spike in cases in Redbridge, yet in recent days the Mildmay Road walk-in centre closed for walk-in appointments, without notifying the council or either of Ilford’s MPs. People have been struggling to get access

to tests. A local secondary school says that it will close within two weeks unless staff get access to tests, and the local walk-in centre will not even share testing data, which the Secretary of State says is so important, with public health officials at the local council. It is an utter shambles. Can the Secretary of State reassure us that he will help us get a grip in Redbridge? Does he recognise from the voices we have heard across the Chamber that these problems are not only in Ilford? There are problems right across the country, and the only way that this system is world-beating is through world-beating incompetence. When will he get a grip?

Matt Hancock: I am happy to consider the specific issues that the hon. Gentleman raises about Ilford. We have an extremely good working relationship with the London group, which is cross-party and includes health professionals. I am happy to take that point offline and work on a solution specifically for Ilford with the hon. Gentleman. As he knows, nationally we are seeing an increase in overall capacity, but because of the increase in demand we have to prioritise. Having said that, in Ilford, like everywhere, I want to ensure that we have access to tests for the people who need them, and that is the job, day and night.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con) [V]: Pregnancy can be one of the most surprising, exciting, but traumatic experiences of a woman's life. That is why this week I launched a campaign with *The Mail on Sunday*, calling for all NHS trusts to ensure that partners support pregnant women during all scans and all stages of labour. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that women across the country have the Government's support, and will he push NHS trusts to stand by pregnant women?

Matt Hancock: Yes, 100%. I strongly support my hon. Friend, and I congratulate her on—*[Interruption.]* Somebody says, "Her pregnancy". I hope it is public knowledge—well, it is now. I congratulate her on her pregnancy, and I know she has a strong interest in our getting this sorted. We put out extra guidance last week, and it has been a pleasure to work with her on the campaign to ensure that all hospitals follow that new guidance. We must ensure that partners can be there throughout each stage of pregnancy, in a covid-secure way, and that people get the support they need.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): Coronavirus cases are on the rise in Hertfordshire, and yet in St Albans key workers, teachers, doctors and parents cannot access tests. They are frustrated for two reasons, first because they cannot get a test, but secondly because this was utterly predictable. We knew there would be a surge in symptomatic cases and we knew there would be a surge in demand from key workers. Was any modelling actually done, and, if so, will the Secretary of State publish it?

Matt Hancock: Of course, we have been increasing capacity all the time, and working throughout the summer to do that, to make sure that there is as much capacity as there is. The big change in capacity will come when one of the new technologies comes off, and that is why I am so passionate about them—because that is what is going to be able to get us out of the situation of having to have prioritisation and instead getting a test to everybody who wants one, not just those who need them according to the clinical prioritisation.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): A local high school student tested positive for covid late last week, so when parents had children from that school displaying symptoms over the weekend, they quite rightly tried to book a test but none was available on the portal. On Sunday morning, I directed one set of parents to a local walk-in centre a 45-minute drive away. The first centre had actually run out of tests, but after a drive to another walk-in centre, they eventually got one. Secretary of State, please, please, please, before we talk about the moon, can we just focus on local community testing in Marsden, Meltham, Mount and other communities in my constituency?

Matt Hancock: We have put a huge amount of testing into Kirklees, and it is very important because of the levels of coronavirus there. I am very glad that my hon. Friend's constituents did manage to get a test, and I know that there is huge demand. But I would also say that getting the new technologies on board is also a part of solving the problem that we have right now. We absolutely have to push on existing capacity, but we have also got to make sure that we invest in that new technology to solve this problem once and for all.

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

Point of Order

1.47 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you advise me how I can ensure that the record is corrected in relation to Division No. 94 yesterday? I spoke in support of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill on Second Reading and I voted on all three occasions, but one of my votes has not been recorded. I suspect that the circumstances relate to the fact that there was a Government Whip there who said he could not see whether my vote had been properly recorded, but he did not give me any advice as to what would happen if there was a problem. I falsely, and quite wrongly, relied upon the Whips, and I hope that you will remind hon. Members that there is no point in relying on the Whips in the Division Lobbies.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has now put that point on the record and it will be investigated. All the Whips Office are now being sent to Specsavers to have their eyes tested.

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.

1.48 pm

Sitting suspended.

Digitally Altered Body Images

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

1.51 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require advertisers, broadcasters and publishers to display a logo in cases where an image of a human body or body part has been digitally altered in its proportions; and for connected purposes.

When I was 15 years old, I saved up all my pocket money to buy a multi-gym, with two goals in mind: the first, to improve my rugby; the second, to aspire to the physiques that I saw in the media—the likes of the Hoff in “Baywatch”. I spent hours working out. It definitely helped my rugby. I do not think that I ever made the grade, though, as a beach body Adonis. But the point is simply this: if my studies had not got in the way, if I had not had outside interests that caught my eye, perhaps, with the right diet and a perfect training regime and if I had been paid to do so, I might—just might—have been able to emulate them. At least it was physically possible.

However, here today, 20 years on, things have changed. With a click of a mouse, you can have bigger biceps. With a swipe of a thumb, you can have a slimmer waist. We are therefore creating a digitally warped reality, striving for bodies that can never be achieved. That is what I want to draw the House’s attention to today. Over the next few minutes I will set out the scale of the problem, what the Bill is intended to do, and why the Government and the House should support it.

Before entering the House I was a GP. I saw many patients suffering from low self-esteem, concerns over their body image. Patients would come in, desperate for diet solutions or a prescription for build-up drinks to make them get bigger. That was often tied up with anxiety and depression, and at worst, anorexia, bulimia or steroid abuse.

It is estimated that currently, there are about 1.25 million people suffering with anorexia and bulimia in the UK, and 1 million people using steroids or image-enhancing drugs. A survey of over 6,000 people, carried out last year by the Health Foundation, found that one in five adults and one in three teenagers felt shame about their body. Lauren Goodger, a celebrity, has spoken out about her anxiety when it comes to posting pictures of her body in social media. Spencer Matthews, of “Made in Chelsea” fame, has spoken candidly about his concerns about needing to bulk up, and turning to steroids to do so.

It is only human to want to compare ourselves with one another—our house, our car, our clothes and—possibly the oldest of them all—what we look like. Research carried out by the Florida House Experience showed that 87% of women and 65% of men compared themselves with pictures in the media. But what if what is shown in the media is not actually present in reality? Here lies the problem. We, society, are creating unrealistic and unachievable aspiration.

This very specific Bill is a small step to try and address that problem. Requiring advertisers, broadcasters and publishers to have a logo is a way of drawing viewers’ attention to the fact that all is not as it seems. It is not a call to ban; it is a call to inform. I do not want to stop people from removing red-eye on wedding photos

or using filters to enhance lighting, but where the body proportions have been fundamentally changed, the viewer should know. This is a call for honest advertising, and we have a precedent for it already—we have the “P” showing product placement, disclaimers on political adverts and the, “Not actual game footage” notice on adverts for video games. This proposal is simply a translation of current practice into the digital world of body image.

Some detractors will argue, “This is the nanny state in action.” However, this Bill does not ban changes. It empowers the individual, giving them choice. Free marketers will know that a perfect market needs perfect information, and this Bill is a step towards it. We do this in respect of physical health, with labelling on tobacco and food, and it gives people choice. Those who believe in parity of esteem between mental and physical health will see that this draws the two into line. The second set of detractors say, “That is all very well, but how can it be applied practically?” First, some countries already have similar laws in place, most notably Israel and France. Israel has the Photoshop law, which explicitly states that any airbrushing or editing on adverts must be labelled or people will face a fine. Similarly, France has legislation requiring the display of “photographic retouched” on edited images or people will face a fine.

The UK has the Advertising Standards Authority to regulate and enforce. It covers not only traditional media, but online media. In meetings with the ASA, the likes of Facebook and Instagram are all keen to stress how they proactively adhere to the ASA guidelines and, indeed, the law. Facebook already differentiates between content added organically—by a member of the public—and content added for commercial use. The latter is actively monitored and is held to a higher set of rules when it is published. Platforms such as Facebook for advertisers have algorithms to search for accounts using the platform for commercial activity. Therefore, if the law changes, the enforcement and adherence remains the same.

The big question is: what about social influencers? It is a grey area. I have already mentioned that the likes of Facebook automatically search for signs of commercial activity, and the industry is actively trying to determine how to define “social influencers”. Clearly, there is a distinct and tangible difference between having 100 followers and having 100,000 followers. This Bill will not answer that question, but neither does it have to. That is beyond the scope of this legislation and it is already being worked on by the industry, the ASA and the Competition and Markets Authority. In short, the industry draws a distinction between commercial and organic—the only question is: at what level? In conjunction,

one further solution, building on what I have already set out, is to have a click-button declaration upon the uploading of the photo, whereby the user is asked whether the image has had its body proportions changed. If it has, a logo will automatically be applied. We already have a similar process when people are asked to declare the copyright when they upload an image, so why can the same thing not apply in this regard?

The UK has a strong and proven track record of self-regulation under the ASA, working within a legal framework. I see no reason why that would change under this Bill, so why should the Government and the House support it? I am glad to see the Minister, whom I thank for being here today. Ironically, my post about this subject has, organically, reached almost half a million people; there have been multiple stories in the national media about this topic and a big debate has been started since the mention of this law. Charities such as Girlguiding have come out in support of the cause. After all, research shows that 88% of girls between the ages of 11 and 21 want images to be labelled. The Bill commands support from across the House, and I am hugely grateful to the Chairs of the Select Committee on Health and Social Care, the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Select Committee on Women and Equalities for all seeing the value in this Bill and for supporting it.

Finally, what do I hope to gain from this Bill? I actually hope I will never see this logo, as advertisers, broadcasters and publishers do not feel the need to fundamentally alter the proportions, but if they do, I hope they are honest about it. I hope that those who are social influencers will not feel the need to change their images and, anecdotally, there are already reports in the press that the Bill would change habits. However, as someone who got married last year, I hope to be a father in the next year or two, so if this Bill is a small step that means my daughter is less likely to worry about her diet or my son is less concerned about building muscle in an aspiration that simply cannot be possible, I will rest a little bit easier. I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Dr Luke Evans, Jeremy Hunt, Caroline Nokes, Julian Knight, Dean Russell, Simon Jupp, Neale Hanvey, Sarah Owen, Chris Elmore, Dr Lisa Cameron, Jim Shannon and Wera Hobhouse present the Bill.

Dr Luke Evans accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 180).

United Kingdom Internal Market Bill

[*Relevant documents: First Report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, Unfettered Access: Customs Arrangements in Northern Ireland after Brexit, HC 161, and the Government response, HC 783.*]

[1ST ALLOCATED DAY]

Considered in Committee

[DAME ROSIE WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): I should explain that in these exceptional circumstances, although the Chair of the Committee would normally sit in the Clerk’s chair during Committee stage, in order to comply with social distancing requirements I will remain in the Speaker’s Chair, although I will be carrying out the role not of Deputy Speaker but of Chairman of the Committee. We should be addressed as Chairs of the Committee, rather than as Deputy Speakers.

Clause 28

FUNCTIONS OF THE CMA UNDER THIS PART: GENERAL PROVISIONS

2.2 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I beg to move amendment 28, page 20, line 31, leave out “, Scotland”.

This amendment would exempt from the operation of Part 4 (independent advice on and monitoring of UK internal market) regulatory provisions applying in Scotland which did not apply to the whole of the UK.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clause 28 stand part.

Amendment 29, in clause 29, page 21, line 3, at the beginning insert

“Following legislative approval from all devolved administrations,”.

This amendment would ensure that the CMA may only undertake a review following legislative approval from all devolved administrations.

Clauses 29 to 34 stand part.

Amendment 21, in clause 35, page 26, line 16, at end insert—

“(1A) Prior to publishing the information in subsection (1) the CMA must consult the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland about how it is to approach the exercise of its functions.”

The intention of this amendment is to ensure that the devolved administrations are consulted before the CMA determines how to exercise its functions in regard to the UK Internal Market.

Clauses 35 to 37 stand part.

Amendment 30, in clause 38, page 29, line 22, after “must” insert

“obtain the agreement of the devolved administrations and”.

This amendment would ensure that the Secretary of State cannot decide amount for penalties with CMA without agreement from devolved administrations.

Clauses 38 and 39 stand part.

New clause 1—*Dispute resolution mechanism*—

“(1) Within the period of two months after the day on which this Act is passed, the Secretary of State must consult the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland about how any disputes relating to the functioning of the internal market will be resolved between the four parts of the United Kingdom.

(2) Within the period of three months after the day on which this Act is passed, the Secretary of State must lay before each House of Parliament a report detailing how any disputes relating to the functioning of the internal market will be resolved between the four parts of the United Kingdom.

(3) Any dispute resolution mechanism established by the Secretary of State must provide for representation from each nation of the United Kingdom.”

The intention of this clause is to help resolve the functioning of the internal market between the four nations of the United Kingdom.

New clause 2—*Limits on powers to override common frameworks*—

“The Secretary of State shall not make any order or regulations under this or any other Act of Parliament that has the effect of imposing lower standards on Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, in any area for which a common framework—

- (a) has been agreed,
- (b) is in development, or
- (c) becomes necessary,

unless, where subsection (b) or (c) above applies, the Secretary of State judges that a reasonable period has passed and the negotiations have failed to reach agreement, and a draft of the order or regulations has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.”

This new clause puts common frameworks on a statutory footing. Where there is a common framework agreed, Ministers would not be able to override them through secondary legislation to impose lower standards on devolved nations. Where a common framework was in development, or a new common framework became necessary, Ministers could not impose standards until the negotiation of common frameworks had taken place between the nations of the UK and failed to reach agreement after a reasonable period. The UK Parliament would be the ultimate arbiter of standards if reasonable agreement could not be reached.

New clause 3—*Duty to consult, monitor and report*—

“The CMA has a duty to consult with all relevant national authorities and shall produce monitoring reports on

- (a) changes in standards, and
- (b) assessments of whether standards have been met.”

New clause 4—*Appointment of members to the Competition and Markets Authority board by the devolved administrations*—

“(1) Schedule 4 of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 is amended as follows.

(2) After sub-paragraph 1(1) insert—

- “(1A) The members appointed under sub-paragraph (1)(b) must include—
- (a) a member appointed by the Scottish Ministers,
- (b) a member appointed by the Welsh Ministers, and
- (c) a member appointed by the ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive.”

This new clause gives the devolved administrations the power to each appoint a member to the board of the Competition and Markets Authority.

Drew Hendry: Dame Rosie, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I rise to talk to amendments 28 to 30 in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

When the Institute for Government warned that “it is not clear how disputes around the functioning of the internal market will be managed”,

it opened up the yawning and damning gap in the plans for the governance of the internal market. As a result of ditching co-operation over common frameworks, this Government propose to fill the gap with an Office for the Internal Market—an unelected quango. I will return to the composition of that body shortly. The Office for the Internal Market will have an effective veto over the Scottish Parliament, and the subsequent result is that devolution will be hamstrung. This is yet another step in introducing a system where standards are set by Westminster and they must be accepted by Scotland in devolved areas.

Analysis by the Scottish Government has revealed that successful Scottish policies such as alcohol minimum unit pricing, our policy on tuition fees and the ban on smoking in public places would be among the Bills referred to the Office for the Internal Market. That has been opposed by many bodies who have shone a light on this. The National Farmers Union Scotland has raised a series of concerns about the function of the Office for the Internal Market's dispute resolution mechanism in managing policy differences, ensuring that the UK Government do not have the final say on areas of devolved policy, including agriculture, and enabling the devolved Administrations to act where it is considered that a policy aligning in a particular manner is unfavourable to devolved interests such as agriculture.

Of course, it would not have to worry about that if the UK Government had simply continued work on common frameworks. Common frameworks are designed to manage cross-UK divergence where EU law and devolved competencies intersect, including in relation to the functioning of the UK domestic market, together with existing processes for regulatory impact assessment and existing structures for regulatory co-operation and information sharing. Let us be clear: they do not need to be supplemented or undermined by a new, unelected body.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Does this not get to the crunch? Government Members keep asking what powers are being taken away from the Scottish Parliament. My hon. Friend is outlining it—the power that is being taken away is the power to make all these decisions. The Scottish Parliament is going to be trumped by an unelected, unrepresentative body, instead of having agreements between the devolved Governments and the UK Government on the framework basis, which should be being implemented.

Drew Hendry: I could not agree more. This simply does not have to happen. Scotland does not need it, and Scotland does not want it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Duguid): So you say.

Drew Hendry: Yes, I am saying that, but that is also what the National Farmers Union is saying. It is also what the Institute for Government has pointed out. A number of other bodies have pointed out that this is just not necessary. We have something that we could work with, with co-operation, but of course, the UK Government do not want co-operation, consultation and working together. They just want to impose their will, and that is what they are trying to do again.

This Bill not only undermines the basic foundations of devolution but goes further, hitting all existing mechanisms for co-operation and the development of common frameworks. It is not this abomination that is required; it is the establishment of the common frameworks mutually agreed, developed and implemented through consent, with effective governance and processes for regulatory impact.

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): The hon. Gentleman called the Office for the Internal Market an unelected quango. Does he accept that, if he had his way, he would be handing powers back to unelected quangos in Brussels?

Drew Hendry: This is the argument that Government Members try to propagate all the time—that if these powers came to Scotland, they would immediately be transferred to unelected people in the EU. Two things are wrong with that. First, nobody in the EU is actually unelected when they make decisions; they are all elected by either the Parliament or the people who go there. The second and most fundamental point is that, under these proposals, the UK Government are simply taking all control and overriding the ability of Members of the Scottish Parliament to do their job by representing the people who voted for them and their choices.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con) *rose*—

Drew Hendry: I will make some progress.

The UK Government say that they want to

“guarantee the continued right of all UK companies to trade unhindered in every part of the UK.”

Under this proposal, businesses simply have to have deep enough pockets to challenge the democratic decisions of the Scottish Parliament and the Members elected by the people of Scotland to represent and make decisions further for them. For some, it will be “Sale of the Century” or “Bargain Hunt” as they go looking for these things. For those who set their sights on Scottish domestic choices, it does not stretch the imagination much to picture private health companies or private water companies operating in England looking at our publicly owned organisations and seeking to claim that, under the UK Government's auspices, they have a guaranteed right to trade in Scotland. That is the first big flashing red light here.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I agree with the points that my hon. Friend is making. Is he as concerned as I am to find that when the CMA arbitrates on a dispute, it does not have to publish the report of its finding, on the basis that such a report contains

“commercial information whose disclosure the CMA thinks might significantly harm the legitimate business interests”

of any person? That means that the CMA could well cover up the report of any dispute in favour of private business.

Drew Hendry: Exactly; my hon. Friend makes a telling point. To say that the protections are opaque would be an exaggeration, because they are nowhere near as good as that.

Richard Fuller: I am keen, as I mentioned yesterday, to learn more about some of the points of view that the hon. Gentleman is expressing. In the absence of a common frameworks agreement, if it were not possible

[Richard Fuller]

to get reconciliation between the constituent nations of the country on what the regulations should be, what would be the implications for business?

Drew Hendry: The problem with that question is that there is already, as I mentioned at the start of my remarks, a process for dealing with that—the common frameworks. I am saying that the UK Government do not have to take this hammer and smash devolution in order to organise things so that business can co-operate and work across the different nations of the UK, taking cognisance of the choices made by those nations' individual Parliaments.

I turn to the composition of the Office for the Internal Market, and I would be grateful if the Minister intervened and gave me some answers to these questions. Who are these people? Who will sit down in judgment over the democratically made decisions of the Scottish Parliament? Do we know yet? Do we have any idea? These words from the Prime Minister—he was talking about the EU, of course—are coming back on him, as so many of his outpourings do:

“They may decide that now is the time—even though electorates are already feeling alienated from the political process—to hand sensitive decisions...to unelected bureaucrats.”

But that is what he has decided to do. He has decided to hand these decisions to unelected bureaucrats.

What grace-and-favour appointments will there be to this body? Will any of them have links to the many vested interests that apparently find it so easy to pick up contracts from this Government? The fact that that is something we can only guess at underlines how dangerous this proposal is for Scottish people and communities. We reject the idea of this body of unelected, unknown bureaucrats having power over the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish people.

The SNP has tabled amendments 28, 29 and 30, which are in my name and those of my hon. Friends. Amendment 28 would exempt from the operation of part 4, which deals with independent advice on and monitoring of the UK market, regulatory provisions applying in Scotland that did not apply to the whole of the UK. Via this amendment, the SNP wants Scotland to be removed from part 4 of the Bill, because it undermines devolution.

Decisions made by our elected representatives must be upheld, and this proposal to overrule the Scottish Parliament is a democratic outrage. Let us be clear that we cannot and will not accept this legislation in any form. Under the unelected Dominic Cummings, the Prime Minister is forcing this power grab through, despite overwhelming opposition from Scotland's Parliament and MPs. It proves that Scotland will never, ever be accepted as an equal partner in the UK. It attacks the foundations of devolution and gives Westminster and an unelected quango a free hand to overrule the Scottish Parliament in devolved areas, threatening our NHS, our food and our environmental standards. It fires the starting pistol on a race to the bottom.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): I fully agree with amendment 28, which is very well drafted. The same should apply to Wales and Northern Ireland, because it would allay any fears in

the respective devolved countries of the UK that the British Government are using the UK Internal Market Bill to torpedo devolution.

Drew Hendry: Indeed, and this is a matter that does not just affect Scotland, as the hon. Gentleman said. Even the Labour-run Welsh Government have come out to stand against these measures.

2.15 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman has made some strong points, but does he agree that it does not have to be this way? He will know that our Counsel General, Jeremy Miles, has been giving evidence alongside one of the Scottish Ministers this morning to a Committee in this place. He spoke of the engagement and discussion they had had with the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), and how that completely dried up at the start of this year, so much so that they did not even get the details of the Bill until the night before it was published.

Drew Hendry: That sort of attitude towards what should be co-operation over our common interest underlines the contempt that has been shown for the devolved nations. It is yet another example.

As I have said, we cannot and will not accept this legislation in any form. All the Bill does is simply and plainly underline why the democratic choices that represent Scottish people and the protection of our Parliament can only be delivered through the powers of independence for Scotland, so that it can take its place as an independent nation among the other independent nations of the world.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): The arguments that I have just heard from the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) are, in my judgment, completely unjustified. [Interruption.] He might expect me to say that; it is hardly surprising. The reality is that the Bill is intended to provide for independent advice and monitoring through the creation of this internal market within the Competition and Markets Authority arrangements. What the provision clearly states—far from it being just a bunch of nodding donkeys, which is more or less what the hon. Gentleman is saying—is that it will be a non-ministerial department, albeit sponsored by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and it will have an enormous amount and range of experience and knowledge brought from its predecessor.

Drew Hendry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, especially as I just recently concluded my remarks, but can he confirm two things for me? Who will be on the body, and who has—he will know the answer to this—the final say over this body?

Sir William Cash: What I can say for sure is that it will not be the European Union, and that summarises the argument in a nutshell. It is something I spoke about in the debate only yesterday, where I made it entirely clear that there is one thing we have to be absolutely clear about, and this Government, as compared with the previous Administration, have made it clear.

In relation to that vast range of state aids that I mentioned yesterday—they are effectively decided by the European Commission and imposed on our own companies and our own internal economic sovereignty at the moment, but we are now going to insist on retrieving them, and we have retrieved them by leaving the European Union—the position is simply this: the manner in which the European Court and the European Commission operate needs to be revised, reviewed and abandoned for the purposes of ensuring that in the United Kingdom, we have a competition policy that enables us to be able to compete fairly, not only throughout the whole world, but also in relation to the European Union.

