

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT

Welsh Grand Committee

## STRENGTHENING THE UNION AS IT RELATES TO WALES

*First Sitting*

*Tuesday 18 January 2022*

*(Morning)*

---

### CONTENTS

**Strengthening the Union as it relates to Wales**

*General debate in progress when the Committee adjourned till this day  
at Two o'clock.*

---

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

**not later than**

**Saturday 22 January 2022**

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2022

*This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament licence, which is published at [www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/](http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/).*

**The Committee consisted of the following Members:***Chairs:* †GERAINT DAVIES, SIR CHARLES WALKER

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Antoniazzi, Tonia ( <i>Gower</i> ) (Lab)  | † Jones, Mr David ( <i>Clwyd West</i> ) (Con)               |
| † Atherton, Sarah ( <i>Wrexham</i> ) (Con)  | † Jones, Fay ( <i>Brecon and Radnorshire</i> ) (Con)        |
| † Baynes, Simon ( <i>Clwyd South</i> ) (Con)                                      | † Jones, Gerald ( <i>Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney</i> ) (Lab) |
| Brennan, Kevin ( <i>Cardiff West</i> ) (Lab)                                      | † Jones, Ruth ( <i>Newport West</i> ) (Lab)                 |
| † Bryant, Chris ( <i>Rhondda</i> ) (Lab)  | Kinnock, Stephen ( <i>Aberavon</i> ) (Lab)                  |
| † Cairns, Alun ( <i>Vale of Glamorgan</i> ) (Con)                                 | † Lake, Ben ( <i>Ceredigion</i> ) (PC)                      |
| † Crabb, Stephen ( <i>Preseli Pembrokeshire</i> ) (Con)                           | † McMorrin, Anna ( <i>Cardiff North</i> ) (Lab)             |
| † Crosbie, Virginia ( <i>Ynys Môn</i> ) (Con)                                     | † Millar, Robin ( <i>Aberconwy</i> ) (Con)                  |
| † David, Wayne ( <i>Caerphilly</i> ) (Lab)  | † Morden, Jessica ( <i>Newport East</i> ) (Lab)             |
| † Davies, David T. C. ( <i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales</i> ) | Roberts, Rob ( <i>Delyn</i> ) (Ind)                         |
| † Davies, Dr James ( <i>Vale of Clwyd</i> ) (Con)                                 | Saville Roberts, Liz ( <i>Dwyfor Meirionnydd</i> ) (PC)     |
| Davies-Jones, Alex ( <i>Pontypridd</i> ) (Lab)                                    | † Smith, Nick ( <i>Blaenau Gwent</i> ) (Lab)                |
| † Doughty, Stephen ( <i>Cardiff South and Penarth</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)               | † Stevens, Jo ( <i>Cardiff Central</i> ) (Lab)              |
| † Edwards, Jonathan ( <i>Carmarthen East and Dinefwr</i> ) (Ind)                  | Tami, Mark ( <i>Alyn and Deeside</i> ) (Lab)                |
| † Elmore, Chris ( <i>Ogmore</i> ) (Lab)   | Thomas-Symonds, Nick ( <i>Torfaen</i> ) (Lab)               |
| † Evans, Chris ( <i>Islwyn</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)                                      | † Wallis, Dr Jamie ( <i>Bridgend</i> ) (Con)                |
| † Griffith, Nia ( <i>Llanelli</i> ) (Lab)   | † Williams, Craig ( <i>Montgomeryshire</i> ) (Con)          |
| † Harris, Carolyn ( <i>Swansea East</i> ) (Lab)                                   | † Williams, Hywel ( <i>Arfon</i> ) (PC)                     |
| † Hart, Simon ( <i>Secretary of State for Wales</i> )                             | † Winter, Beth ( <i>Cynon Valley</i> ) (Lab)                |
|   | Huw Yardley, <i>Committee Clerk</i>                         |
|   | † <b>attended the Committee</b>                             |

# Welsh Grand Committee

Tuesday 18 January 2022

(Morning)

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

## Strengthening the Union as it Relates to Wales

9.30 am

**The Chair:** Bore da a chroeso. Good morning and welcome. It might be helpful to remind Members that you have until 11.25 am for this debate. We will meet again at 2 pm for a debate that will last another two hours, until 4 pm. We have about 20 speakers, so I will ask people to be brief in their openings so that we can get some Back Benchers in this morning as well as Front Benchers. Please bear that in mind, because I want to call everybody. I have no power to impose any time limit, but brief contributions would be appreciated by all.