It is well known that the question of state aids, which goes across such a wide range of matters, as I mentioned yesterday, causes an enormous amount of problems in many sectors of the British economy. We have to be able to compete effectively. We have just heard a statement on coronavirus. The damage that has come about as a result of this uncontrollable—or virtually uncontrollable—disease, which has infected so many people, affects the operations of our businesses and has created a great deal of economic dislocation. We will need to be able to compete effectively throughout the world. This is a serious matter about a serious issue. What we cannot have, as I mentioned yesterday, is the situation that we have at the moment, which is where authorisations are given by the European Commission that either create discrimination against British businesses or have the perception or the potential for doing so. They will affect the voters in Scotland—and the voters in Sheffield, if I may say so. I was brought up in Sheffield. I saw what the European Coal and Steel Community did to the British steel industry. *[Interruption.]* I hear what the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) says. The reality is that those businesses were driven out of business by, in many cases, unfair subsidies and unfair state aids that were given to other member states. I can give an example. I happened to know many people who worked at the coalface—I used to play cricket with them when I played for Sheffield—and I can tell Members that the Sheffield steelworkers, whom I also played with on occasion, sometimes it was rugby, found that they were very severely jeopardised by the massive state aids that were given to the German coal industry—it was as much as £4 billion—and authorised by the Commission. For a variety of reasons, we did not get the same kind of treatment here in the United Kingdom. This is all part of the problem of how to have fair and reasonable competition.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Let us come to the here and now, looking at this Bill. Say, in the future, the Scottish Government want to support the Scottish farming industry, but the UK Government have decided that, as free marketeers, they want to pool all support for their farmers. Under these proposals, is it not the case then that Scottish state aid for their farmers would be ruled illegal and they would not be able to trade in the UK internal market?

Sir William Cash: As far as I am aware, the answer is no. The Office for the Internal Market will not be able to override decisions made by the devolved Administrations. What has happened—

Alan Brown *rose*—

Sir William Cash: Just a minute. We have proposed in this Bill that monitoring and advice regarding the UK's internal market should be provided on a non-binding basis by the OIM. That will support the development and monitoring of regulation across the UK.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Bill says that these reports, which are not in themselves binding, are made to the Scottish Parliament as well as to the United Kingdom Parliament? Because of course, the Scottish Parliament will have enhanced powers as a result of our leaving the EU just as the Union Parliament will.

Sir William Cash: That is absolutely right. In fact, I argue that the provisions of the Bill as a whole maintain the Union, which is absolutely essential to the future of our competitiveness internationally. I do not expect SNP Members to agree with me, but what I am saying is that I actually believe that they should reflect very carefully on the advantages that come from being part of a Union. There are so many people—our friends and relations—who come from different parts of the United Kingdom and who work in different parts of the United Kingdom. When they are doing is contributing to the welfare of the Union as a whole.

Stephen Doughty: I am a Unionist, too. I believe in our Union and I believe that we are stronger together, but the reality is that the approach taken by this Government with this Bill disrespects the devolution settlement and rides roughshod over the wishes of the Welsh Government, which, let us not forget, is run by a Unionist party, Welsh Labour, but one that believes in devolution. So why does the hon. Gentleman think that the Welsh Government, who want to co-operate with this Government in finding common frameworks, are so unhappy with the approach taken in this Bill?

Sir William Cash: If Euro-integrationism were to get in the way, that would be a problem, but on the question of whether the UK Government are engaged in some kind of power grab while depriving the devolved Administrations of a say, the answer to that is no, too.

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

Sir William Cash: Wait just a minute. The Office for the Internal Market's provisions will be available to all four Administrations and legislatures on an equal and purely advisory basis. It will provide information to support separate political or legal processes, to resolve any disagreements and to enable intergovernmental engagement. Subject only to my overriding concern that in no shape or form should we end up having a continuation of European Commission decision making, authorisation processes and the rest, which have severely inhibited our capacity to compete effectively throughout the world—and for that matter within the United Kingdom as a whole—I believe that the arrangements here will respect the devolved Administrations on the basis that I describe.

Joanna Cherry: To take the hon. Gentleman back to his comments a moment ago, when he lectured myself and my colleagues on the importance of being part of the same political union in order to trade freely and

[Joanna Cherry]

competitively, if that applies to Scotland in relation to the United Kingdom, why does it not apply to the United Kingdom in relation to the European Union? Can he explain that?

Sir William Cash: It is a good question. In fact, I will answer it the other way: why on earth would the people of Scotland—

Joanna Cherry: No, answer my question.

Sir William Cash: No, I am going to put it the other way around and do it my own way. Why on earth would the Scottish people, in their desire to obtain independence from the United Kingdom, actually want to surrender to the European Union, which discriminates against us day in, day out?

Joanna Cherry: I am going to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. The Scottish National party wants Scotland to remain part of the European Union—a single market of more than 500 million consumers. The SNP does not wish to put up trade barriers with England. It is his party that wishes to enforce upon us trade barriers if we dare to exercise our democratic right of self-determination, which he has spent the last 40 years banging on about in this House for England.

Sir William Cash: If I may say so, not unsuccessfully.

Joanna Cherry: That remains to be seen.

Sir William Cash: I am very happy to remain to be seen and to be heard. I will give an example of a company in my constituency that, because of certain economic problems, found that it needed help and wanted some state aid and grants and things of that kind. It so happened that the company owned another company that happened to be in Ireland, and strangely enough, when it came to it and applications were made—I do not know all the details, but this is the general thrust of it—the company in the United Kingdom that needed the benefit of state aid and subsidy unfortunately did not get it, but the company in Ireland did.

The point I make is simply that it seems most peculiar to me that a system that is completely fair should have what I regards as such wanton discrimination in favour of one part of the European Union as compared to another.

Joanna Cherry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Cash: Just a minute. I think the hon. and learned Lady is probably exhausting herself by her interventions. I gave the House but one example yesterday, on the issue of Lufthansa. There is a body of opinion and evidence demonstrating the serious discrimination that goes on, although I make the point that European Court of Justice cases on this have gone both ways. However, I think it is very important that we are absolutely clear and certain—because it affects jobs, businesses and people who work for the companies concerned—that the national interests of the United Kingdom, in our mutual interests, are reflected in the decisions taken by whatever the competition authority may be. I know that the previous Administration had in mind the idea of

providing for some special reserved powers, which this Government have now decided should be displaced to ensure that we have a proper system—with proper external and internal advice that will be provided by the new Office for the Internal Market within the Competition and Markets Authority—in order to guarantee that we can be world-beating competitors. We have to be able to trade across the world as we have done.

If I may say this to the very distinguished Scottish National party Members, I am sure that they will not forget that Adam Smith was the Scotsman who defined the whole nature of free trade and the ability to compete effectively. The tradition in Scotland has always been to support the ideas of fair and free competition, and that is the essence of these provisions. I am afraid that I cannot come up with an example from Wales, but I am sure there is one. What I can say is that the objects of the Office for the Internal Market will not override decisions made by the devolved Administrations. That is my understanding, and we will hear what the Minister has to say.

2.30 pm

There is not a power grab going on. I know that SNP Members always want to get everything for themselves—a kind of power grab in itself—so I am not terribly surprised by their amendments, but this office will be independent in its ability to give fair, reasonable and proper advice to the Government. The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), is here now to answer these questions himself, but it seems that the whole arrangement would make enormous sense in the post-Brexit world where we will no longer be subjected to what I regard as predatory arrangements that are built into the undemocratic system whereby those who have the ear of the internal part of the European Commission get their way so often that we are discriminated against.

We will have our own system, on our own terms, in accordance with the decision taken by the British people in the general election last December, which endorsed the decision that was made in the referendum. I do not want to go through that whole argument from beginning to end but it is relevant to this debate, because when we do leave the European Union in all its shapes and forms, we will be in a position to make decisions in the interests of all the people in the Union and with regard to the importance of the devolved Administrations. The provision for the markets authority will be a very fair way of conducting our proceedings. This will serve everybody a great deal of good and we will all benefit from it.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): Claire Hanna has withdrawn so we go straight to Richard Fuller.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): Thank you very much, Dame Rosie—that was unexpected. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, and to have the opportunity to raise some general points and specific questions relating to the clauses under consideration today.

Overall, I am very supportive of the Bill, but, as with any substantial change, caution, checking and prudence should be part of the Government's process. When I

look at regulations and regulatory frameworks—which perhaps I do a little too often—uppermost in my mind is the quality of the regulations or framework, their effectiveness, their relevance, and whether we have the correct allocation of decision authorities given the different parts of the United Kingdom or different groups for which the regulations are being made.

On that last point, I want to pick up on some of the issues that animated the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) and perhaps others in their questions about the choice of a common approach compared with a common framework. I should perhaps know more about this area, but it is alluded to in paragraph 8 on page 5 of the explanatory notes to the Bill, which states:

“As part of its vision for the UK internal market, the Government is also engaging in a process to agree a common approach to regulatory alignment with the devolved administrations. The Common Frameworks Programme aims to protect the UK internal market by providing high levels of regulatory coherence in specific policy areas through close collaboration with devolved administrations.”

Where is that in the Bill or today’s considerations? What is the Government’s current thinking around engaging in a process to agree a common approach as part of their vision, as the explanatory notes state?

I did not get an answer from the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey to my question about how disputes would be resolved in a common frameworks approach, which seems like a fundamental issue.

Drew Hendry: I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to make good my deficit in not answering his question fully. I am happy to try to do so now. I understand that before the Bill was introduced, the Joint Ministerial Committee, with Ministers on both sides, was working on a programme, with some success, I understand, by which all these issues could have been ironed out in a collaborative and consultative way with each of the Governments of the devolved nations, but that has now been torn asunder. I look forward to the answer to the question about how this collaboration will work in the future, given that the Bill simply overlays that with an unelected quango and the ability for the BEIS Secretary and this Parliament to make the ultimate decision.

Richard Fuller: I think I have the answer—it might not be the one he thinks he is conveying—which is, there is none. There is no answer to how disputes will be resolved because it does not appear that that has actually been achieved.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I think I can clear some of this up. Essentially my hon. Friend is right and the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) is not right. The very meetings the hon. Gentleman has just described are still going on and will deliver five frameworks by the end of the year, so I hope he will withdraw his remarks about how that programme is not being co-operated with, because that is simply wrong. My hon. Friend is correct in that the section he refers to in the explanatory notes is, as the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) will explain later, being delivered alongside the Bill.

Richard Fuller: I am very grateful for that clarification.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey also said that the Office for the Internal Market was overlaying that process. That is not correct either. It is an advisory body that informs the decisions made by the common frameworks agreement. Perhaps I did not hear him correctly, but on both those points he did not sound precisely on point.

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is highlighting the fundamental weakness of the Bill from our perspective. The internal market is a shared asset between the four countries of the UK, but what is missing from the Bill is clear intergovernmental structures to govern it.

Richard Fuller: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. “So get on with it”, would be my suggestion to him and his colleagues. I have heard several points of strong opposition to the Bill rather than engagement. A more constructive engagement with the UK Government would help everyone, because as he rightly says the internal market is a shared asset between the four component nations of the UK. So I urge him and his party to encourage that work with the UK Government.

On the specific clauses in the Bill, I have a general point to make. We are very keen as politicians to do the new things, set new regulations, but we spend very little time checking whether they work or whether the regulatory body is doing any good or indeed doing what it said it would do in the first place, so it is important to get a bit more precision from the Government in some of the words they use in the Bill.

Clause 29 talks about the reports—the Minister may be able to help—the Competition and Markets Authority must prepare or report on. Clause 29(5)(b) states:

“developments as to the effectiveness of the operation of that market.”

The word “effectiveness” can have lots of different meanings to lots of different people. What remit are we giving to the Office for the Internal Market on how it will judge the definition of an effective operation of the market? Does it, for example, include whether the operation of the market continues to have the consent of all constituent devolved Administrations of the United Kingdom? Does it mean that the country has an adequate spread of production across the country? Does it mean that each market is promoting competition? Does it mean that prices are going down? The word “effectiveness” covers a lot of issues.

That issue also relates to clause 29(8), which states:

“So far as a report under this section is concerned with the effective operation of the internal market in the United Kingdom, the report may consider (among other things)—... (i) competition, (ii) access to goods and services, (iii) volumes of trade”.

I would say that that is a partial list. There may be other aspects that we would wish the Office for the Internal Market to look into when it considers the operation of the internal market, some of which I have mentioned. For example, is the Minister considering, or would he consider, that that should include the impact of the internal market on consumer rights? Should it include regional disparities? Most importantly, should it include innovation and competition?

Clause 30(3)(a) talks about advising on proposed regulatory provisions on request. This is an important issue relating to the points raised by the hon. Member

[Richard Fuller]

for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, which is not only on the decision authorities but the scope for devolved Administrations to raise issues with the Office for the Internal Market. Clause 30(3) states:

“The condition is that it appears to the requesting authority that—

(a) the regulatory provision to which the proposal relates would fall within the scope of this Part and be within relevant legislative competence, and

(b) the proposal should be further considered in the light of the significance of its potential effects on the operation of the internal market in the United Kingdom.”

It seems to me, particularly in light of the desire of devolved Administrations to have some potential for innovations in regulations such as minimum alcohol pricing, that that “and” might be better considered as an “or”. It would be feasible for devolved Administrations to raise issues which may be outside the scope of their current remit of responsibilities, but for which the devolved Administrations, elected by their local voters, wish to see as a potential regulatory change in the future. What is the harm that could be caused by enabling that to be considered by the Office for the Internal Market?

The hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) tabled amendment 21 to clause 35, which relates to participation in the Competition and Markets Authority. Obviously, she may wish to speak to her amendment directly, but I draw the attention of the Minister to the issue of participation in the CMA. It is a relevant question to ask who will be on those bodies. We put the so-called great and the good on such regulators, but we do not really know who they are. What oversight do we have of their performance? What oversight and decision rights do we have of appointments? Would it not be a consideration to spread that beyond this Parliament to include devolved Administrations? I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to look carefully at the amendment tabled by the hon. Lady, as well as her new clause 4.

I welcome the Bill. As the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) mentioned, the internal market is a shared asset and we all want it to work effectively. The Bill is a very good start in making us move in the right direction, but we need some prudence in its implementation. I am very grateful to the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) for her intervention to clarify some points on where we stand in relation to the common framework.

2.45 pm

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Before I consider part 4, I wish briefly to set the context of the comments that I will make.

Yesterday, Scotland’s friends in the EU and the wider international community were concerned that a UK Prime Minister was prepared to sacrifice the rule of law in a vain attempt to save his own bacon. Of course, there is disbelief that this arrogance is voiced outside the Cummings bubble, but the deliberate trashing of the UK’s international standing is now endorsed by 340 parliamentarians so can no longer be regarded as the ravings of a few. They are all now complicit in this grand folly of legislation.

The Bill is a disgraceful piece of legislation led by a Prime Minister whose words mean nothing and a party that is lurching ever further to the right, breaking the rules, acting unlawfully and now rewriting its own laws, while rubbishing any moral authority the UK had to hold rogue states—

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The hon. Gentleman should resume his seat. I draw his attention to the fact that he needs to address the amendments before us. This is not a Second Reading speech all over again; it is important to address what is before the House today.

Neale Hanvey: Thank you, Dame Rosie. My preface to my comments was just to set the scene, which is what I am doing, but as I move on my comments will relate to the amendments.

The Prime Minister has presided over a summer of U-turns, U-turned on his own Brexit deal and turned away from the rule of law. The comments in terms of Scotland can be summed up by the Law Society of Scotland’s reflections on the Bill. It has stated that

“as a matter of principle”

the Bill should comply with the oldest principle of international law,

“pacta sunt servanda (agreements are to be kept)”.

Quite unfortunately, Scotland has a head start in knowing the hollowness of such a principle. [Interruption.] I’m sorry?

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot have conversations across the Chamber. I would be grateful if he moved on to the amendments before us as quickly as possible. Thank you.

Neale Hanvey: This debate is focused on part 4, in which the authority of the Competition and Markets Authority and the wide-ranging and poorly specified powers of the UK Government’s man in Scotland are nothing short of a British nationalist inquisition. There are wide-ranging powers that cut to the very heart of the devolution settlement across every policy area—powers that the Government claim they will never use; they are there just in case. Well, Scotland is not buying it, and we are not having any of it. Devolution is the settled and robustly expressed will of the Scottish people, and it must be for the Scottish people alone to decide whether it should ever be restricted or changed in any way.

Part 4 of this wrecking-ball Bill takes decision-making powers away from Holyrood and hands them to the unelected body of the Office for the Internal Market. This office of inquisition will have the power to pass judgment on devolved laws and could quickly become the target of rich corporate lobbyists determined to see activities such as fracking go ahead against the will of the Scottish people.

Patrick Grady: Is not the power grab compounded by the fact that the Government clearly intend to push this legislation through without legislative consent to the Bill from any of the devolved Administrations? When they ask, “Where is the power grab? Give us an example,” that is it. They are refusing even to accept the fact that the devolved legislatures will not consent to the Bill and they will not engage in its detail. The power grab runs right the way through this process.

Neale Hanvey: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution—

Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Neale Hanvey: If I could just answer my hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. I will address the notion that there is a power surge of any shape or form shortly.

Jane Hunt: Sorry, I was a bit keen. Do you agree that without the Bill—without the internal market structure—Scotland would be worse off? [*Interruption.*] Forgive me, but let me explain my point. I will not talk about whisky, because we always do that when we are talking about Scotland; I will talk about lenses for glasses, which are often made in Scotland. A large number of them are made in Scotland and go across the whole UK. If we did not have the internal market structure, then there could be tariffs—restrictions—on their being sold in, say, Wales or England. So why would you not want to accept this now?

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. May I just point out that it is very important not to use the word “you” to another Member? We speak to the Chair, so it is “the hon. Member” rather than “you”, just to clarify that.

Neale Hanvey: The hon. Lady raises a really interesting point. I wanted to get it into my remarks, and she has now given me a very clear avenue in which to do it. I cannot understand how she could come up with the suggestion that the UK would enforce its own internal tariffs, but with regard to Scottish competitiveness in this internal market, Scotland is already at a disadvantage. There is a company in my constituency that imports chassis from the EU but does not make its lorries here completely—like many of its EU competitors, it buys certain parts and puts them together. Those EU companies would be allowed to import a fully completed vehicle without any tariff, while that company would be subject to a high tariff on the importation of those chassis and therefore at a competitive disadvantage. That is because of Brexit. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point. I would also be grateful if the Minister took cognisance of my comments and gave me a detailed response about how the Government will protect companies such as that in my constituency from this type of disadvantage in the importation of completed vehicles.

Paul Bristow: The internal market does not just guarantee costs and prices of things—it also guarantees standards. One of my favourite Scotland-to-England exports is BrewDog’s Punk IPA. How can the hon. Member, without the internal market, guarantee that my pint of Punk IPA in Peterborough is the same quality as in Aberdeen?

Neale Hanvey: I thank the hon. Member for raising yet another very helpful point. The problem is not whether the quality of Punk IPA will be consistently high in the north and the south, or even in Europe if it is still able to import it; the problem is that the quality at the lowest level will have to be accepted everywhere. It is not the highest level that is the issue; it is the lowest level. I will now try to make progress. I hope that it is now beginning to make sense, Dame Rosie, why I had that preamble.

As I said, devolution is the settled and robustly expressed will of the Scottish people, and it is for them alone to decide if it should ever be restricted or changed in any way. If this law had been in force during the past 20 years of devolution, it would have affected Scotland’s ability to prioritise important issues like free tuition for Scottish students or to set important health policies such as minimum unit pricing for alcohol and introducing the smoking ban before other nations. Those would all have been at risk and may not have happened. Looking forward, there are things like the procurement of changes to food standards that can be imposed on Scotland as devolution is reduced to the powers of compliance, complicity or subjugation. Can you imagine the howls from Government Members if the EU had proposed such legislation? Yet they are content to do this to Scotland, and then tell us that we should be grateful. What a charade!

Well, Scotland is not buying it and we are having none of it. This legislation strips powers of decision making away from our democratically elected representatives in Holyrood. In an email to MSPs on 14 September, the Royal Society of Edinburgh warned that, while final decision-making power ultimately would remain with the UK Government, the use of that authority by the CMA against the wishes of devolved Administrations “would constitute a failure of intergovernmental relations”.

The reality is that part 4 grabs the powers of devolution and gives them to an unelected, barely accountable quango. The Bill grabs the powers of devolution, animal welfare, forestry, voting rights, food standards and energy—all currently the purview of the Scottish Parliament. The Government say that they are empowering Scotland; the truth is that they are robbing Scotland of democracy itself.

Sir William Cash: How does the hon. Gentleman reconcile what he has just said with what the Scottish Retail Consortium has said, which is that protecting the UK internal market means that

“Scottish consumers”

will

“benefit enormously”?

It talks about the importance of the

“largely unfettered internal single market”.

In the consortium’s view, Scotland welcomes the measures to protect the UK internal market.

Neale Hanvey: The way that I reconcile it is that I am talking about democracy and the hon. Member is talking about trade, and I would say that democracy is slightly more important than trade.

The Bill would make Scotland’s Parliament and our law meaningless and smash devolution. And what of the protestations of this Government’s man in Scotland and his self-congratulatory talk of a power surge? It is crystal clear now that the only power surging is to the CMA, to the Office for the Internal Market and to the Secretary of State in Scotland.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I wonder whether my hon. Friend agrees that the protestations that there is some kind of power surge are simply incompatible with the suggestion that the Office for the Internal Market will be set up in such a way as to enable it to lie above the powers of the Scottish Parliament.

Neale Hanvey: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments, because they illustrate very well the sophistry with which the whole charade has been presented. We are told that it is a power surge, and a power surge it is; but it is a power surge in the wrong direction—it is a power surge away from the devolved Government of Scotland. To judge by past behaviour, those powers will be used to interfere, undermine and diminish not just the elected Government of Scotland but the very voice of the Scottish people.

Yesterday, I heard Members claim in this Chamber that the Bill would strengthen the Union, and in their mind that may be true, but the Union is not being strengthened by a shared vision, mutual respect or other honourable means. It is the strength of bondage, of subjugation and of the pomposity that only Unionist voices matter. I've got news for you: it does not strengthen the bonds of the Union; it exposes the bondage of the devolved nations and illustrates why Scotland must choose an independent future. "Lead Not Leave"; "broad shoulders of the Union"; "Vote No to stay in the EU"; "We Love You Scotland"—well, nothing epitomises our Union of equals like the Prime Minister bestowing the effective status of viceroy of Scotland on the right hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Mr Jack), his very own Union Jack.

Today, the international community knows something that the Scottish people have known since 2014: believe not a word, not a promise, not even a vow. To this Government, agreements are always optional. The Bill does not strengthen the Union; it strengthens the case for Scottish independence.

3 pm

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): I want to look at the clauses. On clause 28, it is proposed that "Scotland" be left out. On clause 29, amendment 29 would insert that following a legislative appeal from all the devolved powers, we would have a consultation before any changes. On clause 35, it is proposed that prior to publishing any information, the CMA must consult all Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Ministers and the devolved Administrations. All these amendments seem to have one thing in common: they are asking for all consultation on how we move our internal market forward to be done with the devolved powers in the United Kingdom. Many in the House have raised the issue of who will be holding the CMA to account. We here represent the entire United Kingdom. We are elected to represent all parts of the United Kingdom.

Alan Brown: Is the hon. Lady therefore confirming that Westminster should take sovereignty over the devolved Administrations and the will of the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments?

Joy Morrissey: Absolutely not—that is not what I am saying.

Alan Brown: That is what I heard.

Joy Morrissey: Let me clarify for you. An internal market is something that is brought together historically. When we look at successful internal markets of the past, where have they been successful? We can look at the single market within the EU and at the 13 original colonies in the United States. They were 13 separate

entities that had no regulatory system and were bound together by an internal market that allowed for free trade and the movement of goods and services. This Bill is not a political Bill—it is an economic Bill to enhance our competitiveness with the world. It is not to detract from the powers of Scotland—it is to make Scotland stronger through the power of free trade within the internal market.

I have been listening very carefully to what hon. Members across the House have been saying and the points that you have been raising, and I am very sympathetic to your cries about a lack of democratic representation. That is why I voted to leave the EU: for the very reason of the lack of democratic representation by the European Commission, which oversees the single market.

Joanna Cherry: Is the hon. Lady aware of the Sewel convention? If so, what is her objection to amendment 29, in the names of my hon. Friends?

Joy Morrissey: Amendment 29 states:

"Following legislative approval from all devolved administrations".

Are you asking for all the devolved Administrations to be represented at the federal level?

Joanna Cherry: The Sewel convention, which was put on a statutory footing—before the hon. Lady was a Member of the House, but many of us who were at that time will remember it—states that this Parliament will not normally legislate in respect of devolved matters without the consent of the devolved Administrations. That convention exists. It is on a statutory footing, so what is her objection to amendment 29?

Joy Morrissey: I would argue that this is not an infringement of your rights or those devolved powers. This Bill is about enhancing all of our abilities to work in a single internal market to allow goods and services to flow freely. My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Jane Hunt) mentioned glasses being made in one part of the Union and then being put together in another part. We have this so that we can frictionlessly move goods and services through the United Kingdom without tariffs and restrictions. There has to be a system through which that federal system is united, in terms of the economic objectives that we are setting, making ourselves globally competitive.

Stephen Doughty *rose*—

Joy Morrissey: I will not give way—I will make some headway and then give way in a moment. When we talk about the internal market, we are talking not about a political objective, but about an economic objective—to remove regulatory obstacles from more goods and services in the UK so that we are able to trade freely among ourselves and make ourselves globally competitive. We are removing the technical, legal and bureaucratic barriers to allow its citizens to trade and do business freely, for its citizens to enjoy products from all over the UK.

When SNP Members raise concerns about state aid, I would imagine that they are referring to the EU structural funds or the EU development funds, the criteria for which have, in the past, benefited certain deprived areas in regions in Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom. I can understand how there would be concern,

and perhaps something could be established to look at how that fund and the targets were set to help in disadvantaged and impoverished areas where the EU structural funds have helped to improve the livelihoods of people in the United Kingdom, and to look at how we move that forward. This is not a Bill to take any political power: it is to make us stronger economically. It is purely on the grounds of economics—

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware of the decisions being made in Shetland that if the nationalists get their way and there is separation of the United Kingdom following a second referendum, Shetland will seek to go independent itself? Therefore, not only are the nationalists seeking to break up the United Kingdom, they are seeking to break up Scotland.

Joy Morrissey: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

Stephen Doughty: I do not want to break up the United Kingdom. As I have said, I am a Unionist and I want to see a functioning UK internal market. Does the hon. Member think it is respectful for her Government to give details of the Bill only the night before it was published to Welsh Government Ministers, who also want to see a functioning internal market and want to make sure our country functions effectively and economically in the way she suggests?

Joy Morrissey: I thank you for your point, but I wonder if you would find it respectful for the EU to threaten to put a tariff in the sea—*[Interruption.]* No, that is a completely valid point to raise. I find that to be disrespectful of our sovereignty and our ability to govern internally.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Joy Morrissey: I will carry on. On that point, the EU's threat to disrupt our food exports from mainland Britain to Northern Ireland as negotiating leverage fundamentally undermined our credibility and our sovereignty within the United Kingdom itself. The Bill will strengthen our ability to create—

Kirsten Oswald: On the point about credibility, does the hon. Lady think it is just possible that the reason that credibility has been lost is because of her Prime Minister disagreeing with himself rather than for any other reason?

Joy Morrissey: You say it was mentioned by the SNP earlier about wanting to throw off the bureaucratic chains and wanting to have democratic representation, but that is exactly why I voted to leave the European Union, and that is why I will fight to make sure that we have a regulatory system that has less red tape and that has representation. We talk about democratic representation, but we are representing the will of the people who voted for Brexit in one referendum and we are delivering the result. Scotland also—*[Interruption.]*

The Temporary Chair (Sir Graham Brady): Order. Can I just remind Members on both sides of the House that these are very specific amendments that are being debated. We cannot go back to a Second Reading debate.

Joy Morrissey: Thank you, Sir Graham.

I will conclude by saying—

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Joy Morrissey: I probably should make headway. I am trying to understand and sympathise with the amendments that have been tabled, but I do not feel that they are in any way needed to enhance what is in the Bill. I urge hon. Members to vote to keep the Bill the way it is.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Temporary Chair (Sir Graham Brady): Before I call the next speaker, because a number of new Members are participating in Committee, I remind everybody that Members speak through the Chair, so saying “you” is a reference to me—and I might take that personally. I call Beth Winter.

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab): This Tory Government leadership said during the Brexit campaign that leaving Europe would enable the British people to take back control. This Bill does the opposite of that. It is driving a race to the bottom by harmonising standards in a way that gives the UK Government the power to overrule the devolved nations. Experience tells us that this Conservative Government have repeatedly refused to commit to higher standards in legislation, and there has not been negotiation, involvement or informed consent to any of this with the devolved nations.

While it is important, as the UK leaves the EU, for us to have a system to harmonise standards across the four countries, any internal market legislation should look to do the least possible on a centralised basis and as much as possible on a decentralised basis. In the view of the Senedd in Wales, there already exists a successful regime to form the basis for all future arrangements: the common framework.

This attempt to harmonise standards throughout the UK is, in fact, an attempt to replicate the EU's internal market but with some crucial differences. In the EU, dispute resolution is independent and done in a way that prevents bigger members from being able to force smaller states to accept undesirable standards. Under the Government's proposals for the UK, the opposite will be true, as the Conservatives prefer a mutual recognition principle of harmonising standards, so that the lowest standards legislated for by any of the UK Parliaments must automatically be adopted by all.

Devolution is not just an abstract concept. It has allowed the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government to develop more ambitious standards and policies than their Westminster counterparts, such as protecting the NHS as a publicly owned service and developing world-leading standards on food, animal welfare and the environment, which are now under threat from the Conservatives' internal market Bill.

I am an environmentalist, and I have a great interest in reducing the use of plastics. The Minister for European Transition in Wales, Jeremy Miles, has spoken on this issue in the last couple of days. The Welsh Government propose to introduce a ban for nine single-use plastic items, but the UK Government propose a similar ban

[Beth Winter]

on just three of those nine items. The principle of mutual recognition in the UK could mean that Wales will be unable to enforce the ban on the sale of the other six items. The Chair of the Senedd Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, Mick Antoniw MS, has stated that it is clear from this Bill that the aim of the Tory Government is

“to cement their neoliberal economic and social agenda into the framework of a centralised... state”,

and that the Bill shows their

“contempt for devolution, the constitution and the rule of law”.

I agree with him.

Mutual recognition is a blunt instrument, and it is not clear why this path is the Government’s preference when it renders the notion of common frameworks completely obsolete at a stroke. The Government have previously supported a common frameworks approach. In fact, all four UK Government signed up to that in 2017, although it should perhaps not come as a surprise that the Government in Westminster are prepared to sign things in bad faith. Common frameworks would allow for a genuinely collaborative approach between Westminster and the devolved Administrations, with standards between the nations being harmonised through discussion and negotiation between equals—I stress that point: equals—as opposed to new obligations being imposed on the devolved Governments against their wishes under the new mutual recognition principle.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is making a very strong speech and getting to the nub of this issue. She has explained why we should be concerned about unilateralism. I share her concerns about food and environmental standards. We have also seen this with covid testing in recent days, including in her own constituency—unilateral decisions are being taken at a UK level to reduce testing in Wales, which is having an impact on our constituents. Does she agree that there is absolutely a reason why we are so concerned about the way that the Bill is being put forward?

Beth Winter: I do, and I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution.

Labour’s new clause 2 proposes a common frameworks approach. I will be voting for it, and I do not see a valid reason for any Member of the House not to do the same. New clause 2 supports the objective of the Bill—the creation of a UK single market to reduce barriers to trade—while still respecting the principles of devolution, which is supported by a strong majority of Welsh people. *Diolch yn fawr.*

3.15 pm

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): Today we are debating the creation of the OIM. I will try to keep my comments brief and not repeat what has been said. Clauses 28 to 39 set out that the OIM will provide independent and technical advice to the Parliaments—that includes the Westminster Parliament and the devolved Administrations—on any regulation that might damage our internal market. That market is hundreds of years old and spreads from where I live in Cornwall to the rest of the UK, including, happily, Northern Ireland, and that is why we are here today. The OIM is vital to ensuring the integrity of the internal market. We should

pay particular heed to the National Farmers Union’s comments that the UK’s internal market should operate as effectively as it does now. This body will ensure proper competition and fairness for our businesses, which, I hope will be reassured. I am pleased that the body will have responsibilities and be accountable to this Parliament and all devolved Administrations, so that all parliamentarians, in all of those Administrations, have the opportunities to scrutinise its findings.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that we should be pursuing a system that supports British jobs for British people, and that is what this Bill seeks to pursue? If we maintain the status quo, we have a system in which EU law intervenes on us and we open our procurement to all manner of companies from overseas within the EU. That does not support British jobs, particularly given that we know that some of these countries have under-the-radar state aid, which is unfair to British companies.

Cherilyn Mackrory: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and agree 100% with what he said. I want to confine my comments to the specific measures we are discussing today. We are here today, with this Bill progressing through the House, for exactly the reason he set out and because of the comments made at the joint committee’s negotiating table, where what I will refer to as a “foreign power”, as the Prime Minister did yesterday, is trying to interfere in our internal market. That is why we are here. While wanting to keep my comments specific, I must absolutely reiterate that point.

I am hearing what Opposition Members are saying about devolution and their fears that they are being overruled by Westminster, but that is simply not the case from what I have read in this Bill. The advice goes equally to all the devolved Administrations and all politicians get the chance to sit and scrutinise it.

Owen Thompson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Cherilyn Mackrory: If I may, I will make some progress. I wish to talk about similarity with the Committee on Climate Change, which spoke to all the devolved Administrations and gave advice to all of them. From that advice, this Westminster Government have formed the Environment Bill, and I am happy to be serving on that Bill’s Committee—I hope it will sit later this autumn. That Bill is facing very little opposition in this place, because it is what we are calling a “broad framework”, and the semantics can be decided after, in this place and by experts in the field. Although I take a great interest in environmental issues and am passionate about them, I am not an expert and I would not expect to be. I hope that those specifics—the targets and everything else being met by that Bill—will be decided with much input from those people.

Kirsten Oswald: I do not know whether the hon. Lady is aware that Scotland has more stringent targets on net zero emissions than the rest of the UK. So if there were a conflict over a new project, does she think the Scottish Parliament would simply have to accept a ruling from the OIM and break its own environmental commitments by doing so?

Cheryllyn Mackrory: That discussion would have to be done on a case-by-case basis. I do not agree that the Westminster Government should overrule and I do not think they are doing so in this case, because we are talking about an advisory body. If the Scottish Parliament does not agree with what it is saying and the Scottish people do not agree with the Scottish Parliament's view on that, the people of Scotland can change their politicians at an election, as we can elsewhere.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Cheryllyn Mackrory: I am going to make some progress and will draw my remarks to a conclusion quickly.

The reason we are here today and why this Bill is having to be put through Parliament is because of negotiating in bad faith at the joint committee. I was so pleased to hear the Prime Minister's remarks yesterday that if the treaties come into conflict, Her Majesty's Government will ask for arbitration—I was reassured by that. These are all things that have to happen, have to be said and have to be set into domestic law in order for us to proceed at these negotiations. That is the only reason why we are debating this Bill today.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. This Bill is difficult for the Scottish National party. It is offensive to our values, it is not our world view, and it is being introduced in pursuit of a project that Scotland comprehensively rejected. We are engaging in good faith, but we do not consent to this project. Scotland does not consent to the way the Bill is drafted.

However, I was not sent by the people of Stirling to showboat and walk away, or to grandstand and not try to find solutions. As is typical of all our amendments, we have tabled amendments 28 and 29 in good faith, and to insert into this dreadful Bill the principle of consent from the Scottish Parliament and other devolved Administrations. If we cannot do that, we seek to exempt Scotland from this madness. We are engaging in this process in good faith. We are working within the constitutional reality of the United Kingdom, and by rejecting the amendments, this House will prove, in full view of the people of Scotland, that the constitutional reality of the United Kingdom does not work for us.

I was sent here to try to find solutions, and amendments 28 and 29 do that. We believe that decisions for Scotland should be made in Scotland. It is a fundamental principle of devolution that, unless reserved to this place, decisions should be made by the democratically elected Parliament of Scotland. That principle was endorsed by the people of Scotland with 74% of the vote in 1997, and those Government Members who are keen on referendums should be aware that they are up-ending a deeply held principle of the people of Scotland.

As I have said, this Bill is a poor piece of legislation, and it did not need to be this way—that is what I find so frustrating. It is offensive morally, politically, even intellectually, but it did not need to be that way. We are open to negotiation and to frameworks. We respect the fact that we have left the European Union—we regret it deeply, but it has happened. As a solicitor by trade, I accept that a domestic legal construct is needed to replace the single market legislation of the European Union, but it does not need to be this abomination.

We could do this better. Our amendments seek to make this bad Bill better. We will still not be keen or in favour of it, but it does not need to be the naked power-grab that it is.

Part 4 of the Bill seeks to replace 60 years of jurisprudence from the European Court of Justice and the European Commission, democratically overseen by democratically elected Members of the European Parliament, and member state Governments who are themselves democratically elected—60 years of expertise on how the single market and internal competition works.

Joy Morrissey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alyn Smith: Oh please.

Joy Morrissey: I'm back. To clarify that point, it is actually the European Commission that oversees the single market, and it is that unelected body that oversees and creates the market framework—[*Interruption.*]

Alyn Smith: I thank the hon. Lady for that point. In my 15 years at the European Parliament I was always struck by how many unelected bureaucrats had been democratically elected by the people they served. It is great to engage with something that does not quite exist, such as the European Commission that the hon. Lady wishes did exist.

For those who are against unelected bureaucrats, I suggest only that they consider the reality of the Bill. The Bill replaces 60 years of jurisprudence, overseen by experts in the European Commission and the Court of Justice—be they democratically elected MEPs or democratically elected member state Governments—with a group of people who will be unelected. They will be appointed, but they have not been appointed yet. We do not know who they are. They will be operating a competition policy that has not as yet been revealed by this Government, who are so desperately negotiating with themselves that they cannot tell our European partners what they are trying to do. Those people will be operating with a budget that has not yet been shown to us, and with jurisprudence that does not yet exist. It takes a heroically Panglossian approach to think that that can be created in a matter of months.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Could the hon. Member clarify for me how he thinks replacing 60 years of jurisprudence will be terribly difficult, yet replacing 300 years—[*Interruption*]/—will be simple?

The Temporary Chair (Sir Graham Brady): Order. Stick to the point of the amendments.

Alyn Smith: Sir Graham, I will try to stick to the amendments. I was hoping for a point of consensus with the hon. Lady, but the lady is not for turning. I will stick to the matter at hand, if I may.

This chimera, this shibboleth is going to be created by this Bill. I have already explained the reality of how devolution works: unless reserved to this place, decisions should be made in Scotland. This shibboleth—with people not yet appointed, operating to a policy not yet decided, to a budget that has not been agreed, with a jurisprudence that does not exist—will sit above, as a politically appointed death panel, every single decision

[Alyn Smith]

of every single public authority in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and, indeed, England. Every decision involving public expenditure will be gainsaid by this unelected quango that does not yet exist, and we do not know what it is.

From our perspective, this is replacing a system that we are comfortable with. We respect the fact that we have left the European Union; we do not like it, but we have. A system that works tolerably well is going to be replaced with a system that does not exist. It is politically motivated, ideologically driven and owes nothing to the creation of jobs or safeguarding of jobs or standards. It is entirely a political project to get as much power to this place as possible against the objections of the Senedd in Wales.

Stephen Doughty: Does the hon. Member suspect, as I do, that appointed to this unelected body might be more chums of the Prime Minister of the likes of Tony Abbott—a disgraced former Prime Minister of Australia, a political appointment and totally unsuitable for the role, yet appointed because he shares the same political views as the Prime Minister?

Alyn Smith: I am very grateful for the point, and I very strongly agree. We do not know who these people are going to be. We do not know how they are going to be appointed and, forgive me, but from the track record of the Government thus far, I have little faith in who they are going to be and what their agendas will be in practice. Our concern is about the lack of power that the people of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and, indeed, England will have over that process—and, indeed, this Parliament. The oversight that this Parliament will have over this process under the very text of the Bill, which is a wider discussion than these amendments, is appalling, but it did not need to be this way.

We heard earlier in the debate from some Conservative Members that there should be uniform standards across the UK. It is a superficially appealing point as superficial arguments go, which seem to be what Conservative Members deal in, but the single market within the European Union operates very successfully with different standards. The whole point of devolution is that different places are empowered to make different decisions, so there may well be different standards, different practices, different expectations or different rules in different parts of the four home nations. That is the point. This Bill is a mechanism—a political mechanism—to override and destroy that democratic diversity and replace it with devolution as power retained. It is a naked power-grab for all to see, and I would urge people outside this House to read the Bill carefully, because it makes the case for independence for Scotland all the stronger.

Cherilyn Mackrory: Talking about standards, the British should be very proud of their standards in animal welfare and particularly in farming—I am certainly proud of our Cornish farmers—and we have done that while we have been part of the European Union. Our standards are higher than many of our counterparts in the European Union. Having a single internal market does not mean that we will lower standards. If anything, we can learn from each other and keep our higher standards in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Alyn Smith: In which case, I do hope the hon. Lady is going to be supporting our new clause 5, which would make it explicit in the Bill that there will be no cutting of standards. That is not under consideration today, but it is there in black and white. It was curious to see Conservative Members refuse to support a previous reasoned amendment from a former MEP colleague of mine, who put forward precisely that on a previous piece of legislation and it was rejected. This is a Government who are so desperate not to tie their hands with such considerations as lowering standards, because that may well be what needs to be traded away in future trade deals.

3.30 pm

Drew Hendry: Was it not just this Sunday that a UK Government Minister refused to rule out our having to import and sell chlorinated chicken? The product is chlorinated due to the filth of animals living in the cage among pests.

Alyn Smith: Absolutely. We are deeply concerned on behalf of Scotland's farmers—and, indeed, everybody else's—that trade deals could see a lowering of standards. Mutual recognition of the UK internal market could undermine the capacity of the different authorities to have those rules.

Alan Brown: On that concern about the lowering of standards, the International Trade Secretary said previously that consumers would choose what products they wanted on the shelves. Does that not indicate that the Bill is a Trojan horse for a lowering of standards that would affect Scottish farming?

Alyn Smith: Exactly. I fully agree with my hon. Friend, who has been fighting for farmers in his constituency for many years. New clause 5, for which I hope we have some support from those on the Opposition Benches, is specifically about the maintenance of minimum standards, so I hope that when the House comes to consider it, there will be support for it. If we are scaremongering about lowering standards, then Members can support the amendments to make it explicit in the Bill that standards will not be lowered. Prove us wrong. By refusing to back the amendments, we will be proven right.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a very cogent speech in favour of independence, basically. I thank him for his lectures on constitutional history and I thank the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) for her lectures on the Sewel convention, but those predate us getting into the internal market in the first place. The Bill seeks to restore the status quo ante in this country, which is an internal market. It is not a power grab. The amendments are a grab for independence, and I understand why they have been tabled, but that is what is going on here. The hon. Gentleman is trying to further independence through these amendments. I completely understand that, but that is why we will reject them.

Alyn Smith: I take the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. He accuses me of promoting the case for independence and, indeed, I do promote the case for independence, but Government Members need to be in no doubt that a substantial element of the population of Scotland is deeply disgusted by this process. They are

frustrated by the disrespect that Scotland has been shown since the EU referendum, where we rejected Brexit significantly, but were told to shut up and get back in our box. Just after the 2014 referendum, we were told we were a partnership of equals, but we were then told immediately afterwards that we are part of the United Kingdom, not a partner in it. The Bill makes that explicit in the eyes of the people of Scotland.

I won Stirling from the Conservatives with 51% of the vote precisely because I am in favour of the rule of law and international solidarity, as demonstrated by the multilateral, binding, voluntary solidarity of the European Union. That is a structure we are comfortable with and a structure we are very comfortable with Scotland fitting into in the future. Dare I say it, but Scotland has a far sharper sense of its place in the world than the UK does right now.

This Bill seeks to cement power in the hands of the unelected, aided and abetted by people who—with good intentions, I do not doubt—are facilitating that power grab, but in so doing are upending the principle of devolution that is dear to the hearts of the people of Scotland and Wales and is deeply sensitive in Northern Ireland. When the hon. Gentleman says I am promoting the cause of independence, damn right I am, but I am also defending constitutional probity in the rule of law within the United Kingdom. Perhaps Government Members need to think a little harder about what they are being whipped through the Lobby to support.

To conclude, our amendments seek in good faith to insert into this package, which we dislike so much, the principle of consent of the Scottish Parliament and the devolved Administrations. Failing that, we seek to exempt Scotland from this madness. I urge Members to support the rule of law and democracy within these islands.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I do not think I have spoken under you before. My constituents in Rother Valley and fellow Members of this House will be aware of my deep and unwavering commitment to the Union. I am an avowed Conservative and Unionist, and I never pass up an opportunity to celebrate the success of our British family. As such, it is a privilege to promote our Union and this Bill, unamended, which promises to protect the jobs and safeguard the unity of our nation.

As I said last night on Second Reading, we are one family. The Bill strengthens the familial ties between the four countries of our family, but I fear that the amendments—particularly amendments 28 and 29—weakens those ties and fundamentally undermines the purpose of the Bill. The Bill binds us ever closer together. It provides that any goods that are legally sold in one part of UK must also be freely sold in any other part of the UK—equality.

Alan Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alexander Stafford: Why not?

Alan Brown: Where is the equality in goods of a lower standard being forced on another country in the UK?

Alexander Stafford: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point, but my point is that this is about equality. We are one country and one family, and everyone

should be equal. The father is not superior to the mother, the wife not superior to the husband, and the husband not superior to the daughter. I do not know what sort of family the hon. Gentleman comes from, but everyone is equal in my family.

Owen Thompson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alexander Stafford: I have just given way, so I will make some progress first. I am mid-flow.

As I was saying, any services that are authorised in one part of the United Kingdom may be offered without any additional authorisation in all other parts of the UK. Professional qualifications issued in one part of the UK will also be recognised in all parts of the UK. This makes it easier for us to trade and work between our four great nations. The SNP's amendment 28 goes against the fairness and terms of the Bill, and it will make trade and equality harder for everyone.

For centuries, our internal market has been at the heart of the UK's economic and social prosperity, and it has been a source of unhindered and open trade across all four countries. Our internal market predates all other economic unions, and it has been uniquely successful in pushing forward economic progress and prosperity across the country. This Bill provides businesses with the certainty they need to grow and thrive. What is more, business organisations agree that the Bill, unamended, does so. The CBI has said that protecting the UK internal market is essential, and the Scottish Retail Consortium has said that protecting the UK internal market will mean that Scottish consumers benefit enormously. Are we honestly saying that if the amendment is accepted, Scottish consumers will benefit more? I do not think so. If the voice of business says this, we should listen to them. We are, after all, Conservatives—the party of business. Business will make us prosper.

I turn to some substantive clauses of the Bill and the nub of today's discussions. This Bill will see the creation of an independent Office for the Internal Market within the Competition and Markets Authority. It will be a British body monitoring British trade, putting mutual recognition and principles of non-discrimination at its heart—equality. If we are to continue with the levelling-up agenda, we must welcome the OIM, so that we have a body that ensures effective competition in every aspect of the country. It will provide balanced oversight and, ultimately, a central point for the different Parliaments to plug into, thus binding us closer together. In other words, everyone will get a say. The Parliaments and Assemblies of the country will get together to talk and work through difficulties. We will not be pulling apart; we will be coming together under this body, and that will strengthen us. That is why the SNP do not like this Bill. As the hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) said, they want independence, and they want us not to come together. Under this Bill, we will all come together.

Kirsten Oswald: The hon. Gentleman can correct me if I am wrong, but he has just suggested that the Scottish Parliament and other bodies would come together under this new office. May I clarify if that is really what he is suggesting?

Alexander Stafford: I will clarify that I believe this organisation brings the parties together so that we can discuss and get through any issues that arise. Of course,

[Alexander Stafford]

there will be issues and differences of opinion, but this body allows us to talk in a good way. We have heard antagonistic rhetoric from many different parties on both sides of the House, but with this body, we will talk as equals.

Stephen Doughty: The hon. Gentleman spoke a moment ago about families. I believe in this family as well, and I believe in the United Kingdom staying together. The problem is that in families, without respect or communication things go pretty wrong. Does he think it was acceptable for the UK Government only to share the contents of the Bill with the Welsh Government the night before it was published? Does he think that that fosters the type of familial relationship that he so espouses?

Alexander Stafford: I do believe in respect, and I do believe in recognition. I also believe in respecting the will of the people. I think it is disgraceful that Members on the other side of the House come here and talk about respect when, over and over again, they have tried to thwart the will of the people on Brexit. I will take no lectures from such a party talking about recognition.

Alyn Smith *rose*—

Alan Brown *rose*—

Alexander Stafford: Can I make a bit more progress?

Alan Brown: Just on that little point?

Alexander Stafford: Oh, why not? I haven't had enough of you! More, please!