Under the resolution of the House of 1 March 2017—St David's day—members of the Committee may speak in Welsh. I ask, however, that points of order be made in English. Simultaneous interpretation is available on channel 2 of the headsets that you should have. Any speech delivered in Welsh will be found in *Hansard* in both languages. Please switch off headphones when not in use to prevent feedback.

9.31 am

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Simon Hart):** I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the matter of strengthening the Union as it relates to Wales.

I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Davies. I know you would love to make a longer contribution, but sadly on this occasion we will be denied that particular pleasure. This is the first Welsh Grand Committee for some time, and it is a huge pleasure to introduce it. I welcome colleagues. Another cause of celebration is that it coincides with the birthday of my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire—as if there were not enough to enjoy about today's proceedings, we can add that to our list.

The country is talking of other political matters at the moment, but I want to spend my time this morning talking about the UK Government's achievements in Wales, why the Union matters and why, thankfully, three out of four voters at the last opportunity still supported Unionist parties in Wales. In a week when apologies are on everyone's lips, I will be making no apologies for this being the most active and engaged UK Government in Wales for the last 20 years; no apologies for standing up, when necessary and forced, to a Welsh Government who sometimes seem to enjoy all the responsibility but little of the accountability when it comes to Welsh matters; no apologies for taking a very proactive approach to covid and recovery, particularly in our economic interventions; and no apologies at all

for delivering what 54% of the people of Wales voted for back in 2016, despite numerous efforts by some of our political opponents to reverse, delay or deny what happened in that referendum.

I will start with a reference to the Union—I make no apologies for my Unionist credentials, either. Sometimes, our attitudes as politicians of the Union can be wilfully misrepresented. For me, the Union is not a political movement or party; it is not instead of national identity, but as well as it. We all know that it is perfectly possible—we see it among our constituents all the time—to be patriotic and enthusiastically champion everything that is Welsh, but at the same time to recognise the value of the Union. How often have we all heard, even in Plaid Cymru seats, people say, “I'm passionately Welsh but I'm also British”?

In my mind, the question is not, “Could Wales survive on its own?”. An accusation that is occasionally, and sometimes legitimately, levelled at us—because of the manner in which we have sometimes constructed our arguments—is that we are suggesting that Wales could not survive on its own. I have never subscribed to that view. However, I have always asked, if Wales was to survive on its own, what would be the economic, social and cultural cost of taking that step? My attitude to the Union is one of respect, but it is also one of reality—of wanting to take a really detailed look at some of the more complex areas of the debate, around defence, currency, intelligence, security and international trade.

**Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC):** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Simon Hart:** If I could get into my stride and warm up a bit before I take interventions, I would be very grateful.

The question for today is, “What have the UK Government delivered for Wales while covid has been the dominant news story?”. I will not share it with hon. Members because it would take far too long, but I have two and a half pages of very varied, but very significant, achievements that the Government have been able to deliver—sometimes in collaboration with the Welsh Government, sometimes not. For example, £121 million has been directly invested through the first round of the levelling-up fund. The diversity of this is worth noting.

The Government have increased the Army footprint in Wales, the only part of the UK that saw an increase—from 6.7% to 7.3%. The Queen's Dragoon Guards will return to Wales, to Caerwent, in the constituency of the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth. There will be a new reservist unit in the constituency of Wrexham. We are saving Brecon barracks—such an important part of the social and economic heartlands of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire. We put £30 million into developing the first centre for rail excellence, which is between Port Talbot and Brecon, and will create 150 direct jobs.