Alan Brown: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way once more. With all this coming together, we should bear in mind that we do not yet know who the CMA and the OIM will be made up of, but we know that they will be appointed by the Government, and that Dominic Cummings will probably have a hand in that, so what are the chances of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish business interests being represented by those people? There's not much coming together there, is there?

Alexander Stafford: I have every faith that the Scottish people will be represented, and the Welsh and the Northern Irish and—I hate to say the word; I do not think the hon. Gentleman mentioned this—the English people as well. This Government and this party want to represent the United Kingdom. The SNP wants to represent the Scottish people only. I want to represent the entire country, so of course we will come together.

Going back to the main part of my speech—

Christine Jardine: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alexander Stafford: I have taken a huge amount of interventions already, so I will make some progress.

This body, fundamentally, is at last going to look after Britain and British interests, and that to me, is vitally important. Moving on to the main clauses of the Bill, clause 28 as it stands will allow the OIM to monitor the internal market, which is another example of how we have taken back control of Britain's future. We are looking after our own markets at last. Clause 29 states that the CMA will be able to conduct research of

its own volition in addition to research requested by political parties, the devolved Administrations and legislatures and, of course, the UK Government. It will regulate cross-border competition, cross-border investments and the levels of trade between the different parts of the UK. This will be great for the levelling-up agenda, because the CMA will look at all aspects across the borders.

Clause 30 will make the system more transparent. The CMA will have to share all reports commissioned with all national authorities—including the Scottish Parliament—after 15 days, regardless of who requests the report, in order to be compliant. All parties should welcome this level of transparency and openness in politics. In other words, if one body asks for it, everyone gets to see it. There is no cloak and dagger; everyone is involved and treated equally. Clause 32 states that the CMA will be able to report on the economic impacts of the Bills passed into law. It is fantastic to have objective-free reporting, without party-political goggles or restraints. This will allow us to have an objective-free, open way of looking at things.

Clause 34 will allow the CMA, at its own discretion, to exclude particular categories of information from its reports, where they are judged to be significantly harmful to UK business interests. That puts our economy first, which is exactly what the body ought to do. It is not a political body, and it is not a Parliament making political points. It is trying to say, “We are here for business”, because this is a business Bill to promote British business and our British trade. It is not about independence. It is not about a so-called power grab. It is about promoting trade, and nothing more. It is about making things better for everyone—for the people of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England.

Clause 36 grants the CMA information-gathering powers, and states that no information can be requested if it cannot be compelled to be given in the course of civil judicial proceedings before a court. This gives a level of protection against invasive Governments of all colours, whether in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, because this party backs business. Despite what the SNP is telling us about a so-called unelected cabal of people being in control, that is simply not the case. This body is about business. We have had many interventions in the debate, but now that I am talking about the clauses and about business, how many times have SNP Members intervened to talk about the nub of the Bill rather than going on about independence? The Bill is not a power grab. It is about business and the economy.

Clause 47 sets out conditions on non-compliance. The CMA will be able to decide whether information requests have been supplied to a satisfactory level, and non-compliance will be punishable with a financial penalty. Dispute resolution will ultimately be a matter for the courts, and the Government will be kept out of it. Once more, we are talking the language of business. We are not doing this in a party political way; we are doing it in a business way. As anyone who has worked in a business or run a business will know, we do not want politicians sticking their noses in business. We actually want a fair way to get through things.

Alyn Smith: As an utterly pro-business but also pro-democracy party, we would contend that the Parliament of Scotland is best placed to look after jobs and work in

Scotland, so will the hon. Gentleman condemn the Prime Minister's earlier comment when he used a four-letter expletive about business?

Alexander Stafford: I am not sure what word the hon. Gentleman refers to, I will be honest. There are lots of great words for business. "Great" business? That is five letters.

We can all talk about business, but all I know is that this Government are pro-business and always have been; we are the business party, because only through business can we get prosperity. I know that the SNP is not pro-business—it is a sort of left-wing socialist party that wants to stamp down on free trade—but the Conservative party wants businesses to be managed and to operate properly and to get the Government off businesses so that they can do what they do, which is to thrive and create jobs. That is what the Bill is about.

3.45 pm

Cherilyn Mackrory: I believe that my hon. Friend just answered my question. I was going to ask whether it is the case that the Scottish Parliament should not interfere in business as much as possible and actually allow businesses to run their own affairs?

Alexander Stafford: I completely agree, obviously. Parliament should not be getting into this.

Owen Thompson *rose*—

Alexander Stafford: I will give way in a second. Government should not get in the way of business. Business will thrive and needs to thrive. When we fully leave the European Union, we need business to thrive, and we need this internal market to be turbo-charged.

Owen Thompson: On interference, is it not the case that the Government are now interfering in devolution in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland by imposing the Bill against the wishes of those devolved Administrations?

Alexander Stafford: I completely refute that point. In fact, I think the Bill will actually create a better working environment, as I said, by bringing the four components together. Since '97, the Union has been pulling apart, and the Bill will actually bring the parties together, to talk better. That is why the SNP does not want the Bill, because the Bill actually says that we are one family. Yes, we have differences, and yes, we have different opinions, but we are a family and we need to work together. The Competition and Markets Authority is the Christmas table, bringing us all together from across the land to share the stuffed goose.

Paul Bristow: Does my hon. Friend agree that this is essentially an economic argument, not a political argument, despite how much Members opposite—the nationalists—are trying to make it into a political argument?

Alexander Stafford: I completely agree—this is an economic thing. In fact, I am about to talk about clause 38, which brings me on to answer my hon. Friend's point. Clause 38 says that the CMA is able to choose between a number of penalties to punish non-compliance, which is good, but is unable to levy a penalty against national or devolved Governments. It

can therefore never be a stranglehold on Governments and can never be used as a tool between Governments; it is not going to bash the English Government or the Welsh Government or the Scottish Government. The CMA is actually a business body. This is not a political Bill but a Bill for business, because business will bring us together. Fundamentally, the Acts of Union of 1707 came together over business. Lest we forget, after Scotland's failed colonial project in Panama, when Scotland went bankrupt, we had to come together to promote business. That is why the Acts of Union happened. This helps to create business.

Ultimately, the Bill ensures that high standards are protected across the whole UK. Our legislation will maintain consistently high standards across every part of it, promoting co-operation between the UK Parliament and the devolved legislatures. There will be no diminution of our food hygiene or animal welfare standards. I know that the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not buy into this nationalistic, manufactured hysteria. Scottish National party Members claim to represent all the people of Scotland. No, they do not. They represent their own views, and those of many people—I grant them that; many people want independence—but not the whole of Scotland. What represents the whole of Scotland support for business.

Christine Jardine: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alexander Stafford: Why not?

Christine Jardine: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but how does he explain that those of us who are not nationalist, who do not want to see independence in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland and who believe wholeheartedly in the United Kingdom feel that this part of the Bill is damaging and is the very thing that will potentially tear apart the United Kingdom? How does he allow for that, and for the fact that we object to the Bill?

Alexander Stafford: I say sorry that those people are falling into nationalist arguments and giving succour to the independence movement, rather than actually coming together for business, as true Unionists in the House should. They should celebrate coming together for business rather than playing these party political games that will only tear us asunder. We should work together, and I encourage them to work together.

Christine Jardine *rose*—

Alexander Stafford: I have already given way once, so I will make progress.

The Bill is not a Westminster power grab, but a guarantee of a strong United Kingdom that will safeguard jobs and make us stand tall on the world stage. It will make us all more prosperous. The devolved nations, like Rother Valley, stand to benefit greatly from this Brexit bonanza, and I will lend them my support every step of the way.

Through the Bill we will enshrine in law the principle of mutual recognition so that goods and services from one part of the UK will be recognised across the country, and the principle of non-discrimination so that there is equal opportunity for companies trading in the UK,

[Alexander Stafford]

regardless of where they are based. This not only protects the integrity of the United Kingdom, but strengthens it. However, I wish to appeal to all our fellow Britons, north of the border, across the Irish sea and in Wales. This is about more than just pounds and pence. The economic benefits of the Union are undeniable, but our United Kingdom stands for so much more than that. I have the greatest respect for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and their people, history, culture and devolution settlements. That is why I back the UK Internal Market Bill—it empowers all Britons, wherever in the United Kingdom they may live, and strengthens devolution.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): It is pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham, and to speak to new clause 2, which was tabled by Labour's Front Benchers. This new clause seeks to put common frameworks on a statutory footing. Only yesterday the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster reassured Members of the importance of common frameworks. If that is the case, I expect the Government to have no problem accepting this amendment, which seeks to prevent Ministers from overriding and imposing lower standards on devolved nations against their will. However, the devolved nations have every reason to be worried because when it comes to empty words, meaningless platitudes and empty promises, I am afraid that this Government have form. There is a pattern here: the Government promise to maintain our standards while simultaneously passing laws to allow themselves to lower them.

Let us take, for example, the Environment Bill, which the Government used not to set targets, but to give themselves the power to set their own targets in the future. They voted against the principle of non-regression to stop environmental standards being lowered. We have also heard about agriculture today. The Agriculture Bill offered nothing to guarantee that food standards would not be lowered and undercut in new trade deals. Hon. Members might be wondering why the Government would keep making promises and then refuse to legislate for them. The agenda is pretty clear to me. This is about creating a race-to-the-bottom economy. It is about undermining our standards. It is about the Government allowing themselves to sell off our rights and protections in dangerous trade deals that will undermine our future for decades to come.

Meanwhile, when we tried to amend the Trade Bill at least to ensure parliamentary scrutiny, the Government rejected that, showing very clearly what taking back control actually means—not parliamentary sovereignty, but an Executive power grab. Now with this Bill, especially in its current, unamended form, the Government are trying to cement that power grab by giving themselves the right to impose lower standards on devolved nations while ripping up the withdrawal agreement that they so proudly campaigned on just nine months ago, and breaking international law in the process.

The Government's posturing will do nothing to protect the millions of workers in all four nations across the country who are worried about losing their jobs; nothing to reassure the British farmers who are worried about their products being undercut and dangerous trade deals that lower food standards; and nothing to foster the international co-operation that we need to defeat

this pandemic or tackle the climate crisis. I urge people who have spoken passionately about our food, environmental and trading standards, and the Union, to vote for new clause 2 so that the Bill does not ride roughshod over our devolved nations and so that it resembles something that is fit for purpose.

Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham

This is a good Bill, and a necessary Bill. It will protect the integrity of the United Kingdom and our internal market as we leave the European Union. In our considerations on part 4, the description we heard earlier of our internal market as a shared asset is very apposite. Part 4 provides an important part of the framework that will allow us to uphold our obligation under the Articles of Union, which state clearly that all parts of the United Kingdom should be on the same footing in respect of trade and navigation and in all treaties with foreign powers. The United Kingdom is built upon a commitment to free trade between our four nations, and prosperity and peace are built on such trade and partnerships. The European Union, for all its faults and all its deviation from its original vision, was founded on that principle and purpose: to preserve peace through trade.

I speak, therefore, in support of an unamended Bill and unamended part 4 in its entirety. Clause 28 to 39 give us an independent advisory office for the internal market under the auspices of the Competition and Markets Authority that will act purely for the benefit of the UK and each of its nations. This replacement of EU legislation will see practical powers brought back to our devolved Parliaments to help regulate the strength and progress of our internal market and ensure a smooth transition for businesses away from the European Union. The Office for the Internal Market will strengthen the internal market's might and efficient operation and enable real-time and considered advice to the Government to help direct their route forward.

As a one nation Conservative, I believe that global Britain itself begins with one nation—it begins at home between all four parts of the Union—and the Bill will set us up for that mission by reinforcing the United Kingdom and its internal market. We need these provisions to protect, strengthen and monitor the internal market and to make safe the Union and the businesses and jobs within it, and to protect our sovereignty and that of future generations; and we need them to become that outward looking and strong global nation that this Government and I want us to be and which the might of our internal market demands.

The Bill is a demonstration of the UK's preparedness to manage our markets abroad and at home. It will ensure unfettered trade across the UK and avoid new burdens and barriers being put on us unreasonably. As we begin our recovery from the covid-19 crisis, these two implications of the Bill could not be more important. Businesses in my constituency rely on seamless trade across our four nations and further afield. While the Government can enable growth, they cannot create it. Throughout the crisis, we have relied on frontline heroes, in the NHS, schools, shops, and elsewhere, to get us through, but in this next stage of the recovery, it will be the wealth creators, business people and entrepreneurs who take us forward, but they need a secure, dynamic, investable playing field from which to operate. That is

what these clause provide: the framework in which to grow, the springboard from which to flourish, and the rules to operate within.

I will finish by stressing our obligation to uphold the internal market and ensure that our sovereignty as one nation is secured.

Jonathan Edwards: Will the hon. Member give way?

Julie Marson: No, I will not give way. We have heard so many canards in the Chamber this afternoon, it is beginning to resemble a duck pond, so I will press on to the end.

We have acted in good faith throughout these negotiations and for many of us too many concessions have been made in the name of good politics and friendship, but a reliance on friendship and good faith is not, it seems, assured, so the Government are right to act to provide a safety net. The potential implications of not doing so are too severe to ignore. The easy choice is to hope; the right choice is to prepare, and that is exactly what the provisions in the Bill set out to do.

They will prepare the UK's internal market for the next stage of our journey and give businesses confidence in, and understanding of, our business and economic ecosystem. By voting for the Bill in its entirety, including these clauses, we are fulfilling our obligations to protect the integrity of our internal market, our United Kingdom. We simply cannot risk the integrity and functionality of the internal market itself. For those reasons, I will be supporting the Government's clauses and encourage other hon. Members to do the same.

4 pm

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham.

The most important element of the debate around this Bill and its amendments is that the most successful union of nations in the world continues to thrive. The UK's internal market has functioned seamlessly for centuries. Amendments to this Bill should be accepted only if they make this market more effective. We all have a duty in this House to prioritise that. The Government are absolutely right to ensure that there are no internal barriers to trade within the UK following the end of the transition period, so that business is able to trade unhindered across the United Kingdom.

As has been mentioned in this debate, the Bill establishes the Office for the Internal Market within the Competition and Markets Authority to provide independent and technical advice to Parliament and the devolved Administrations together on regulations that may seek to damage the UK internal market. It will be responsible for monitoring and reporting on our own internal market, and it will do so impartially, away from the undue influence of Ministers, whether here at Westminster or in the devolved Administrations. This is important for obvious reasons. Ministers want and need technical advice. Goods and services must move unhindered and conform to the same standards and requirements whether they are sold in Peterborough, in Paisley, in Prestatyn or in Portrush.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): My hon. Friend is giving a very strong argument as to why this legislation is so important. Does he agree with Grahame Crook, the director of Kent Periscopes, in my constituency, who says:

“Barriers to trade within our own borders will not just be harmful but are patently ridiculous. We, the four nations of the United Kingdom, face enough challenges to our prosperity at the moment from outside forces—notably covid—without hobbling ourselves further by having restrictions on trade within the UK?”

Paul Bristow: I absolutely agree with the businessman in my hon. Friend's constituency. I think it is the Federation of Small Businesses in Wales that has said that ensuring stability in the UK market is vital. What businesses in Peterborough want to hear is that they can trade freely across these islands. It is an economic argument, not a political argument, which is what many of the amendments tabled by the nationalists are. It seems ridiculous to have to say this, but the vast majority of business-to-business traders in the UK are selling to, and buying from, other businesses within the UK. The Scottish economy and Scottish jobs rely on UK-wide trade. The Welsh economy and the Welsh jobs rely on UK-wide trade. The Northern Irish economy and Northern Ireland jobs rely on UK-wide trade and, of course, the English economy and English jobs rely on UK-wide trade. The Office for the Internal Market is not there to lecture the devolved Administrations. Let me repeat the point that I made earlier: if the SNP had its way, it would hand the powers of the proposed OIM straight back to Brussels.

The nationalists are okay with quangos, just as long as they are European Union quangos and not British quangos. Let us be clear: as my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) said earlier, the Scottish Retail Consortium has said:

“Scottish consumers and our economy as a whole benefit enormously from the UK's largely unfettered internal single market”.

That is what is at stake. Would amendments 28 and 29 make the Scottish economy or Scottish jobs healthier? They would not, which is why we need to reject them.

The Office for the Internal Market is there to achieve the things I have described; it is not some sort of power grab. It will advise all four Governments of the United Kingdom, including the United Kingdom Government, as equals. As was said earlier, the internal market is a shared asset of all four nations. All four Governments need to be advised equally. If the internal market is a shared asset, we want it to work well.

New clause 4, tabled by the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), would require that Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Ministers have a say on who will advise them. I urge Ministers to give that due consideration and listen to those arguments, because if they do, we can avoid some of the politics that surround the argument. It does not matter how many manufactured grievances there are from the Scottish nationalists; we can avoid some of the politics and just get on with it and vote the Bill through unamended.

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is making some points on which we might be able to agree. The issue at hand is who sets the rules for the new UK internal market. Does he agree that the four Governments should play an equal role in setting the rules? Or does he believe that it is a matter for Westminster alone? That is the fundamental issue at hand.

Paul Bristow: I have heard the arguments, as have Ministers, I am sure. Points have been made about the internal market being a shared asset; having clear input

[Paul Bristow]

from the devolved Administrations on who is appointed to the Office for the Internal Market would be an inherently good thing. I am sure that Ministers have heard those arguments, and if they have been heard, we can go ahead with the Bill unamended and just get on with it.

The CBI has said that protecting the internal market is essential and, as I said earlier, the Federation of Small Businesses in Wales has said that ensuring stability in the UK market is vital. Let us not mess around with the most successful internal market in the world, which has worked well for centuries; let us reject the amendments and vote for the Bill unamended.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham.

I rise to speak to amendment 21 and new clauses 1 and 4, which I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues have tabled with the purpose of building consensus, which has been sorely lacking in the whole process of the Bill. From the publication of the White Paper and its incredibly short consultation period back in July, to the rushed programme for debating the Bill, there is clearly no willingness on the Government's part to find any degree of consensus. We have heard some of that rancour this afternoon.

The devolved Administrations have indicated that they are unlikely to give legislative consent to the Bill. Although it will not, that should be something that gives the Government pause for thought. It is not just the SNP that thinks the Bill does real damage to the devolved settlements, but Welsh Labour and colleagues in Plaid Cymru. As a Liberal Democrat, I must say that the Government are making it hard for those of us who want to keep the United Kingdom together to make the emotional case for doing so.

It seems easy to forget that just four years ago the Conservative Government were passing the Scotland Act 2016. That piece of legislation was grounded in consensus and, although it was an Act of the UK Parliament, the Smith commission that preceded it was made up of Scottish political party representatives. I am afraid that in the past year the Government have taken us far away from that model of consensus.

The Government have been determined to leave the customs union and the single market above all else, and the Bill is a clear indication of that. I fear there has been no consideration of cost, and not simply in financial terms. The Prime Minister signed a withdrawal agreement that created a border in the Irish sea—one voted for in January and overturned by the Bill we are debating. How many more people in constituencies such as North East Fife that voted clearly to remain in the EU are the Government willing to alienate?

It is a matter not just of conduct but of the practical realities. For example, the University of St Andrews, the largest employer in my constituency, has ongoing concerns, not assuaged by this Government's current actions, about the impact of our final departure from the EU in December. I urge the Government to change tack. Surely working in co-operation and trying to find consensus should be the way to demonstrate Government good faith in the UK and its workings. That is why I have tabled my amendments, along with my parliamentary colleagues.

New clause 4 and amendment 21 try to take some of the spirit of what was in the Scotland Act 2016 and apply it to this Bill. I thank the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller), who is now back in his place, and the hon. Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow) for their supportive comments on them. I hope that the Government will give some indication of seriously considering them.

One of the steps recommended by the Smith commission was put into law by section 65 of the Scotland Act, which gave Scottish Ministers the power to appoint a member to the panel of Ofcom. This Bill creates new responsibilities for the Competition and Markets Authority—a body, as has been well debated already, whose public appointees are chosen by the Secretary of State for Business in the UK Government. As others have rightly pointed out, the Government have a less than transparent approach to appointments and contracts of late. Would it not be simpler to mirror what the Scotland Act did for Ofcom for the CMA, given the Government's intention that the CMA has a very important role in relation to the functioning of the Union? That is what new clause 4 is about. It would give the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Administrations the ability each to appoint a member of the CMA board, giving them a degree of buy-in to this body. I really hope that the Government will consider supporting the new clause. There is a clear precedent for it in the Scotland Act. It would give the devolved nations a degree of ownership over the CMA and make it a more collective body.

Amendment 21 tries to ensure that, as this raft of new responsibilities is going to the CMA, there is proper buy-in and consultation with the devolved Governments in that regard. Again, this is based on provisions that currently exist in law in the Scotland Act, which specified that for agencies such as the Maritime and Coastguard Agency there should be consultation with the Scottish Government about their strategic priorities in the exercising of their functions. Consensus, consultation and collaboration, with a four-nations approach, should be the root of all we do as a United Kingdom. It should be and must be our starting point.

One of the key concerns around this Bill is the fear of a race to the bottom, as the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Neale Hanvey) said. One easy way that the Government could assuage these fears is by accepting likely amendments to the Trade Bill and the Agriculture Bill in the Lords, which they have previously failed to do in this place.

New clause 1 fills in one of the missing pieces of the Bill but also provides an opportunity to strengthen intergovernmental relationships. The White Paper for the Bill posed the question of what body to use to examine the functioning of the internal market, but it did not discuss what to do when there is a dispute, nor is this answered in the Bill itself. I find that strange, because there is lots in part 4, not least in clause 32, dedicated to the CMA investigating whether a provision passed by a national authority has a detrimental effect on the functioning of the internal market. If the CMA does indeed find that there is a detrimental effect, then other than clause 33, which states that the relevant Administration should table a written statement in their respective Parliament in response to the report, not a hint of the process to be used to reach a resolution in order to do that is detailed. It may be that the UK

Government are intending for dispute resolution to take place within existing intergovernmental bodies such as the Joint Ministerial Committee. As part of the ongoing review taking place, that may well be the case, but it is important that that is set out. It is also important that such a decision is made with the support of the devolved Administrations. New clause 1 will ensure that the Secretary of State has to carry out that process of consultation and that any dispute resolution mechanism provides for representation from each of the devolved nations.

The Joint Ministerial Committee has been at the heart of the devolution settlement for the past 20 years, as the previous Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee reported in its inquiry into devolution, but it has its limitations. The Committee's inquiry found that the

"existing setup and organisation of the JMC has resulted in it being predominantly controlled by the UK Government",

which has "limited its effectiveness". In the Committee's current inquiry into coronavirus, we heard that the JMC has not even met during the pandemic. There is also no formal mechanism for coming to agreement or resolving disputes generally. As I said, there is an ongoing joint review of intergovernmental machinery. The Minister mentioned that that is due to report by the end of the year, but it has been ongoing since March 2018. New clause 1 would set the UK Government and the devolved nations on a path to a dispute resolution mechanism. Fundamentally, we need a route to rebalancing the relationship between the four nations and moving to a more equitable, and arguably more federal, United Kingdom.

4.15 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham.

I must say at the outset that I agree with the thrust of the points made by the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) when he said that the Bill was a move in the right direction. I think that in Northern Ireland we can actually agree on that point. This is definitely the right step for the House to take. The Bill is about the internal market of the United Kingdom, so it is important to set the context of what that market means for a place like Northern Ireland.

It is vital that people understand the significance of the United Kingdom internal market for businesses, people and the employed across our beloved Province. Great Britain accounts for 52.7% of Northern Ireland's external sales, so the majority of things we sell go to the rest of Great Britain. Northern Ireland's food and drink sales—remember that food production is the single largest employer in Northern Ireland—to Great Britain are valued at over £2.3 billion to our entire local economy. It is the largest market in six out of 10 agri-food sub-sectors. It is absolutely essential that people understand that. Given that the vast majority of our people are involved in food and drink production, the fact that our largest market is our home market means that this market here is vital to understanding how our economy works. It does not look south. It does not look to the north. It looks to our neighbour, the biggest island in this archipelago of islands: it looks to Great Britain. It is essential for people to understand how significant this economy is for Northern Ireland.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that for business in Northern Ireland, free and unfettered access to Great Britain is absolutely vital for jobs, growth and prosperity, and that any obstacle would be critical for jobs and businesses in both his constituency and mine?

Ian Paisley: My hon. Friend makes a vital point, one that I think is shared by Members across the House who recognise how vital GB is to the Northern Ireland economy, and to helping it grow and flourish.

Let me put more flesh on the bone on how vital the internal market is. We have had an increase in freight and vehicle traffic to and from Great Britain for nine consecutive years. Some 532,000 units move out of Belfast harbour to GB. That is absolutely critical to understanding how our economy works. I understand, Sir Graham, that you will want me to move on to our amendments and their effect, but when 65% of what Northern Ireland purchases is from GB, we get an idea of how big and important the GB economy is. That is the point my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Carla Lockhart) makes. We make £13.3 billion worth of purchases from GB every year. Consider the size of the Northern Ireland economy, with 1.7 million people. We make almost £14 billion of purchases from GB—not from Europe, not from the south of Ireland, not from the United States of America, not from any other European non-EU country, but from GB. Getting this Bill on the internal market right is therefore vital to us. The amendments will ensure that our country either flourishes or fails.

I believe that Members of this House want to see a flourishing Union. We have different interpretations of what that Union is about, and I have to respect those different interpretations, but I believe that the Members from Northern Ireland plead earnestly to ensure we have a flourishing Union. The amendments that my party is bringing forward are about making sure that our Union flourishes and that the finances within it flourish. In terms of foreign and direct investment, after London, Northern Ireland is the single largest part of the United Kingdom that benefits from foreign and direct investment. Therefore, getting trade deals in place is equally important to us, but the Bill is the foundation stone.

Each of these amendments has an impact on the economy of Northern Ireland, and many would have a good impact, but some less so. We want to ensure that the power to disapply or modify export declarations and other exit procedures is implemented fully. We cannot have something that puts Northern Ireland at a disadvantage in terms of its trade and how it operates. In terms of clause 44, on the notification of state aid for the purposes of the Northern Ireland protocol, we want to ensure that Northern Ireland is treated the same as the rest of the United Kingdom. We cannot have a situation where Northern Ireland's opportunity to flourish from state aid rules from GB would be changed.

Let me give a specific example. The House has been debating for some time the issue of free ports, and there is an attempt to identify the best places for free ports across the whole United Kingdom. I would love some of those free ports to be in Northern Ireland, whether it is up in Londonderry at Foyle, in Belfast harbour, in Larne or in Warrenpoint. I would like to see those areas identified as potential free ports.

[*Ian Paisley*]

Under the protocol, our southern neighbour, who has different economic objectives—set aside its politics—from Northern Ireland, could object in the EU to Northern Ireland having a freeport and stop Northern Ireland having a freeport. Given that the UK Government appear to be looking at free ports as a way to drive the economy forward post Brexit, Northern Ireland could be completely disadvantaged because of the predatory financial interests of a country that wants to look after itself—namely, the south of Ireland, at the behest of the EU. That would be utterly disastrous. Whenever Ministers are considering these issues, I hope they will recognise that we welcome this Bill because it will prevent the attempt to tie Northern Ireland into a protocol and a withdrawal agreement that could damage financial and economic opportunities that would benefit all of us.

Some people put about the idea that this could damage the Belfast agreement. No matter what side we are on in terms of the Belfast agreement of 1998, at the end of the day, we should all be on the side of wanting to ensure that Northern Ireland's economy flourishes, because it is through jobs and employment that people gain satisfaction and contentment. If we have contented people, we will not have people being dissatisfied, with community tension rising and problems flowing from that. Getting these economic aspects correct will ensure the peace that people cherish and therefore the principles of the Belfast or Good Friday agreement, which Members have enunciated their love for.

I have absolutely no doubt about the sincerity of those who have tabled amendments on how they want to see their part of the United Kingdom operate, but I hope that the Prime Minister is sincere in what he is bringing forward. I hope that Northern Ireland is not going to be used as a pawn in this, and I say that in all sincerity. The Government cannot afford to do that to the emotions of the people of my country. They cannot kick them up and down, turn the volume up and down and not expect a reaction. It is far too fraught with people's concerns about their economic wellbeing to do that.

If the Government implement this Bill, I appeal to them to implement it with the sincerity with which we are reading through these clauses and agreeing with them. Do not use us as a pawn to extract some other general concession from the EU and then desert Northern Ireland. Once bitten, twice shy. If you fool me once, shame on you, but if you fool me twice, shame on me. There will be no shame on the Ulster Bench in this matter. We are warning the Government: treat us with sincerity, as we are entitled to be treated.

This problem protocol lies behind many of the amendments that have been tabled today. Some Members have objected to the protocol because it is perceived as discrimination against Wales and Scotland, disadvantaging those regions of the United Kingdom compared with Northern Ireland. I would say to my colleagues in the House from those parts of the United Kingdom, that the protocol actually damaged Northern Ireland, and fixing it now is the best way to move forward. We should stop and think about the idea that people can one day support the protocol as if it is the best thing ever, when for the last while we have heard objections to the protocol. The protocol is the problem and it needs to be adjusted and changed, and we need to address that.

The amendments do contain a running theme in that they seek to obtain consent for the devolved institutions, and Members have spoken at length about a perceived power grab. Those are issues that the Government must try to address cogently and they must try to reassure Members on that. It is very difficult for Northern Ireland Members to accept the arguments about making sure that the devolved institutions are entirely in step with all this, because the devolved institutions will never be in step with any of this for this reason: the devolved institution in Northern Ireland cannot make an opinion on this Bill because it cannot agree, it cannot find consensus. It is essentially gridlocked on this matter.

An amendment was drafted—it has not been selected—by the hon. Members for Belfast South (Claire Hanna) and for Foyle (Colum Eastwood) that would have required going back to an Executive that cannot agree or make an agreed statement on Brexit, the internal markets or any of those matters. I do not think we should push things to the gridlock in Northern Ireland. That is why we need legislation to come direct from Westminster and help us to make sure that we govern with the consensus of the whole House.

I was disappointed that the Member for Belfast South decided not to speak in this debate earlier and removed herself from the list. We understand the reason—the amendment was not selected—but I would have been interested to hear the points that the SDLP Members would make on why they would want to hand a veto to a deadlocked Executive or Assembly. The Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly need to focus collectively—I think they do focus individually—on businesses, and I hope that they will do that and ensure clarity on how businesses could operate under the Bill.

The one thing I hear every day from constituents—and I am sure it is the same for members of the SDLP, the Alliance party and my own party colleagues—is that they want clarity on how business should be done in Northern Ireland. Businesses from all across Northern Ireland have expressed concerns about the problem protocol and its lack of clarity. Indeed, some of those points have been well made in the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, where we have sought answers from the Government on the clarity that is ultimately required. The report that we made to the Government showed where we need clarity. Will there be import declarations? Will there be entry summary declarations? Will there be safety and security certificates? Will there be export health certificates for everything? Will there be phytosanitary certificates and certificates of origin? If there are, who will pay for them? How will they be monitored—through a computer process, a desktop process? Will that be for every single good, or will it be for 2% of the goods that are currently moved? Please give us clarity on all of those matters, or do what the Bill suggests and remove the paperwork, remove the burdensome red tape, take it away altogether and let us trade.

I ask any Member representing an English constituency if they would tolerate having to fill in an export declaration form for goods that were moving from Yorkshire to London. They would not, so why should people and businesses in Northern Ireland have to tolerate filling in, or being threatened with having to fill in, declaration forms for that sort of movement of goods? It is not acceptable and will not be tolerated, and rightly so. The Government should address that.

I would also appeal to those people who have tried to be encouraged by what the US Congress have said about the Bill: that if the protocol is removed, they—the US Congress and the Speaker of the House—would do their best to block trade with the United Kingdom. Considering that the highest levels of foreign direct investment from the United States of America have come to Northern Ireland and benefit constituencies such as Foyle, the Belfast constituencies, my constituency and the Upper Bann constituency, who in their right mind would stand in this House and praise American politicians for trying to stop that trade?

4.30 pm

I want to see a flourishing trade with the United States of America. We have benefited from it in the past. They have been our greatest friends. Now we have people trying, for the sake of the Bill, to influence America to stop doing trade with this United Kingdom. It is utterly preposterous. If people were to stop and think for one moment of the consequences and the impact that that would have on people's employment and wellbeing, I think they would realise that making that crass political point serves no purpose other than to call for a blockade of trade and to damage people's wellbeing.

We have tabled amendments on state aid rules. We want to ensure that Northern Ireland benefits from state aid in the same way as every other part of the United Kingdom. We do not want to have predatory actions from businesses operating in the Republic of Ireland to prevent financial assistance flowing to businesses in Northern Ireland. We want to see the same flow of state aid from Her Majesty's Government that we are entitled to—nothing more, but I tell Members this: nothing less. We are entitled to the same; we are entitled to those benefits. If the Bill helps to repair that—I believe that our amendments, which will be debated tomorrow, will help to do that—I hope that we could see a significant change in the direction and climate of the agreement and what the Brexit agreement has heretofore put in place. Where there have been concerns about it, some of those concerns could be alleviated. We need to address those issues.

There are many other outstanding points in the Bill. We need greater clarity in clause 40, on the meaning of “special regard” for the authorities and for the flow of goods between GB and Northern Ireland. The Bill appears to make reference only to the mitigation of the challenges facing GB to Northern Ireland trade; there is no detail on how that might work in areas relating to the recognition of standards, goods and access to free trade agreements, or potential divergence between EU and GB standards.

We want to ensure that devolved Departments and businesses have greater clarity going forward. Can or will Her Majesty's Government disapply Northern Ireland's membership of the single market provisions from any goods? These are genuine questions that we need clarified, and I hope that the Government will provide that clarity. On clauses 41 and 42 and unfettered access—the point that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann—that issue is catered for mainly in the context of Northern Ireland to GB checks and customs. Little is contained in the Bill about the GB to Northern Ireland focus. I would like to see more flesh on that point, so that we see both sides of the trading equation.

We welcome the fact that, under clause 43, the Secretary of State will have the ability to interpret state aid protocol provision, but we want further assurances that Northern Ireland will be in the same UK framework. Those matters are important to us, if we are to get fully behind the Bill and see it implemented in a way that will benefit our country.

Unfortunately, what appears to lie behind all this is the question that has dogged this Parliament and its predecessor: who governs the United Kingdom? Is it Michel Barnier? Is it the European Community? Is it this Parliament? I believe it should be this Parliament, and the people from all the nations of this nation coming together to govern us. I hope that will be the outcome.

Owen Thompson: There are many things wrong with the Bill. Today, we are focused on the creation of yet another unelected body with the monitoring responsibilities to investigate devolved decisions. The current Government seem very keen on creating record numbers of unelected roles. They threatened to abolish the Electoral Commission, so we know that they do not like oversight. But yet another bureaucratic body to investigate and veto what elected politicians decide in the devolved Administrations—is that really what we need? Just because the Prime Minister, and perhaps his Government, are averse to democracy and oversight does not mean that the rest of us are.

Perhaps, if I might be so bold, this is more about the fact that the Conservative party has been unable to win an election in Scotland or Wales since 1957, yet it wants to implement its own policies in disregard of the elected wishes of the Scottish people, who democratically elect the Parliament at Holyrood. Perhaps that is what the Bill is about. Perhaps the Conservative party has taken lessons from some of the donors in the Kremlin.

This unnecessary new body will decide whether a Bill meets the new test for the internal market, putting permanent constraints on the devolved competencies of the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments and the Northern Ireland Assembly. We cannot support such an anti-democratic move in either principle or practice. The amendments seek to remove the Bill's remit from Scotland. The Office for the Internal Market should not be given powers to monitor the regulatory provisions that apply in Scotland but in not the whole UK. This is nothing short of a threat to Scottish democracy.

How will the OIM's decisions be scrutinised? Yes, a report must be lodged annually in this place, but nothing tells us at what point that will appear before Members. Will it be like an estimates day? By what process can hon. Members genuinely scrutinise the OIM's decisions? We need to know. How can we possibly have any clarity about how this will work if we do not know the process of simple oversight and scrutiny?

The regulations proposed to set up this body are unwarranted and lack the necessary clarity about the extent of its remit, how the CMA will receive and consider proposals for investigations and essential mechanisms for democratic scrutiny of the membership and dispute resolution. At very least, it should be essential for all four Administrations to agree at every stage. As the Royal Society of Edinburgh said, the use of this authority against the wishes of the devolved Administrations constitutes a failure of intergovernmental relations.

[Owen Thompson]

What happened to the respect agenda? We were told we were in a Union of equals and that we were to “lead not leave”. Where has that gone? Let us make this simple: scrutiny of Bills passed at Holyrood should be undertaken in Holyrood. Transparent, proportionate processes are in place to scrutinise Bills in the Scottish Parliament and consider the input of key stakeholders, including business, public authorities and the public. Replacing that with an unelected body and an unclear process is a retrograde step for transparency in our democracy. It could result in vested interests with financial clout having undue influence, or in regulators challenging the decisions of our elected representatives.

We hear a lot about unelected bureaucrats—we had a lesson from my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith), who highlighted that some of the so-called unelected bureaucrats are in fact elected—but this is a genuinely unelected quango. There is no need for the creation of a new body that could scupper much of the excellent evidence-based policy work that has served Scotland so well. Policies such as the minimum unit pricing of alcohol and maintaining free higher education pose no threat to the integrity of the Union, but could fall foul of the rules for this new internal market.

Alyn Smith: I commend my hon. Friend on a powerful speech. Does he share my concern that as well as the general structure of this body, it is beyond ludicrous that at this late stage, we still do not know who these individuals will be, how they will be appointed, who they will serve and what policy they will implement?

Owen Thompson: Indeed. Hon. Members could be forgiven for thinking that the Bill was being rushed through without a huge amount of thought behind it—not that I would ever suggest any such thing.

The premise of the internal market on which the Bill is based is false. It seems to regard differences in policy decisions taken across different parts of the countries and nations as somehow a bad thing or an irritating bump in the road that somehow has to be smoothed out. That is devolution. The point and principle of devolution is that decisions can be made in a devolved Administration. It was designed to respect localised democracy and better meet differing priorities in different parts of the United Kingdom. Instead, under the Bill, the centralising tendencies of this unequal Union are being put into overdrive.

The Scottish Government have always recognised the importance of free trade across the isles. We have a system in place to govern trading arrangements across the UK, consisting of reserved and devolved competences. Where work is at an intersection of EU law, the four Governments can and should work jointly through the common framework process, although that involves concepts that might be difficult for Government Members to grasp: mutual trust, respect and constructive dialogue, none of which are evident in this Bill. These processes are already there to ensure the continued frictionless trade across the UK that we all want to see, and the Scottish Government happily signed up to this process—it is the correct way to proceed.

The Bill is a political move to curb the power of the devolved Administration, and if this Government continue to seek to guarantee the controlled right of UK companies

to trade unhindered in every part of the UK, they should get on with it and use the processes that are already there. The processes in this Bill mean that private health companies or private water companies operating in other parts of the country could soon have a guarantee to work in Scotland, where these things are run by public companies. This is a constitutional and legislative mess.

The Bill is a blatant political move to scupper those rebellious Scots, who just do not seem to fall for the Prime Minister’s charms. He is throwing his toys out of the pram, taking a huff and saying, “It’s ma baw and ye cannae have it.” The Prime Minister had the brass neck to pretend yesterday that each devolved Administration will be “fully and equally involved” in monitoring the internal market, despite sovereignty resting wholly with the Westminster Government. If he is speaking in good faith—it could happen—Conservative Members will back our amendments tonight. They would at least require the approval of devolved Administrations, bringing at least a degree of democracy and accountability to what is, in effect, an unelected body. Surely, that has to be a simple thing to support.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I rise to speak to Liberal Democrat amendment 21, new clause 1 and new clause 4. It will come as no surprise to this House that I have serious concerns about the Bill. As a Liberal Democrat, I believe passionately in devolution; the role of our regional governments in powering their communities is vital. If unamended, the Bill undermines that key function. Government must work for the whole UK. Food standards are a key example in that regard, and I am sure that most, if not all, Members of this House have been contacted by their constituents on maintaining our higher food standards. It is unacceptable that the Government should compromise on standards or harm British farmers by ramming through a damaging trade deal against the wishes of at least one of the nations of this United Kingdom—it is also unacceptable for all our constituents. The Government must co-operate with our devolved Administrations, and I urge Members from all parts of the House to support our amendments, which will strengthen our devolved Administrations.

This is my first speech on this Bill, so let me comment on its specific implication for Northern Ireland, an integral part of our family of nations. The Bill is intended to allow frictionless trade within our four nations, and of course it would not be acceptable to have a hard internal border between any of the component parts. On that point, I absolutely share the concerns of my colleagues on the Government Benches and of colleagues behind me, but the only reason there is any risk of a hard internal border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is the deal that the Prime Minister signed last year, which threw Northern Ireland under a bus—I never forget the anger from my Northern Irish colleagues behind me.

At the time, the Prime Minister called it a “fantastic” deal, so what happened to this oven-ready deal? He has now remembered that he has a responsibility to keep the Union together. The question is: what can he do, after his deal got us into this current mess? The Government have two options: they can renege on the withdrawal agreement, break international law and trash our reputation as a trusted trade partner, or they can uphold the

withdrawal treaty, abide by international law and negotiate a deal with the EU that avoids the need for a significant internal border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

The principle of the rule of law—a principle founded in this country—will be gravely compromised if this legislation is passed as it currently stands. The UK has a proud history of upholding liberal democratic values and setting a global example to stand up for the rule of law. Without significant alterations, this legislation will undermine our commitment to the rule of law. What does that say to the rest of the world about our values? It sends the message that we are ready to rip up agreed rules at a moment's notice for political gain, not just to our would-be trading partners, but to authoritarian regimes around the world that are themselves determined to undermine the rule of law and promote the politics of division. The rule of law is under attack across the world, from unrest in Beirut to the horrific accounts of what is happening to the Uyghur population in China. The impending economic consequences of covid-19 are causing authoritarian regimes to grab extra power. This is the worst possible time to send the message that it is acceptable in some instances to break the law and go back on our word.

4.45 pm

Getting a good deal with the EU—a deal that would avoid the need for a significant internal border—is eminently achievable and is plainly in the national interest. This is about regulatory alignment: closely following regulations on food and animal standards, workers' rights and consumer rights, and competition rules. The closest working relationship with our European neighbours continues to be in all our interests. Now is not the time to undermine trust and negotiations held in good faith. The Government must finally put the interests of the whole United Kingdom first to protect the Union and uphold international law. Please support amendments 21, and new clauses 1 and 4.

Christine Jardine: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), I rise to speak to amendment 21, and new clauses 1 and 4. Ironically, I do so on the International Day of Democracy—a day when the people of this country might expect their elected representatives to be pondering the importance of listening, consultation and the rule of law. To be fair, in a way we are, but not in any way that fills me with pride or a feeling of hope for our future and for the United Kingdom. No, we are standing here in the mother of Parliaments discussing a Bill that is undoubtedly necessary to smooth trade within the United Kingdom, and I find that we are faced with a Bill—and this part in particular—which shows scant regard to several vital pillars of our democracy.

Where is the respect both for elected representatives here and the devolved authorities across the UK? Where is the respect for the need to consult, listen and produce a coherent, consistent and consensual approach with the other elected authorities? Perhaps amendment 21 would deal with that. Most importantly, where is the respect for the rule of law—a principle without which it is difficult for any democracy to work effectively for its people?

We have heard much over the past few days about the potential impact of the Bill on this country's international reputation, but today I am concerned about, and would like to concentrate on, its impact on the Government's reputation and on the future of the country. There are reports that the Prime Minister and his team are confident that the general population will not be too bothered about the Bill. I have to tell the Government that they have political opponents all over the country and in this House who will spend every waking moment, every hour, making sure that the electorate are entirely aware of their perception that this Bill is damaging to the devolved nations and how they operate, and they will use it to promote their own separatist agenda to split up not the European Union, but the United Kingdom. I take great offence at the suggestion earlier that I might be a nationalist simply because I am concerned about the impact of that argument. It is precisely because I believe in the United Kingdom that I want us to pay attention to the dangers in what this Government are saying.

Alyn Smith: I commend the hon. Lady on her Unionism and respect it absolutely. Edinburgh West is a place I know well from my own background. Will she agree that there is not a single thing about independence in the amendments my party has tabled—they are about protecting the devolution settlement—and will she be supporting them as well as her own amendments?

Christine Jardine: Yes, I support the devolution amendment, and yes I believe, as I will come on to explain, that this is all about the devolution settlement, which is a very different thing from independence.

How often did right hon. and hon. Members listen to me and my colleagues warn the Government they were heading to exactly where we are now? As I said earlier, I fully accept we need a framework by which the powers that were vested in Brussels and are now returning to the UK will work for every part of this country. We need a Bill that does precisely that, but, Sir Graham, this ain't it.

I cannot understand why the Government, in forming this Bill, did not stop for a minute and listen to the many voices urging them to be more conciliatory—to look, for example, at measures such as those that my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I have proposed: to appoint Ministers from the devolved nations to the CMA and be inclusive. But the Government did not listen to us, especially when we warned about the dangers of the withdrawal agreement to the Good Friday agreement, which everyone in the House should regret. Please listen to us now when we say that this approach—this Bill, these steps—do not respect the spirit of that agreement or the devolution settlement.

I appreciate, possibly more than many, that the devolution settlement is something that Conservative Members, particularly those from Scotland, were not comfortable with 20 years ago, but even they have surely learned to love the enthusiasm, commitment and benefits we have seen in Scotland, and I am sure in Wales, and the great changes brought about in Northern Ireland by devolution, and in London. We have come so far since the turn of this new century in devolving power in this country closer to the people most affected by it. It would be dreadful if this Bill—this attempt to allow us to trade more smoothly—were to undermine it, but I fear that that is exactly what it will do.

[Christine Jardine]

In supporting amendments tonight, I appeal to Government Members, many of whom have sat—and one or two of whom are aiming to sit once again—at Holyrood. I am confident that they cherish as much as I do what we have achieved for Scotland in Scotland as part of the United Kingdom, in Wales and, most importantly, in Northern Ireland, where we have peace for the first time in my lifetime. I disagree fundamentally with my colleagues on the SNP Benches about independence and where Scotland should be heading, but I cannot disagree with their anger at the lack of respect for ourselves, our Parliament and others across the United Kingdom.

I do not believe that that is what the Conservative and Unionist party truly believes or wants. I want to believe it was not what it intended when it opened this constitutional and legal can of worms, but we need more than words and platitudes about how it will be fine and it is all about trade. We need Conservative Members to stand with us and say to the Government: please respect our Parliaments, the will of the people across the country and the rule of law. If they will not abandon the Bill, I ask them please to accept the amendments, because that is the only way to respect and protect the United Kingdom.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a great honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham, and to follow the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine).

The Bill claims to be about unity based on the pillars of mutual recognition and non-discrimination; in reality, unamended, the Bill is something quite different. It will enforce the lowest common denominator in goods and services across the United Kingdom. There is such a focus on the fear of letting in through the front door chlorinated chicken or whatever other emblem of lowered standards there might be from a trade deal with the US or anywhere else. This Bill unamended is the route through the back door to lowered standards, whether it be for farmers, in retail or in manufacturing.

What is the value in consistency if it leads to the lowest possible standards, and how do we ensure the integrity of the Union and the dignity and, indeed, sovereignty of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England as we consider how to regulate these deals? We have in front of us the proposal for the Office for the Internal Market, which looks to be utterly toothless, in effect. At the apex of its terrifying range of powers is the ability to launch investigations and to deliver written statements—and that is it. That is the entire arsenal for the devolved nations to protect their standards of goods and services, while those nations will not be around the table making the decisions in the first place.

If the Government think this is a Bill about creating a united front, they are completely and utterly deluded. Rather than finding unity and a common position between the nations of the UK, this set of proposals in reality drives a deeper wedge between them. Like my hon. Friends who spoke before me, that fills me not with joy in the anticipation of another bite at the cherry of independence, but with complete and utter dismay. It should fill Conservative and Unionist MPs with utter dismay, and I am bewildered that it does not.

The problem is that the Government voted for and the Prime Minister signed a withdrawal agreement that he knew—he must have known—was a trade-off between a border separating Northern Ireland and the Republic and a trade border in the Irish Sea. One threatens the Good Friday agreement and the other threatens the very existence of the United Kingdom. There was never a third option: there was no Malthouse compromise and nothing else was on the table. It was all guff, and I pity any Tory candidate who fell for it.

It was a border between Northern Ireland and the Republic or a border between Ireland and Great Britain, and the Prime Minister made a choice, but now he says he does not like his choice, or he did not understand his choice, or it is all the fault of the nasty foreigners. But we have discovered in the last few days, as have millions of people who voted in good faith for this Government last December, that Brexit is not done: it was never done. Either the Prime Minister did not understand what he was signing, or he said a thing, indeed a series of things, that was not so. On this also, there is no third option.

More than 20 years ago, as has been said, this country rightly moved towards devolution to empower Wales, Scotland and then Northern Ireland. To their great shame, the Labour Government at that time did not do go further in empowering the regions of England also. Of course, the devolution that did happen at the time was opposed by the Conservative party in opposition, but in time it grew to accept the new devolved nature of Government in these islands, because—guess what?—proportional representation gives it seats in Scotland.

If on issues where the devolved Administrations have competence this Government force them to submit to whatever standards they decide on in the guise of unity, all we are doing is enforcing the lowest common denominator. We will not be levelling up; we will be forcibly levelling down. The Government will be sticking up two fingers at devolution.

This is a significant threat to the Union. I am waiting and waiting for the moment when Conservative and Unionist party Members will grasp the second part of their name and their mission. The current Conservative leadership deems this Bill to be just another convenient trench in the culture war. I implore Conservative MPs to take back control of their party before it is too late and we lose our country, for then there will be no Union for us to be Unionist about.

In South Cumbria, I am 50 miles from the Scottish border. I have no desire to live 50 miles from a foreign border—not in my lifetime, nor in my children's or grandchildren's lifetimes.

There are both practical and emotional reasons why this Bill is the worst thing to come to this House in the 15 years that I have been a Member of Parliament. Cumbria does not have a more important internal market than our relationship with south-west Scotland. It is a porous border, not even recognised by many: people work on one side of the border and live on the other; they go to school on one side and visit their GP on the other. Sheep reared in Cumbria are sold in Scotland. Cattle reared in Scotland are sold in Cumbria. Farmers dependent on common standards on both sides are about to see those standards undermined. Our farmers, across all nations, are to be sold down the river. Every poor decision, every compromise will sow more seeds of discontent in the devolved nations, playing into the hands of those who are desperate to split us asunder.

5 pm

To many, this might feel academic, perhaps to the genius spin doctors in Whitehall who play with our country as though it is some kind of great board game, some game of Risk; it is academic for them, funny for them, a game for them, but it is not for us in Cumbria—not for our farmers and not for our tourism sector. In fact, for most of us, it matters massively. It is emotional and it is practical, and you are playing games with the future of our relationship with our most important trading partners.

The Government seem not to care one bit about the cross-border single market of Cumbria and Dumfriesshire, for example. We need all the nations around the table and robust regulation of market and trading decisions, so that my farmers in Cumbria are not undercut by Government regulations—and then really until they are none the wiser and it is too late. We have the best standards of animal welfare, environmental control, and food safety in the world. I do not want there to be an in-built race to the bottom within the nations of the United Kingdom that undermine that correct reputation.

Richard Fuller: If I may, I will pick up on something that the hon. Gentleman has said. Many speakers on the Opposition Benches have also said this. They talk about the race to the bottom with regard to regulations. Please will he indicate where he sees any of that deregulatory zeal in this Government? I would like to see some deregulatory zeal. The truth of the matter is that, historically and certainly in recent years, the pattern of regulation of markets, whether in Scotland or in the rest of the United Kingdom, is for more and higher regulation. That is the story. The Government want to continue to maintain high standards. Where can he point to, so that I can see all these things that he is waving around as something we should be fearful of?

Tim Farron: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We should be aware that, on top of the desire politically for greater regulated markets, which I absolutely welcome, there is also a desire to maximise profit. What do we do when we are trying to maximise profit? We reduce costs. What are regulations? Well, sadly, they often involve more costs. One of the benefits of the European Union is that we lock ourselves in to an understanding that there are common rules. If, within the United Kingdom, we create an in-built incentive for one part of the United Kingdom to reduce its standards and therefore automatically drag down the standards of the other three parts of the UK at the same time, we have made this possible. Indeed, I argue that, thanks to the laws of free-market economics, we have made it more than likely—we have made it almost certain.

The Competition and Markets Authority should be representative of all the nation. There needs to be unity in the decisions and not just in the implementation of the conclusions. I am afraid for the future of our United Kingdom. Do this Government want to be the Administration responsible for the disintegration of our Union, whether by negligence or design? That is where they are taking us. This Bill, through its inherent relegation of the importance of devolution, is a colossal step—a witless step even—towards undermining the unity of the Union. This Government have taken us out of one Union. We will not let them wreck another, which is all the more precious even than the one that we have left.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). Although I perhaps did not agree with everything that he said today, we do agree on many other things. Indeed, I think that it is perhaps the first time that I have followed three Liberal Democrat speakers. I am not sure whether that gives them a numerical advantage, but one DUP man is equal to three Liberal Democrats—I say that in jest; we are not in any way against each other.

I have listened very closely to the speeches both last night and this afternoon. I must say that the case presented by the Prime Minister outlines what our fears were with the withdrawal Bill, which is the same withdrawal Bill that we voted against on three occasions when it was brought forward by the former Prime Minister. In January this year, we also voted against the withdrawal agreement because we felt at that time that it put us at a disadvantage. What makes this different is the position we now find ourselves in. The Prime Minister has brought forward a Bill that gives protection to Northern Ireland in a way that we would like to see. With that thrust and protection in the Bill for Northern Ireland, there is something that we agree in our party we can support, and we look forward to that. The exception is clause 47, to which we are bringing forward an amendment tomorrow that we feel would strengthen our position again. Hopefully the Prime Minister, Ministers, the Government and others will feel that that is the right way to go.

I am without doubt a proud Brexiteer. That is not a secret—it is well known. As a Unionist, I love this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I love my Scottish colleagues and they know that. I love my Plaid Cymru friends and I try to work with most people in this Chamber. They might have a different political viewpoint about the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but I will tell the House one thing: they are genuine people and I respect their point of view, even though I, in many cases, do not agree with it. I am simply someone who has experienced, in my nation—in Northern Ireland—the difference between intent and reality. This Bill has been brought forward to give help to the devolved Administrations as they look at trade, and I am very pleased to see that.

I am reminded of a devolved Administration today that I was a Member of for some 12 years, as long as my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) was—the Northern Ireland Assembly. As a Unionist, I forewarned that the make-up of Stormont would lead to one party being able to bring the institution down. I listened as I was told that it would not happen as it was in the best interests of Northern Ireland to continue to work together. I sat in my office and watched the country being left adrift for almost three years, with this place reluctant to take over and upset the premise of devolution in everything other than the imposition of abortion against the will of the Assembly and the general public. But the Assembly is now up and running, and we want it to succeed. I want it understood in the internal market Bill that we can have an input, a contribution and a say from the Northern Ireland Assembly.

When my party and I warned that the good faith aspect of the withdrawal agreement was not enough security against what we were surrendering—the sovereignty of the UK over Northern Ireland—I did so not only as

[*Jim Shannon*]

an anxious person, but as an experienced person, who has seen the process, and I understand why this Bill, without any changes, with the exception of clause 47, has been brought forward in a way that we can support: because it makes us stronger within the United Kingdom. I am pleased to see that.

Europe is doing what I knew it would always do, what it has historically done—ride roughshod over good intent to achieve its goal. There was an outcry when it was felt by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), the leader of the Scottish National party, that there would be a possible rise in food prices, with supermarket shelves lying empty, in the event of a no deal. And yet Europe has blatantly threatened that all goods may be considered at risk and that the rest of the United Kingdom may not be considered a third nation, meaning that the shelves in my constituency could be empty or that there could be price rises, whereas a trip over the Irish sea to my right hon. Friend's constituency will see nothing of the same. Is that acceptable? In terms of the internal market Bill and the Trade Bill, as they have been put forward, are families in my constituency richer than those in the constituencies of others? No, they are not. Are their bellies less deserving of food?

I want to make a plea in respect of this Bill for the agri-food sector in my constituency—for Mash Direct, Rich Sauces and Lakeland Dairies, three companies that have some 2,500 jobs. I agree with the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller). With this Bill, are we decreasing or minimising our standards? No; he is right to say that we are not. Companies will grow, and we will retain the standards that we have achieved. There is no way in the world that we will let it be otherwise, and I respectfully suggest that anyone who thinks that we will have got it wrong. Previous Ministers have sought and got agreements across the world, including for trade deals in China. We got those markets with our products, quality levels and standards. We are not going to surrender them; we are going to keep them with this Bill.

The fisheries sector is also important to me and my constituency. It is important that this Bill becomes law to ensure not only that we can produce the products that we do out of Portavogie, Ardglass, Kilkeel and elsewhere in Northern Ireland, but that we can increase our trade and potential to grow, and continue to feed the United Kingdom and Europe.

The UK's chief negotiator has confirmed:

"I am afraid it has also been said to us explicitly in these talks that if we are not listed we will not be able to move food to Northern Ireland...if GB were not listed, it would be automatically illegal for NI to import food products from GB."

That is why this Bill, as it was presented by Government, is the way for us to move forward. The European institutions are using Northern Ireland—as I knew they would—to exert control and undermine our sovereignty, and the House is considering a method of protection, which is what the Bill is about. Yes, there could be a breach, but it is one of acting in bad faith, and the blame lies with the Europeans. They are threatening my constituents, Northern Ireland and the whole United Kingdom. They are threatening my constituents with the possibility that our biggest supplier, GB, will have checks and perhaps tariffs on my food—on my constituents' food. Tariffs on fish, tariffs

on food—am I less British than those from Scotland, Wales and England? Do I deserve less consideration and support from this Government? I do not, and my nation does not. The opinion and wishes of the Northern Ireland Assembly are entitled to such consideration.

I have listened to those who trounce out the Belfast agreement as a talisman against the United Kingdom internal market. When I look back—I say this with great respect—at the treachery of both Blair and Major with on-the-runs letters and shady backroom deals, and when I look at their banner-waving of the Belfast agreement as the only consideration in this debate, it is difficult to understand their absolute abandonment of the principle of consent, which is being demolished by the Northern Ireland protocol. I understand why the amendments have been tabled, but I feel that the protection that the Government have put forward is worthy of consideration and support, and our party will be supporting the Government on their proposals.

We have heard legal opinions from other people, and I want to put this one on the record. Martin Howe QC has clearly said that

"the alteration of the constitutional status of NI (which across the board tariffs on GB to NI exports would entail) would breach the core principle of the Good Friday Agreement...International law does not justify a later treaty to which these community representatives are not parties being used to over-ride the rights they enjoy under the earlier treaty".

That legal opinion tells us that the Good Friday agreement is not under any threat; indeed, I suggest that it enhances where we are and where we are going.

Let us grasp why the Bill exists. As my esteemed colleague, my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) outlined yesterday, we should consider who is threatening to destroy the peace process. The only such threats are coming from Europe. As is often the case, they are smoke and mirrors—they have no validity. Those who espouse the Belfast agreement and devolution, and who respect the will of the people that the Northern Ireland Assembly should have a say, need to think carefully about what will happen. We can see our fears coming to be reality. It is right and proper not just that the Government understand that but that, with this Bill, they are putting in place measures that can be enacted if Europe continues down the route of bad faith that tit has set out on.

It is equally right and proper that we as a House protect Northern Ireland as an intrinsic part of the United Kingdom and ensure that the devolved Administrations, and in particular the Northern Ireland Assembly, have a say. That is why the Bill, as put forward and without change—with the exception of clause 47—is the right way to do it.

5.15 pm

The Prime Minister hopes that the provision will never need to be used and sees it as an insurance policy should Europe act in bad faith. I see it as a necessary tool for when Europe throws the dummy out of the buggy or pram and uses my country as a way to attack the rest of the United Kingdom. We need each other. The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) described it as a family. Northern Ireland needs to be able to trade with our strongest ally—the rest of the United Kingdom. We need the principle of consent within the internal market, and the devolved Administrations need to be involved.

GB accounts for some 53% of Northern Ireland external sales, to the value of £2.3 billion. GB is the largest market for six of the 10 agrifood subsectors. The increase in freight vehicle traffic of some 532,000 units indicates to me that over the next period the opportunity to grow will be even greater. Exports of Northern Ireland aggregates are rising. That again shows the importance of the internal market and of having the opportunities to sell products. Many of the roads around London have rock and stone from Ballystockart quarry in my constituency, because the view is that it is the best rock and stone for roads around London. That is a fact. That is why the internal market is so important. We need to have that trade. Of course, the rock and stone is taken further afield than that as well.

Some 65% of Northern Ireland's purchases are from GB, and they are worth £13.3 billion. More than 90% of Northern Ireland businesses trading with GB are SMEs. In Northern Ireland, we have the largest number of SMEs in the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. They are an integral part. We have 90% of our businesses trading with GB. That is why the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill is so important. That is why we need to get it right. That is why we need to preserve the Bill as is. Tomorrow, we will have the opportunity, with clause 47, to present to the House an opportunity to cement and strengthen that situation even more.

While many are caught up in the argument of who would be breaking the treaty, how that appears internationally and the effect on our reputation, I am looking to this Bill and the Trade Bill. I am looking to food on the shelves. I am looking to job opportunities. I am looking to my companies in my constituency and across all of Northern Ireland working together with strength to ensure that we can get those things in the future. I am looking to trade for our businesses and our legal right under the Act of Settlement to be treated the same as any other nation in this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—we want to be treated the same as Scotland and Wales—strengthened by the principle of consent in the Belfast agreement.

Just today, the figures came out for unemployment. I just want to state them for the record, because it is important for showing where we are. Northern Ireland's unemployment rate is 2.9%. The United Kingdom's unemployment rate is 4.1%. The EU's unemployment rate is 6.7%. The Republic of Ireland's unemployment rate is 5.3%. That would indicate to me and probably to others in this House the importance of Northern Ireland's relationship within the internal market with the United Kingdom and how we can collectively ensure that unemployment rates are kept down through the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Government here.

To conclude, will the House please stand with us and send a very clear message that if the intention is to undermine British sovereignty and for negotiations to fail, as they have failed thus far, we will not be pushed? Northern Ireland, as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is worth standing up for, and I urge all in this House to do just that.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I rise to speak to the amendments tabled in my name and the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

We have had some good contributions from colleagues from all parties in today's discussion of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill—or, as the Prime Minister now calls it after his roasting yesterday, the infernal market Bill. Let us hope that when the Minister rises to speak he is better briefed than the Prime Minister, although I have no doubt that he will be because, unlike his boss, he very much is a details man.

Before I address the substance of the amendments, I want the House to be clear on a few points. Labour wants the Government to get Brexit done and we want a strong internal market that respects devolution and protects high regulatory standards, but we will not fall for the Prime Minister's attempt to rerun the Brexit arguments, and neither should the public. The Brexit issue is settled and the Government now need to get on and get the deal that they promised the British people at the general election.

The Prime Minister's attempts to boost his falling poll ratings have failed. Brexiteer after Brexiteer has denounced this Bill; they clearly did not get the memo that opposing it was some kind of remainder plot, which it is not. We have had a roll call of the great and good—some not so good, but I will let Members decide—including Lord Howard and Lord Lamont, the right hon. and learned Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox) and the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), to name but a few. They have spoken out with courage because this Bill, in its current form, is not in the national interest.

Let me turn to the amendments. The central challenge that faced those drafting the Bill was how to square an internal market where goods can be sold across the UK with the fact that regulatory standards are devolved in key areas such as animal welfare, the environment, food safety and many others. There was an obvious answer, because since 2017 there has been a process of agreeing common frameworks—a joint approach to standards in the different devolved areas. The Government could have chosen to legislate for those common frameworks to make them the default option for regulation, thereby granting a proper voice to the devolved nations on the regulatory standards to which we have to adhere.

To be clear, that approach would have imposed a duty on all Governments to seek to establish common high standards. There would have needed to be an ultimate last resort in case the way forward could not be agreed on, at which point the UK Parliament would have needed to step in. That would have been the way to square the circle of the internal market and respect for devolution but, unfortunately, it is not the route that the Government have chosen. Instead, they have chosen non-binding common frameworks, up against what is in essence a Westminster veto, potentially leading to lower standards, with no guarantee of a voice for the devolved nations.

The Government say that they will still negotiate for common frameworks; that is welcome but it is not enough. If we do not put the process for common frameworks on a statutory footing, we undermine the very process itself, making the nuclear option of imposition more and more likely. Common frameworks without legislation are toothless. As time for regulations to be implemented becomes more and more pressing, and with the looming prospect of other trade deals and their inevitable call on UK-wide standards, we can see how things will play out, with the imposition of regulations via statutory instruments becoming the norm.

[Lucy Powell]

In line with getting Brexit done, there is now a huge repatriation of powers from the EU to the UK. The Government have a choice to make: do they want to respect and strengthen the devolution settlement by pushing power closer to people in communities, as promised in the referendum? Or do they want to retain all those powers here in Westminster? At best, the Bill is a missed opportunity to strengthen our Union; at worst, it threatens the future of the UK itself, giving—as we have heard today—the First Minister and the SNP all the grievances they need to turbo-charge their independence campaign. One has only to listen to the voices across our four nations to realise that, yet the Prime Minister and the Government have a tin ear.

A Front-Bench Conservative Member of the Welsh Assembly resigned because of the Bill's disregard of and disrespect towards the nations of the UK. It is worth listening to what he had to say, which was that

“the Internal Market Bill has done nothing to lessen my anxieties about the dangers facing our 313 year old Union. Indeed they have been gravely aggravated by the decisions made in the last few days by the Prime Minister...I will feel it necessary to speak out against what I consider to be a lack of statecraft at this crucial time for the UK's very survival”

as a multi-state Union.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to those comments by a very honourable man, one of my constituents, David Melding, the shadow Counsel General, a lifelong and loyal Conservative with whom I disagree on many issues. However, he was pointing out the pattern of behaviour from the Government of disrespect for devolution. I have just been speaking to the First Minister of Wales, and he has been clear this is a pattern of behaviour in everything from covid testing to the situation regarding the Bill. Does she agree that the Government need to take a completely different approach if they want the UK internal market to work, as we do?

Lucy Powell: I absolutely do. My hon. Friend has made some powerful points today about the disrespectful way in which the Welsh Government were consulted over the Bill, and he is absolutely right to highlight those. I am afraid that, if that continues, that will not be good at all.

Labour firmly believes that the UK single market is the foundation stone of our Union and brings huge economic benefits to the entire UK. That is why we support the principle behind the Bill and why our amendments are so necessary to improve the Bill in Committee. The UK internal market will be essential in recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. We know that we need mutual recognition for our internal market to function coherently, and we believe that we should use this opportunity to drive standards up further.

Our amendments are about the way in which we arrive at those minimum standards, not whether minimum standards are required. The common frameworks programme has been in place since 2017 and has led to some extremely positive outcomes, even in policy areas as complex and contentious as food standards. I am grateful to the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), for speaking to me last night about how the common

frameworks programme is progressing. The Government and the devolved Governments should be commended for having established this collaborative forum. It could have proceeded with perhaps a little more speed and zeal, but we recognise the competing demands on the Government.

However, the Bill as it stands has the potential to undermine those processes entirely. On food standards, for example, where a common framework has already been agreed, if the Prime Minister were to pursue a free trade deal with the US, we may see chlorinated chicken imported into the UK and making its way on to Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish supermarket shelves, irrespective of the standards that they have worked so hard to agree through the common framework.

However, it is not only about food. The Bill could have far-reaching implications for the country's ability to reduce waste and meet our net zero targets. Wales, as we heard, has high ambitions to reduce single-use plastic items, but the UK Government have proposed a less ambitious target for England. It would be tragic if the UK Government imposed a lower standard on Wales, when we should all be working together to eradicate plastics and keep standards as high as possible and going ever higher. Instead, my fear is that the Government are firing a starting pistol on a race to the bottom for regulatory standards across the United Kingdom, which we do not want to happen.

New clause 2 sets out a process that would underpin the common frameworks approach in good faith and within reasonable time commitments and would put the common frameworks programme on a clear statutory footing. We propose that, where common frameworks are already in place, Ministers should not be able to unilaterally override them via secondary legislation to impose lower standards on devolved Administrations without their consent, as the Bill would currently allow. Where any frameworks are currently in development, or as any new common frameworks become necessary, Ministers would need to allow a consensus-based negotiation via the framework process within a reasonable timeframe before making any further intervention via Westminster. Only if an agreement could not be reached through this process would a Minister be able to intervene and protect the internal market.

5.30 pm

Jonathan Edwards: I agree with the vast majority of new clause 2, but this is the one point that really worries me, because it indicates that Westminster will have supremacy over Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Am I right in interpreting the end of the new clause in that manner? Surely the hon. Lady's colleagues in Wales will be very concerned about any proposal that means that the Westminster Parliament will have supremacy over the Welsh Parliament.

Lucy Powell: This might be where we differ, as I was going to come on to say, because we believe that the ultimate arbiter of the UK internal market would need to be the UK Parliament. Our amendments seek to ensure that negotiations through common frameworks are conducted in good faith and given proper time and that this would need to come back to the UK Parliament in primary legislation, rather than secondary legislation, as is proposed.

Labour supports the need for some kind of independent body to arbitrate the effectiveness of the internal market. However, we want to ensure that this body is fully accountable to the views of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and, crucially, has proper teeth to be able to do what it needs to do. New clause 3 would therefore place a legal obligation on the CMA to monitor, to report and, most importantly, to consult with the devolved Administrations when discharging its new and enhanced duties.

I turn to the amendments tabled by the Scottish national party. While I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) said, it appears from the amendments that the SNP does not want a functioning internal market; it wants to frustrate one. I am afraid that some of its amendments would, in essence, give a veto to the Scottish Parliament of the internal UK single market. We cannot support that. We believe that the UK Parliament has to be the final arbiter of a functioning internal market because we believe in the UK, and the SNP does not. Its amendments would clog up the process and effectively offer one Parliament a veto.

As MPs, we have a responsibility and a duty to protect the interests of this country. The rule of law and the safety and security of our nation should be paramount. For the Conservative and Unionist party—let us remind ourselves of that name—to propose legislation that breaks the law and threatens the Union by putting rocket boosters under those campaigning for independence is near unthinkable. We hope that Ministers will accept our amendments to strengthen the Bill and to respect devolution as it stands and that they will table amendments at the next stage to strengthen the Bill further, so that we can keep our Union intact, get Brexit done, get the deal that this country was offered and move on.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I would like to thank all Members who have spoken today. Before I proceed to discuss part 4 in some detail and the amendments that have been tabled, I want to put the Bill into context, so that we can see where it sits. I would particularly like to thank my hon. Friends the Members for Stone (Sir William Cash), for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford), for Hertford and Stortford (Julie Marson) and for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) for their support of the Bill. This is an economic Bill to ensure that UK companies can trade unhindered in every part of the UK, and their focus on the core issue of ensuring that free trade must be commended.

The United Kingdom's internal market has been the bedrock of our shared prosperity for centuries. It has enabled businesses and individuals to thrive and has been the source of unhindered and open trade across the country. It has helped to demonstrate that, as a Union, our country is greater than the sum of its parts. The economies of our four nations within one United Kingdom are forged as one. Around 60% of Scottish and Welsh exports are to the rest of the UK, which is around three times as much as the exports to the rest of the EU. About 50% of Northern Ireland's sales are to Great Britain. In some local authorities in Wales, over a quarter of workers commute across the border. So when

we leave the transition period at the end of this year, and the laws made in Europe can now be made across the UK, hundreds of powers will flow from the EU to the devolved nations and the UK Government in an unprecedented transfer of powers. It is really important to remember that we are devolving powers down to those devolved nations.

The Bill will not limit the devolved Administrations from innovating, as some Members have suggested. If an Administration wanted to introduce minimum alcohol pricing laws in the future, as was mentioned earlier, our proposals in the Bill would have no effect on them as long as the rules did not have a discriminatory effect on goods from other parts of the UK. Nor would our proposals do anything to prevent any Administration from introducing rules and regulations on how and where products could be used, including bans on smoking in public places. As these powers return to the devolved Administrations and as we recover from covid, we must ensure that our economy is stronger than ever. That is why the Government have brought forward this legislation to guarantee the continued functioning of our internal market and to ensure that trade remains unhindered in the UK.

Our manifesto committed us to maintaining and strengthening the integrity and smooth operation of our internal market, and eight weeks ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy presented to Parliament a White Paper that set out plans to preserve our internal market after the transition period. Since then, we have spoken to hundreds of businesses and business representative organisations across the UK to gather views and feedback on our proposals. Overwhelmingly, businesses supported our approach. For example, the British Chambers of Commerce stressed that a fragmented system would create additional costs, bureaucracy and supply chain challenges that could disrupt operations for firms across the UK. As these proposals progress, business communities will want practical considerations, not politics, at the heart of the debates on shaping solutions. I want to thank those businesses, along with colleagues across the devolved Administrations, for their engagement on the White Paper.

Turning now to the independent body that will be created by the provisions in part 4, we consulted on how to ensure that an independent monitoring and advice function could uphold the internal market. In response, to oversee the functioning of the internal market, the Bill sets up the Office for the Internal Market within the Competition and Markets Authority. In some of the contributions today, Members have talked about who will serve in the Office for the Internal Market. I must remind people that the Competition and Markets Authority sits aside from Government and the directors of its board can be seen on its website. It is open to everyone to see their expertise in their fields. These are not people who are passed on through grace and favour; these are technical roles and it is really important that we have the greatest expertise in that body.

Tim Farron: I do not think that any of us doubt the integrity of the people on the board or on that body. We doubt their powers to be able to ensure that there is equity. Does the Minister not understand that there is a real difference?

Paul Scully: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but prior to his contribution, other Members did raise the point about how these people were being recruited and for what reasons.

This measure means that each devolved Administration will be fully and equally involved in the oversight of the UK internal market. It minimises the need to seek court action, thus ensuring the continued smooth operation of the UK internal market that businesses crave. The provisions set out in the Bill provide broad oversight on an equal basis for all Administrations. The new Office for the Internal Market will be able to provide non-binding, expert reporting, technical monitoring, regulations and proposals, which will provide robust evidence on the actual or potential impact of regulatory measures, thus ensuring enhanced transparency and accountability for decision making across all the Administrations, including the UK Government acting on behalf of England. It is important that by doing this, the Office for the Internal Market will add an extra economic impact assessment that could otherwise just boil down to a political debate, which would not provide the consistency and coherence that businesses are seeking at this time.

I turn now to the amendments, starting with amendment 28 to clause 28. The clause is important because it defines those regulatory provisions on which the CMA will report and advise. This will ensure certainty and transparency for Administrations, businesses and the general public. Regulatory provisions are in scope if they set requirements for the purposes of mutual recognition and non-discrimination principles in the Bill for the sale of goods and equivalent services, as well as recognition of professional qualifications, and if they apply to one or more nations but not the whole of the UK.

As we have heard, amendment 28 seeks to exclude Scotland from the benefits of the new Office for the Internal Market. It would carve out regulation that applies only in Scotland from the definition of regulatory provisions across this part of the Bill, which basically means that the Scottish Government could not proactively request advice and its regulatory measures could not be included in the regular monitoring of impacts and trends in the UK internal market. If the functions of the new Office for the Internal Market applied asymmetrically, as is suggested, its work would be severely undermined from the outset.

Full UK-wide coverage and relationships with all four Administrations will be vital in gaining and maintaining the confidence of stakeholders, so I strongly question how the office could effectively fulfil the functions given to it by the Bill if it cannot assess impacts across the UK internal market as a whole. Parity is a central principle in how the office for the internal market will conduct its affairs. It will be of service to all four nations of the UK, but in turn it will legitimately expect to consider the impacts of regulatory measures across all four Administrations. The clause empowers the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments, as well as the devolved Administrations.

Equally, the amendment would deny Scottish Government policy makers an important support system for the development of regulation following the transition period. The expertise and analysis of the Office for the Internal Market, offered to all Administrations equally, should not be rejected in this way. Finally and most importantly, since this provision plays a key part in ensuring there are no trade barriers, businesses across the UK would suffer.

To ensure the ongoing smooth operation of the UK internal market, clause 29 will ensure that emerging trends and developments in the market are independently reviewed by the CMA. The CMA has a strong reputation for independence and impartiality, which the Government have striven to preserve in setting out the functions of the office for the internal market. The UK Government have no role in what I have described: the function of the office in reporting to this House, the other place and devolved legislatures, discussing such topics as intra-UK competition, free access to goods and services, and the impact of diverging regulatory conditions in different parts of the UK.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) raised other areas that the office could look into. It is important to know that the list is not exclusive; there are other areas, and the CMA has a great track record in championing the consumer, so the consumer point he raised is covered.

I said that there was no role for the UK Government in what I have just described. Truly independent scrutiny is crucial if anyone is to have faith in the office's pronouncements on the health of the UK internal market, especially our business community at a time when those same businesses find themselves stretched thin by the impact of the coronavirus.

Jonathan Edwards: If the office for the internal market writes a report that says, for instance, that a regulation passed by the Northern Irish Assembly—if it was functioning—was contrary to the principles of the Bill, would there be legal recourse if a company was affected by that policy?

Paul Scully: As I say, the office will put forward non-binding reports to each devolved Parliament, but then there are the existing provisions for working intergovernmentally. We also have the common frameworks arrangement, as has been described, which has already provided good collaboration and co-operation, which I will come back to in a second. Ultimately, yes, the courts are there as a last resort, but if we have the inter-governmental relationships and build on those, as trusted partners, we will not have to resort to that.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Neale Hanvey) said that minimum alcohol pricing, procurement, health and tuition fees would be undermined or constrained by the OIM's functions. That is just not true. None of the clauses set out in part 4 precludes the devolved Administrations from introducing policies in any of those areas. The OIM will not be empowered to bind Administrations or veto regulations. It will only be concerned with assessing the economic impact of regulation, never its merit.

When not acting at the request of an Administration for reporting or advice, the OIN would only ever be concerned with monitoring the health of the UK's internal market, such as the flow of trade, the impact of regulations on intra-UK competition and investment, or the ready availability of goods and services for all our citizens. The CMA, which the OIM will be established within, already operates at a strict arm's length from the Government and all devolved Administrations. It has built up a wealth of expertise and experience, and has a global reputation for promoting competition. That is why it is a natural fit. As my hon. Friend the Member

for Stone mentioned, the Bill clearly sets out that the OIM would be required to provide access to its reports and advice to all four Administrations on an equal basis, enhancing transparency and accountability.

5.45 pm

Amendment 29 seeks to constrain the Office for the Internal Market, operating within the Competition and Markets Authority, from taking forward any independent review without the prior approval of the legislatures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We cannot support this amendment, as it would insert significant political intrusion into a necessarily independent role for the Competition and Markets Authority.

Clause 30 supports the fair and open functioning of the CMA in providing technical, non-binding advice on regulatory proposals that could have a potential economic impact for the UK internal market. This provision could be requested by any Administration on a voluntary basis for a proposal made in that part of the UK to support policy development and better regulation. The advice or the report will examine the potential economic impact of the proposal in areas such as competition or trade distortions, or the impact on prices, choices and the quality of goods and services for consumers. To ensure transparency, all advice will be published and shared with the Administrations in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Clause 31 is vital in that it provides the CMA with the ability to produce independent reports on relevant regulatory provisions that have already been passed or made into law in order to support the ongoing development of the UK internal market. The request must concern a regulatory provision applying to that Administration's part of the UK and within its legislative competence. A request may be made by one Administration or more, which will ensure that expert technical evidence can be provided by the CMA upon request by an Administration from any part of the UK. To ensure transparency, the CMA will publish the report soon after it is provided to the requesting Administrations.

Clause 32 sets out the reporting procedure that the CMA will undertake for regulations that are already enacted in any part of the United Kingdom, and are considered to have actual or anticipated detrimental impacts on the UK internal market.

Clause 33 sets out the process that the CMA, the UK Government and the devolved Administrations must follow once the report under clause 32 has been produced by the CMA and laid before the legislatures. It requires the Minister in the Administration responsible for implementing the regulatory provision that was the subject of the CMA's report and the Minister in the Administration that requested the report to make a written statement in the relevant legislature. This provides transparency and parliamentary oversight on UK internal market matters, as well as the opportunity for legislatures to determine the most appropriate subsequent course of action.

The purpose of clause 34 is to allow the CMA to exclude some categories of information from its published reports. It can exclude information if it believes that: it is contrary to the public interest to disclose that information; it contains commercial information that might significantly harm the business interests of another person; or it contains information about an individual's private affairs,

the disclosure of which might significantly harm the individual's interests. Such discretion is obviously necessary in specific circumstances to provide assurances for businesses' and individuals' interests.

Clause 35 sets out that the CMA must publish general advice and information about how it expects to approach the exercise of its monitoring, advisory and reporting functions under clauses 29 to 32. This is necessary to ensure that the way it approaches its functions is visible and clear to the public.

Amendment 21 seeks to include a duty on the CMA to consult the devolved Administrations prior to publishing guidance on the exercise of its internal market functions. It is not necessary or helpful to put a duty to consult into statute. Across its existing functions, the CMA maintains constructive working relationships within all three devolved Administrations. Both the Government and the CMA itself believe that those relationships will continue to be vital in delivering new internal market functions.

Stephen Doughty: The Minister is doing his best job to front this up and to give some of the detail that the Prime Minister was not across yesterday, but does he not have the slightest bit of doubt when his own colleague, the legal representative on the Welsh Conservative Benches in the Senedd, David Melding, resigned saying that this Bill poses dangers to the Union and that those have been gravely aggravated by the decisions of the Prime Minister? When somebody of that standing has criticised the Bill in this way, does the Minister not have any qualms about what he is doing?

Paul Scully: That is why I am going through the clauses and amendments at Committee stage to keep the focus on what is so important—what businesses expect us to do. I will not go through all the clauses, for reasons of brevity, but I am happy to follow up with anybody who wants to do that as we go through the rest of the Bill's stages.

Amendment 30 would require the Secretary of State to obtain the agreement of the devolved Administrations before the Secretary of State specifies the level of financial penalties in secondary legislation in cases of non-compliance with the information-gathering requirements of the CMA. I am happy to reassure the Committee that the Government are committed to not taking any steps to bring the financial penalties into effect by commencing the clause until there is clear and credible evidence that there is a need to do so to enable the CMA to fulfil its internal market functions under the Bill. The amendment would also require the Secretary of State to consult with other relevant persons before making the necessary regulations. I want to confirm that the devolved Administrations would be consulted as other persons the Secretary of State considers appropriate, so they do fit within that.

On new clause 2, we are committed to maintaining high standards across the UK. That is absolutely vital. There are effectively two strands of this debate: first, the devolved Administrations; and secondly, concern—understandable concern—about standards. We have said repeatedly that we are committed to maintaining high standards across the UK, so I am pleased to have the opportunity to set out how we are already working with the devolved Administrations to ensure that this will be done.

[Paul Scully]

I thank the hon. Members for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) and for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) for their passionate remarks in favour of common frameworks and the high standards that we have here in the UK. The new clause, though, seeks to fundamentally alter the nature of the common frameworks programme, the design of which was agreed by the UK Government and devolved Administrations in October 2017 at the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU Negotiations. The principles agreed made it clear that the common frameworks are based on consensus and are designed to establish continuing dialogue between the UK Government and devolved Administrations. This dialogue facilitates policy development in a range of policy areas where powers returning from the EU intersect with devolved competence.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire rightly asked what underpins those common frameworks. Common frameworks provide an agreed approach to ensuring regulatory coherence across the UK in specific policy areas where powers are returning from the EU and intersect with devolved competence. The Bill, on the other hand, works alongside these common frameworks to provide a broader structural underpinning, and offers additional protections to the status quo of UK trade, ensuring certainty for businesses and investors in the form of a backstop—if I may say that—of regulatory coherence. The UK Government continue to work closely and constructively with the devolved Administrations. It would not be appropriate to create a legislative underpinning for UK common frameworks because this is about consultation, collaboration and working together with the Administrations rather than legislating to push them to do so.

In conclusion, in the debate we have had today, we started off with some misunderstandings about common frameworks—we have five frameworks coming before Christmas, including for food standards. We have talked about whether water and the national health service were at risk in Scotland, both of which are not within the scope of the Bill. This is really important: when one starts reading the Bill, one has to get to the last page, because that is where the schedule of exclusions is. It is important to do that, before we posture here in this House about something. As I say, businesses are crying out, “Do not do the politics. Let us trade across the UK.” That is what they are crying out for. That is what they want. So I hope that the amendments will be not be pressed and then we can get on with getting this Bill through the House.

Drew Hendry: Mr Evans, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I must admit I am still reeling somewhat from the irony of the Government opposing amendment 29 on the basis of political intrusion.

We have heard today from those who support independence and from those who are diehard Unionists in this Chamber. We have heard the concerns of the Welsh Government. Can I say that it is not a manufactured grievance to have these concerns from the Welsh Government, because they are genuine concerns? But that is true for Scotland, too. These are not manufactured problems; these are real-world problems.

I have to say that the Labour Front-Bench speech was warmly welcomed by those on the Conservative Benches today. The party that brought devolution in—the

party of John Smith—undermining devolution in the way it did during that speech deserves some proper reflection.

In this debate, we have heard some warm words, but again, we have had absolutely no detail on how this is actually going to be protecting devolution. It is not. We have had no detail on the Office for the Internal Market. Who is going to be in that unelected body? How can we vouch for the integrity of anybody when we do not know who is going to be on that body and who is going to elect them—or who is going to appoint them, I should say?

The Minister talked about alcohol minimum pricing, which by definition is a discriminatory policy in Scotland. How can that possibly be protected under these measures? It cannot be. If we choose in Scotland and if the Scottish people vote for policies aimed at public health that cause the problem, the Bill still undermines the ability to do that.

The Government are determined to continue with their programme of overriding the Scottish Parliament and its elected representatives, and this underlines the fact that Scotland will never be seen as an equal member of the UK. We do not accept this. The people in Scotland are saying, and it is reported in poll after poll, that the only way to protect our Parliament is to be an independent nation.

Mr Evans, I press our amendment 28.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee proceeded to a Division.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr Nigel Evans): Will all non-Front Benchers leave the Chamber behind me, please, and then join the queue in Westminster Hall? Remember to socially distance please as you leave. Thank you very much.

The Committee having divided: Ayes 51, Noes 351.

Division No. 96]

[5.58 pm

AYES

Bardell, Hannah	Hendry, Drew
Black, Mhairi	Hosie, Stewart
Blackford, rh Ian	Lake, Ben
Blackman, Kirsty	Law, Chris
Bonnar, Steven	Linden, David
Brock, Deidre	MacAskill, Kenny
Brown, Alan	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Mc Nally, John
Chapman, Douglas	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Cherry, Joanna	McDonald, Stuart C.
Cowan, Ronnie	McLaughlin, Anne
Crawley, Angela	Monaghan, Carol
Day, Martyn	Nicolson, John
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	O'Hara, Brendan
Doogan, Dave	Oswald, Kirsten
Dorans, Allan	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Eastwood, Colum	Sheppard, Tommy
Edwards, Jonathan	Smith, Alyn
Fellows, Marion	Stephens, Chris
Ferrier, Margaret	Thewliss, Alison
Flynn, Stephen	Thomson, Richard
Gibson, Patricia	Whitford, Dr Philippa
Grady, Patrick	Williams, Hywel
Grant, Peter	Wishart, Pete
Gray, Neil	
Hanna, Claire	Tellers for the Ayes:
Hanvey, Neale	Gavin Newlands and
	Owen Thompson

NOES

Adams, Nigel	Costa, Alberto	Gullis, Jonathan	Maclean, Rachel
Afolami, Bim	Courts, Robert	Halfon, rh Robert	Mak, Alan
Afriyie, Adam	Coutinho, Claire	Hall, Luke	Malthouse, Kit
Ahmad Khan, Imran	Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey	Hammond, Stephen	Mangnall, Anthony
Aiken, Nickie	Crabb, rh Stephen	Hancock, rh Matt	Mann, Scott
Aldous, Peter	Crosbie, Virginia	Hands, rh Greg	Marson, Julie
Allan, Lucy	Crouch, Tracey	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Mayhew, Jerome
Amess, Sir David	Daly, James	Harris, Rebecca	Maynard, Paul
Anderson, Lee	Davies, David T. C.	Harrison, Trudy	McCartney, Jason
Anderson, Stuart	Davies, Gareth	Hart, Sally-Ann	McCartney, Karl
Andrew, Stuart	Davies, Dr James	Hart, rh Simon	McPartland, Stephen
Ansell, Caroline	Davies, Mims	Hayes, rh Sir John	McVey, rh Esther
Argar, Edward	Davies, Philip	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Menzies, Mark
Atherton, Sarah	Davis, rh Mr David	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Mercer, Johnny
Atkins, Victoria	Davison, Dehenna	Henderson, Gordon	Merriman, Huw
Bacon, Gareth	Dinenage, Caroline	Henry, Darren	Metcalfe, Stephen
Bacon, Mr Richard	Dines, Miss Sarah	Higginbotham, Antony	Millar, Robin
Badenoch, Kemi	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hinds, rh Damian	Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Bailey, Shaun	Docherty, Leo	Hoare, Simon	Milling, rh Amanda
Baillie, Siobhan	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Holden, Mr Richard	Mills, Nigel
Baker, Duncan	Donelan, Michelle	Hollinrake, Kevin	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Baker, Mr Steve	Double, Steve	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Baldwin, Harriett	Dowden, rh Oliver	Holloway, Adam	Moore, Damien
Barclay, rh Steve	Doyle-Price, Jackie	Holmes, Paul	Moore, Robbie
Baron, Mr John	Drax, Richard	Howell, John	Mordaunt, rh Penny
Baynes, Simon	Drummond, Mrs Flick	Howell, Paul	Morris, Anne Marie
Bell, Aaron	Duddridge, James	Huddleston, Nigel	Morris, David
Benton, Scott	Duguid, David	Hudson, Dr Neil	Morris, James
Beresford, Sir Paul	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Hughes, Eddie	Morrissey, Joy
Berry, rh Jake	Dunne, rh Philip	Hunt, Jane	Morton, Wendy
Bhatti, Saqib	Eastwood, Mark	Hunt, rh Jeremy	Mullan, Dr Kieran
Blackman, Bob	Edwards, Ruth	Hunt, Tom	Mumby-Croft, Holly
Blunt, Crispin	Ellis, rh Michael	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Mundell, rh David
Bone, Mr Peter	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Javid, rh Sajid	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Bowie, Andrew	Eustice, rh George	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Neill, Sir Robert
Bradley, Ben	Evans, Dr Luke	Jenkinson, Mark	Nici, Lia
Bradley, rh Karen	Evennett, rh Sir David	Jenkyns, Andrea	Nokes, rh Caroline
Braverman, rh Suella	Everitt, Ben	Jenrick, rh Robert	Norman, rh Jesse
Brereton, Jack	Fabricant, Michael	Johnson, Dr Caroline	O'Brien, Neil
Bridgen, Andrew	Farris, Laura	Johnson, Gareth	Offord, Dr Matthew
Brine, Steve	Fell, Simon	Johnston, David	Opperman, Guy
Bristow, Paul	Fletcher, Katherine	Jones, Andrew	Paisley, Ian
Britcliffe, Sara	Fletcher, Mark	Jones, rh Mr David	Parish, Neil
Browne, Anthony	Fletcher, Nick	Jones, Fay	Pawsey, Mark
Bruce, Fiona	Ford, Vicky	Jones, Mr Marcus	Penning, rh Sir Mike
Buchan, Felicity	Foster, Kevin	Jupp, Simon	Penrose, John
Buckland, rh Robert	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Kawczynski, Daniel	Percy, Andrew
Burghart, Alex	Frazer, Lucy	Kearns, Alicia	Philp, Chris
Burns, rh Conor	Freeman, George	Keegan, Gillian	Pincher, rh Christopher
Butler, Rob	Freer, Mike	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Poulter, Dr Dan
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Fuller, Richard	Knight, Julian	Pow, Rebecca
Carter, Andy	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Kruger, Danny	Prentis, Victoria
Cartlidge, James	Gale, rh Sir Roger	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Pritchard, Mark
Cash, Sir William	Garnier, Mark	Lamont, John	Quin, Jeremy
Cates, Miriam	Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Largan, Robert	Quince, Will
Caulfield, Maria	Gibb, rh Nick	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Randall, Tom
Chalk, Alex	Gibson, Peter	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Redwood, rh John
Chishti, Rehman	Gideon, Jo	Levy, Ian	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Chope, Sir Christopher	Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl	Lewer, Andrew	Richards, Nicola
Churchill, Jo	Glen, John	Lewis, rh Brandon	Richardson, Angela
Clark, rh Greg	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Roberts, Rob
Clarke, Mr Simon	Gove, rh Michael	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Clarke, Theo	Graham, Richard	Lockhart, Carla	Robinson, Gavin
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Grant, Mrs Helen	Loder, Chris	Robinson, Mary
Clarkson, Chris	Grayling, rh Chris	Logan, Mark	Ross, Douglas
Cleverly, rh James	Green, Chris	Longhi, Marco	Rowley, Lee
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Green, rh Damian	Lopez, Julia	Russell, Dean
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Griffith, Andrew	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Rutley, David
Colburn, Elliot	Griffiths, Kate	Loughton, Tim	Sambrook, Gary
Collins, Damian	Grundy, James	Mackinlay, Craig	Saxby, Selaine
		Mackrory, Cherylyn	Scully, Paul

Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig

Traveleyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Maggie Throup and
Tom Pursglove

Question accordingly negated.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Clause 28 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 29 to 39 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause 2

LIMITS ON POWERS TO OVERRIDE COMMON FRAMEWORKS

'The Secretary of State shall not make any order or regulations under this or any other Act of Parliament that has the effect of imposing lower standards on Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, in any area for which a common framework—

- (a) has been agreed,
- (b) is in development, or
- (c) becomes necessary,

unless, where subsection (b) or (c) above applies, the Secretary of State judges that a reasonable period has passed and the negotiations have failed to reach agreement, and a draft of the order or regulations has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.' —(*Lucy Powell.*)

This new clause puts common frameworks on a statutory footing. Where there is a common framework agreed, Ministers would not be able to override them through secondary legislation to impose lower standards on devolved nations. Where a common framework was in development, or a new common framework became necessary, Ministers could not impose standards until the negotiation of common frameworks had taken place between the nations of the UK and failed to reach agreement after a reasonable period. The UK Parliament would be the ultimate arbiter of standards if reasonable agreement could not be reached.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 195, Noes 356.

Division No. 97]

[6.13 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Iain
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Champion, Sarah
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly

Furniss, Gill
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Mishra, Navendu
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahaeme

Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Siddiq, Tulip

Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bambos Charalambos and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew

Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian

Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel

Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary

Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Maggie Throup and
Tom Pursglove

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

The occupant of the Chair left the Chair (Programme Order, 14 September).

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.

Progress reported; Committee to sit again tomorrow.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you help Back Benchers, please? A number of Back Benchers who wanted to come into the Chamber for this part of tonight's business were prevented from coming in, and we now have a scenario in which almost the only people in the Chamber are members of the Government and Whips. As I understand it, their plan is to try to distort the votes that may take place on some of the remaining orders, which were originally going to be the subject of deferred Divisions. It seems that, as the business has finished early, the Government are intent on preventing our having a physical Division on some of the remaining orders.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Perhaps I have a better view of the Chamber than he has because I have the advantage of being in the Chair, but it would appear to me that there are several spaces in which Members could sit on the Government Benches and a great many in which Members could sit on the Opposition Benches. I point out to the hon. Gentleman, and to the House, that if there were too many members of the Government party on the Government Benches, I would not stop Government Members sitting on the Opposition Benches, given the unusual circumstances under which we are now operating.

I have to say that I do not understand the hon. Gentleman's point. No one can be prevented from coming into this Chamber and—I will say this quite loudly—if there is anyone who feels prevented from coming into the Chamber right now, they should come and see me. People can come into the Chamber right now.

Sir Christopher Chope: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am not sure that there can be anything further to that point of order, but out of courtesy and given the hon. Gentleman's seniority in the House, I will take his point of order.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

First, there was an attempt physically to stop me coming into the Chamber. When I said that I wished to come into the Chamber to shout "Object", I was allowed in.

You just said, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there are spaces in the Chamber, and so there are, but that was not my point. My point is that while Back Benchers were discouraged or have been kept out of the Chamber, I can count the Government Whips—there are one, two, three on this Bench and four, five, six, seven, eight—

Question accordingly negated.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Sir Christopher Chope: There are about a dozen Government Whips here—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. How many people with particular duties in the House there are sitting in the Chamber is not a point of order. Any Member can sit in this Chamber. The hon. Gentleman's presence in the Chamber is itself evidence of the impracticality and impossibility of any Member—be they a Whip, a Minister or anything else—trying to prevent any Member, but especially a Member with the hon. Gentleman's seniority, from entering the Chamber. I have just said it and will say it again: if there is any Member out there who feels prevented from coming into the Chamber and wishes to come in, let him or her come in now and I will protect them.

Let us proceed.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

PUBLIC HEALTH

That the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (S.I., 2020, No. 788), dated 22 July 2020, a copy of which was laid before this House on 23 July, be approved.—(*David Duguid.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

That the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings in a Relevant Place) (England) Regulations 2020 (S.I., 2020, No. 791), dated 23 July 2020, a copy of which was laid before this House on 23 July, be approved.—(*David Duguid.*)

Question agreed to.

Hon. Members: No!

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There are thousands—in fact, tens of thousands—of people who will be observing these proceedings and will have noticed that the Government have contrived to prevent this House of Commons from being able to have a substantive vote on some of the most repressive legislation we have ever seen in our democracy. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) and I are but two among many Members who object to what is going on, and all I can say is that revenge is a dish best served cold.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): This really is a point of order for the Chair, because it is incumbent on the occupant of the Chair at any particular given time to decide whether there has to be a physical Division or whether the opinion of the House can be taken on the voices. I decided that the opinion of the House on motion 4 could be taken on the voices, because I could hear a great many more Ayes than Noes. That is my decision, and I will stand by it. If the hon. Gentleman or anyone else in this House had wished to make sure that a deferred Division took place, which would have happened had we reached this point in the proceedings after 7 o'clock, it was open to the

hon. Gentleman—who, I know from many years of past experience, is quite capable of keeping the House from discussing a particular subject for many hours—and any other Member to make sure that the previous business did not finish before 7 o'clock.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance as to how those of us who sought to record our opposition to this motion as a matter of public record—because of the large number of people who have made representations to us—might actually record the fact that we opposed this motion?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes. He has just solved his problem; let it be known that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) and the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) oppose motion 4. I note that there are two of them, and that there are a great many others who do not oppose it. I have just explained in my answer to the point of order from the hon. Member for Christchurch that there were very obvious ways in which he and the right hon. Member for New Forest West could have ensured that a vote on motion 4 was taken by way of a deferred Division.

Sir Christopher Chope: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I do not think there can be any more on this, but I will be fair to the hon. Gentleman and take his point of order.

Sir Christopher Chope: Madam Deputy Speaker, you are absolutely correct in saying that, in normal circumstances, there would have been ways in which we would have been able to ensure that business continued until 7 o'clock, but unfortunately that facility is not available in call list system unless one is on the call list.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but I am afraid that he is completely wrong. It would have been perfectly in order for Members not on the call list to participate in the proceedings that have just concluded by way of interventions and so on. There are ways in which that could have been done, and I am sure that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman, who is more expert than almost any other Member on the use of procedure in this House, could have used the procedure to his advantage had he decided to do so. However, I have taken the decision on the Division on motion 4, so we come to motion 5.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

POLICE

That the draft Police Act 1997 (Criminal Record Certificates: Relevant Matters) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 9 July, be approved.—(*David Duguid.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS

That the draft Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 9 July, be approved.—(*David Duguid.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

The increase to the state pension age

6.42 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): This is Pension Awareness Week, and I rise this evening to present a petition on behalf of the women of Glasgow East born in the 1950s regarding the state pension inequality perpetuated against my female constituents by successive British Governments. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the state pension age.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of Glasgow East Constituency,

Declares that as a result of the way in which the 1995 Pension Act and the 2011 Pension Act were implemented, women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age; further that hundreds of thousands of women have had significant changes imposed on them with little or no personal notice; further that implementation took place faster than promised; further that this gave no time to make alternative pension plans; further that retirement plans have been shattered with devastating consequences; and further that the coronavirus pandemic and concomitant economic downturn has caused additional hardship to many of the women who were previously affected by these changes to the State Pension Age.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002598]

Michelham Priory

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*David Duguid.*)

6.42 pm

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): This urgent debate is about the viability and future of Michelham Priory, a medieval, historic Sussex feature in my beautiful constituency of Wealden. First, I must place on the record my thanks to Helen Anson and Lindsay Lawrence, two superb women who manage and run Michelham Priory with their hands tied behind their backs by the Environment Agency, whose failure to maintain water flows means that the priory's moat is now on the brink of being completely lost. The Environment Agency—yet another unaccountable, bureaucratic and faceless body that is both exploiting Michelham Priory and, as I will argue, breaching its obligations—must be held responsible not only for the environmental damage, but the financial damage to the priory, as its lack of action has the priory in absolutely dire straits.

Michelham Priory is situated on a more than nine-acre site. It is designated an ancient monument and contains a grade I listed building that became a country house in the 1930s, homing many young children as they were evacuated from war-torn Britain during the second world war. It is a unique local gem in an area of nature conservation importance and attracts visitors from all across the country. However, it is at imminent risk of being lost forever.

Michelham Priory boasts Britain's longest continual medieval water-filled moat, which stretches a mile and encircles the site. It is fed by the River Cuckmere and is a crucial factor in determining the atmosphere and tranquillity of the priory, and it is a vital component for weddings and other functions taking place at the priory. However, due to gradual silt deposition and the increasing invasive growth of aquatic plants, the moat has been deteriorating and must be desilted imminently or it will be completely lost. The site is currently run by the Sussex Archaeological Society, which has spent eight long, painful years trying to work with the Environment Agency to address the issues of sluice gates and desilting. Sadly, the Environment Agency has put hurdles in front of the society at every opportunity for eight years.

The Environment Agency is failing in its duty to operate and maintain two water-controlled structures that should let water from the River Cuckmere in and out of the priory moat. It shut the gate on the moat some 20 years ago, and has not been providing silt and water management of the River Cuckmere. That has caused the silting and drying up of the moat, as there is no significant throughflow of water. Cutting the moat off from the water supply from the River Cuckmere means that there is a total loss of water during the summer and autumn months, and currently, the only opportunity for a water supply to the moat is from continuous heavy rainfall. Subsequently, the moat has had its aquatic life decimated, which has damaged a unique natural ecosystem and caused huge regrowth of invasive vegetation.

When the Sussex Archaeological Society approached funding bodies to raise funds to save the moat, and attempt to maintain its listed Historic England status, it found that potential funders needed there to be an

effective plan of water management in place. Such a plan would mean that when the moat is fully desilted, people could be assured that silt deposition would not recur in the short term and undermine the charitable objectives of the grant. The Sussex Archaeological Society is more than happy to clear the silt out of the moat, but the fundamental difficulty is that unless the Environment Agency repairs its sluice gates on the moat, the problem will keep recurring. Unless the gates are repaired and fully functional, the desilter would be a waste of the £800,000 needed for silt removal. We are not asking for any funding from any agency; we want the Environment Agency to step up and do its work. Because of the reluctance of the Environment Agency to commit to repairing its sluice gates, the society cannot apply for any financial aid to clear the moat.

The priory also has a unique working water mill—indeed, there has been one on the site since 1255. It is listed with Historic England, which clearly states that it is fed by the River Cuckmere. However, the Environment Agency has refused to acknowledge the priory's milling rights, choosing to describe a river bypass around the site as the real River Cuckmere. The priory's researchers have examined historical documents relating to the water mill, and they believe that the priory is entitled to ancient milling rights that are traceable back to the 1400s. Those ancient milling rights state that the priory must be supplied with two feet and nine inches of water, which must be in the moat at all times—they have definitely done their research—but the moat does not receive that water.

Although the Environment Agency has allowed water to be pumped directly from the stream into the moat, calculations show that to replenish the moat in such a way would take more than one month of continuous pumping of water. The mill has been unable to produce flour for sale since 2017, and the society has been unable to fundraise for urgent conservation of the water mill, due to the key component: lack of water. In the unprecedented times in which we find ourselves due to covid, a facility such as the mill is vital. The shortage of flour during spring was noted all over, particularly on television and among our constituents, and I believe even by you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Getting hold of flour was so hard that it became far more expensive than gold, and although we have a functioning mill, it cannot operate because of the Environment Agency.

The gradual loss of the moat has resulted in a loss of nearly £0.5 million of income over three years, due to the decrease in wedding bookings, photoshoots, and filming opportunities. The reduction in income has put the 175-year-old Sussex Archaeological Society at risk of closure. On top of these challenges, it has also had to deal with the pandemic, which has led to a loss of revenue. I argue that the Environment Agency is also responsible for the half a million pound shortfall in income, which is down to its irresponsible behaviour with the priory. The silting up of the moat has also caused the island's water table to change. The change in levels of soil moisture has led to a gradual drying up of the listed buildings that have stood on the site for centuries. Not only is this causing great damage to the site, it is also resulting in additional maintenance and conservation costs for the society. I say to the Minister that, once again, the Environment Agency is responsible for those costs as well.

To add to the absurdity of the situation, in 2017, the Environment Agency found legislation that it claims meant that the Michelham Priory moat should be classified as a reservoir. So after eight years of negotiation, this is the absurdity that the Environment Agency comes up with. It is preposterous and unacceptable that we now have an empty medieval moat that has had to be classified as a reservoir despite not containing any water. Britain's longest medieval water-filled moat lies empty because the faceless organisation that is the Environment Agency is unable to fulfil its obligations.

Michelham Priory is a wonderful piece of history and I am proud that Wealden is home to the UK's longest medieval water-milled moat. It is absolutely vital that the moat is restored and that the water mill is operational again. It is staffed by wonderful people and, of course, by volunteers. The head gardener, James Neil, is incredibly passionate about the work that he does to keep the heritage site thriving and, of course, also oversees all the other volunteers who are exhausted after eight years of negotiations that have led to no responsible action being taken by the Environment Agency.

What is interesting is that the priory and the volunteers are not asking for any funding. They actually have a plan to fix this, but they urgently need to know the Environment Agency's plans to repair and maintain the two gates in order to obtain the funds needed to desilt the moat and manage it going forward. If the Environment Agency is unable to provide any concrete answers as to why it is unable to address this case, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to get to the bottom of the matter. Why has it taken eight years for no strategy to have been put in place? Why do random people from the Environment Agency turn up at the priory without any understanding of the situation and without any answers as to how they can solve the problem?

I urge the Minister to outline what steps she can take—I appreciate that it is an arm's length agency—to hold the Environment Agency to account and to ensure that Michelham Priory receives the attention and support it deserves from the Environment Agency. I know that it can be incredibly difficult for a departmental Minister to bring an agency in hand, but this is a critical case for us in Wealden. I hope the Minister understands how important this priory is for us, not because of its social and historical impact, but because of its economic impact on the community that it serves and right across the country—especially in east Sussex. I hope that she can also appreciate the frustration that we feel in east Sussex at having to deal with an agency that has failed to deliver over eight whole years. I hope that she can respond in a positive way to my constituents at the priory.

6.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani) on securing this Adjournment debate and on putting her case very strongly, and rightly so because it is such an important part of her constituency. Michelham Priory is, as she says, a grade I listed building. It is one of our foremost Augustinian priories, with a rich history, stretching back nearly 800 years. With its grade I listing, it boasts Britain's longest continuous medieval water-filled moat,

[Rebecca Pow]

which is quite something actually, because only 2.5% of England's 400,000-plus listed buildings are classed as grade I, so it is special.

I agree with my hon. Friend that it is essential that we do what we can to protect the historic environment, including the priory. As she mentions, the Environment Agency over many years has held many meetings with the Sussex Archaeological Society, the owners of the priory, to discuss matters of water management relating to the priory. Those conversations started long before my hon. Friend came to this place. Nevertheless, I understand that a key concern of the Sussex Archaeological Society has been to avoid flooding the priory grounds in the winter and drying out the moat in the summer—something which obviously has deterred the holding of events at the priory, which provide important income for the society. It is the Environment Agency that has to manage the water control structures to reduce that flooding aspect—that is one of the key areas that comes under its hat. Unfortunately, because of the wide expanse of the moat, fed by high flows through channels in the winter, salty river deposits have built up naturally. I have been told that at the moment the moat is 80% filled with silt. That can result in its drying out in the summer months, and there is a risk that the moat will be lost to posterity if it is not looked after, as my hon. Friend says.

To prevent the moat from drying up, in the past, the Environment Agency operated the upstream controls to divert the Cuckmere river into the moat, but that approach created an impassable barrier to fish, so it had to cease. My hon. Friend has not mentioned that then there appeared in the moat a plant called floating pennywort, a non-native invasive species that grows incredibly rapidly and is responsible for swamping waterways, blocking water flow, clogging up water channels, crowding out native plants and taking oxygen from fish and insects. It is not found anywhere else on the Cuckmere river. The landowner, the Sussex Archaeological Society, has a duty to prevent the spread of the infestation, and diverting the river through the moat in the summer months would have increased the chances of the plant's escaping into the wider river environment. To intentionally do so would be classed as a criminal act. That is one of the big dilemmas of the situation.

Ms Ghani: This is a medieval moat. I do not think the Environment Agency can come up with excuses of potential flooding when the moat has been in place longer than any person of expertise within the Environment Agency. The archaeological society, including the staff I mentioned within the priory, has procedures in place to make sure that no crime is committed. It just needs an understanding from the Environment Agency that it will open the sluice and let the water flow.

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for that point, but I think she is slightly missing the point that if one let the water flow, the pennywort would flow out. The pennywort is a real obstacle in the chain of sorting this out, and that is what needs to be addressed.

I have talked very closely with the Environment Agency about this and I do get this point, which needs to be addressed. I would say—and will reiterate as I go through—

that I think more conversations need to be held about this, because it is one of the keys to unlocking what I believe my hon. Friend is aiming to achieve.

The Environment Agency is managing the floating pennywort in the moat on the society's behalf at its own expense because, even confined within the moat, it needs to be reduced. The agency is trying to tackle it, as part of its commitment and duties to conserve the environment and protect the downstream Cuckmere river. I want to be clear that the Environment Agency has duties in respect of the river, but they are very much in terms of protecting the wider environment; that is the agency's role.

If my hon. Friend would like to discuss these matters further, I have asked the Environment Agency to meet her in order to further that.

Ms Ghani: I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to intervene again. The frustration is that there have been meetings over eight years—eight whole years during which the priory has been and is absolutely committed to working with the Environment Agency, taking on board any of the financial implications of desilting, and managing the plants; but the Environment Agency has not come up with a plan. How many more meetings can I expect them to have, after eight years have delivered nothing from the agency?

Rebecca Pow: I am not surprised—this is the case that my hon. Friend has been making since the beginning. As she says, for the moat to be reinstated to a healthier and more resilient condition, the pennywort needs sorting out and the silt needs removing. Environment Agency staff have offered advice to the Sussex Archaeological Society about methods of silt removal and suggested efficient ways of dealing with the silt that could reduce the cost of the operation. They also offered to help with obtaining the permit to do the work, which obviously has to be achieved.

7 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(David Duguid.)

Rebecca Pow: The Environment Agency has suggested that the Sussex Archaeological Society can abstract 20,000 litres of water a day from the adjacent Cuckmere river channel without a permit, which would provide a source of water other than the rainfall that is naturally filling up the moat. That is another offer that the Environment Agency made.

I understand that the society was developing a plan for the priory site that was to include restoration of the moat, alongside other conservation repair work, and I know that it has been working hard on that. Understandably, the full project has not yet come through because of the difficulties of the current pandemic. As my hon. Friend will appreciate, funding of the Sussex Archaeological Society is not within my portfolio, but I understand that the society has recently received funding, including a business resilience grant from the national lottery to fund an operations manager post for 18 months and £250,000 through the heritage emergency fund. An application has also been made to the culture recovery fund for a grant of almost £500,000, which is being

assessed, with the decision expected next month. That all comes under the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport rather than the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but all that funding is potentially in the pipeline.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's concerns that any plan the Sussex Archaeological Society makes depends on the Environment Agency's own plans for managing river flows and the environment, so I have asked the Environment Agency to keep working constructively with the society. I gather that many of the faces in the society have changed recently, so that might offer a chink of hope for future progress. I should note that the Environment Agency has its own duties that have to be considered when developing these plans, but I am confident that an acceptable solution can eventually be found.

The water environment is under pressure. It has been heavily affected by human activity, including abstraction, pollution and historical modifications. That pressure will only build as the climate changes and with the demands of the growing population, and we all have a role to play to try to limit the impact. Our 25-year environment plan sets out our commitment to protect our environment and how we will do that, to ensure that we have not only a resilient water environment but an environment which supports the activities that depend on it. The Environment Bill, which I hope will return to Parliament shortly, will build on that and help us to improve the environment.

Finally, I encourage the Sussex Archaeological Society to continue to work constructively. I understand my hon. Friend's frustration, but she is clearly doing a good job in getting on the case, and I urge her to continue that. She spoke eloquently and, in fact, fairly starkly, but I expect nothing less. I have asked the Environment Agency to keep up these talks. They have been ongoing for eight years, but it is important that we highlight the issue of the floating pennywort, which clearly has to be addressed before anything else can be sorted out.

I am interested in the mill. My hon. Friend should pursue the issue of the gate repair and have some conversations about that, but she will find that there is a good response on that, as it is linked to the pennywort. I also encourage the society to work with other local interest groups and potential partners to find some imaginative solutions to the challenging issue of managing this moat in what is clearly a wonderful grade I listed historic property. On that note, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will leave you with the image of the moat and the priory, and I thank my hon. Friend.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

7.4 pm

House adjourned.

Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green)	Chris Elmore
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting)	Chris Elmore
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower)	Chris Elmore
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston)	Patrick Grady
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South)	Clive Efford
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Betts (Sheffield South East)	Chris Elmore
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South)	Patrick Grady
Bob Blackman (Harrow East)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North)	Patrick Grady
Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough)	Stuart Andrew
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill)	Patrick Grady
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham)	Chris Elmore
Richard Burgon (Leeds East)	Zarah Sultana
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West)	Stuart Andrew
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)	Chris Elmore
Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow)	Patrick Grady
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Champion (Rotherham)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife)	Patrick Grady
Feryal Clark (Enfield North)	Chris Elmore
Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland)	Stuart Andrew
Theo Clarke (Stafford)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire)	Chris Elmore
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde)	Patrick Grady
Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon)	Alex Burghart
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East)	Patrick Grady
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow)	Chris Elmore
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford)	Caroline Nokes
Janet Daby (Lewisham East)	Chris Elmore
Geraint Davies (Swansea West)	Chris Evans

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden)	Stuart Andrew
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk)	Patrick Grady
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Rachel Hopkins
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West)	Chris Elmore
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire)	Patrick Grady
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock)	Patrick Grady
Peter Dowd (Bootle)	Chris Elmore
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington)	Chris Elmore
Philip Dunne (Ludlow)	Jeremy Hunt
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover)	Maria Caulfield
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall)	Chris Elmore
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield)	Stuart Andrew
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw)	Patrick Grady
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South)	Patrick Grady
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford)	Chris Elmore
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford)	Stuart Andrew
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk)	Bim Afolami
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet)	Caroline Nokes
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston)	Chris Elmore
Paul Girvan (South Antrim)	Sammy Wilson
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glendon (North Tyneside)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes)	Patrick Grady
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts)	Patrick Grady
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West)	Chris Elmore
James Grundy (Leigh)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish)	Chris Elmore
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East)	Chris Elmore
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham)	Chris Elmore
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston)	Chris Elmore
Simon Hoare (North Dorset)	Fay Jones
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West)	Chris Elmore
Adam Holloway (Gravesham)	Maria Caulfield
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley)	Chris Elmore
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Hussain (Bradford East)	Judith Cummins
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central)	Chris Elmore
Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North)	Chris Elmore
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton)	Stuart Andrew
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South)	Chris Elmore
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton)	Chris Elmore
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck)	Kate Osborne
Chris Law (Dundee West)	Patrick Grady
Clive Lewis (Norwich South)	Rosie Duffield
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset)	Stuart Andrew
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale)	Chris Elmore
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles)	Cat Smith
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster)	Lee Rowley
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Lynch (Halifax)	Chris Elmore
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian)	Patrick Grady
Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar)	Patrick Grady
Karl McCartney (Lincoln)	Stuart Andrew
Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South)	Patrick Grady
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington)	Zarah Sultana
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East)	Patrick Grady
John Mc Nally (Falkirk)	Patrick Grady
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr)	Chris Elmore
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood)	Chris Elmore
Ian Mearns (Gateshead)	Chris Elmore
Mark Menzies (Fylde)	Stuart Andrew
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Patrick Grady

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon)	Wendy Chamberlain
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale)	Stuart Andrew
James Murray (Ealing North)	Chris Elmore
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South)	Chris Elmore
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire)	Patrick Grady
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon)	Rebecca Harris
Guy Opperman (Hexham)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Osamor (Edmonton)	Nadia Whittome
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)	Peter Aldous
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East)	Chris Elmore
Christina Rees (Neath)	Chris Elmore
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge)	Chris Elmore
Naz Shah (Bradford West)	Chris Elmore
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall)	Chris Elmore
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield)	Chris Elmore
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East)	Patrick Grady
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn)	Chris Elmore
Henry Smith (Crawley)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Glasgow Central)	Chris Elmore
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon)	Stuart Andrew
Mel Stride (Central Devon)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth)	Olivia Blake
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East)	Chris Elmore
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire)	Patrick Grady

Written Statement

Tuesday 15 September 2020

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Coronavirus Update

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I want to update on the latest local restrictions. The latest evidence indicates that the covid-19 infection rate is beginning to rise across the country. It is therefore now vitally important that the Government take decisive action to limit any further spread and reduce the likelihood of a further national lockdown of the type that was necessary earlier this year. We will continue to review the restrictions to ease or strengthen measures when necessary and based on the scientific evidence.

Changes to Leicester restrictions

Further changes are also being made to the Leicester restrictions. As of Tuesday 15 August, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Leicester) Regulations 2020 were amended to enable the opening of casinos, indoor skating rinks, bowling alleys, indoor play areas, exhibition halls and conference centres. Socially distanced indoor performances were also able to resume, and remaining restrictions on certain close contact services (treatments on the face, such as eyebrow threading or make-up

application) were lifted. These changes meant that Leicester is subject to the same business restrictions as the majority of England and guidance was updated accordingly.

The ban on inter-household gatherings in private homes and gardens remains in place to control the spread of the virus.

The Government will continue to review the remaining restrictions in Leicester at least every 14 days, with the next review due to take place before 24 September.

Additional restrictions in Birmingham

In the west midlands, the increase in covid-19 infection rates can be seen particularly in Birmingham, Solihull and Sandwell, where incidence rates and positivity rates have increased significantly. Transmission appears to be associated with household transmission, travel hospitality venues and other social mixing.

Given the broad transmission routes, we have considered and agreed the request of local authorities to restrict household mixing to try and curb the spread of the virus in the Birmingham, Solihull and Sandwell areas of the west midlands. Restrictions on households mixing within private homes and gardens was enacted in secondary legislation and came into effect on Tuesday 15 September. Residents in these areas should not socialise with people that they do not live with, either inside or outside. This was taken in consultation with local leaders, who are working hard to keep the transmission rates down.

Publicly available Government guidance on gov.uk is being updated to ensure it fully corresponds with the new regulations. Sector bodies will also produce updated guidance where relevant.

[HCWS452]

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 15 September 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
TREASURY	159	TREASURY—continued	
Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.....	161	Export Costs: Northern Ireland to Great Britain...	171
Coronavirus Job Support Schemes.....	167	Local Authority Funding.....	173
Covid-19: Business Support	165	Low-income Families	172
Covid-19: Employment	162	Manufacturers: Support.....	174
Covid-19: Fiscal Support	159	Official Development Assistance.....	172
Covid-19: High Street Businesses	166	Online Sales Tax	170
Eat Out to Help Out Scheme	163	Social Care Workforce Special Payment Scheme....	173
Energy-Efficient Homes: Support	172	Topical Questions	175

WRITTEN STATEMENT

Tuesday 15 September 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	3WS
Coronavirus Update.....	3WS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Tuesday 22 September 2020**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 15 September 2020

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 159] [see index inside back page]
Chancellor of the Exchequer

Coronavirus [Col. 181]
Answer to urgent question—(Matt Hancock)

Digitally Altered Body Images [Col. 202]
*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Dr Luke Evans)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time*

United Kingdom Internal Market Bill [Col. 205]
Considered in Committee

Petition [Col. 281]

Michelham Priory [Col. 282]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statement [Col. 3WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