The small ruminant rule has been lifted. Who would have ever thought that the small ruminant rule would play such a significant part in our lives? The lifting of it, which is enabling Welsh lamb to be marketed in the United States for the first time in nearly 25 years, is a significant moment for our farming industry. With the

Welsh Government and the First Minister, we set up the coal tip safety taskforce—jointly chaired by the First Minister and me—securing £31 million for the Tylorstown tip and creating the first register of coal tips and their safety in Wales. No doubt there will be more on that.

There are other things, too: the £4.8 million investment in Holyhead hydrogen hub, and accelerated funding for the Cardiff city, Swansea bay, north Wales and mid Wales city and growth deals. The mid Wales growth deal, worth £55 million, was signed by the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth only last week. We have invested £31.9 million to develop electric propulsion systems in Cwmbran, and there is Wales-specific funding through the British Business Bank of £130 million. I could—and I will—go on, and I know my hon. Friend will go on later.

There is lots to say, and it is all positive, imaginative and innovative. It is all about jobs—sustaining existing jobs and creating new jobs as we come, we hope, out of the pandemic for the last time. Probably the best example of the strength and value of the Union is the way in which we have been able to join forces with so many people in our pandemic response. I could go through a long list, but hon. Members should cast their minds back to the furlough scheme: one in three jobs in Wales was protected, at very short notice, by the might of the UK Treasury.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to thank the TUC? It was its representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that led to the furlough scheme.

**Simon Hart:** I am very grateful for the intervention, because I would like to thank a number of people. I do not think this scheme was the particular brainchild of any one group of people or other, but it was an urgent response to a serious and potentially catastrophic issue, so I extend my thanks to anybody who may have had a stake in that process. However, I particularly commend the Treasury. In all our time as Members of Parliament, we have probably not always thought of it as an organisation that moves at lightning speed, but on this occasion it did move at lightning speed, and it has saved hundreds of thousands—millions—of jobs in the process. The Chancellor took decisions that nobody thought possible at the time and implemented a scheme at a speed that nobody thought feasible at the time, and one in three of our constituents on the payroll in Wales had their job secured as a result.

**Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Simon Hart:** May I give way to the hon. Member for Arfon before coming to the hon. Member for Llanelli?

**Hywel Williams:** Dwi'n ddiolchgar iawn i'r Ysgrifennydd Gwladol am ildio. Ar nodyn hanesyddol, byddai Lloyd George yn dweud nad oedd yn dweud llawer o ddim byd am y pum munud cyntaf, er mwyn caniatáu i'r Siambr lenwi, wrth gwrs. Credaf bod hyn yn esiampl. Tra mae wrthi yn gwneud y diolchiadau, ydy'r Aelod gwir anrhydeddus am restru nid yn unig y buddion sy'n dod o'r Undeb, ond hefyd y costau? Hefyd, i Aelodau anrhydeddus yn ystod y dydd, a yw'r Llywodraeth am nodi yr hyn yr ydym yn ei gollu o fod yn yr Undeb?

*(Translation) I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. On a historical note, Lloyd George used to say that he did not say much for the first five minutes, to allow the Chamber to fill up, of course. I believe this is an example. While the right hon. Gentleman is expressing his thanks, will he list not only the benefits but the costs of the Union? Will the Government also note for hon. Members throughout the day what we lose from being part of the Union?*

**Simon Hart:** I could not catch the hon. Gentleman's question, partly because I could not get the headset to work at that speed, but the Under-Secretary of State for Wales passes on the fact that it is about the cost of the Union. Perhaps, when the hon. Member for Arfon is able to make his contribution, he will be able to expand on his arguments. As I will come to later in my speech, the value of the Union is what really matters as far as we are concerned. As I mentioned earlier, if any kind of coherent argument is to be made against the Union, it needs to be made in the context of its value rather than necessarily its cost.

I will mention one thing that always baffles me about the Plaid Cymru approach to the Union. For the last four and a half years, we have heard endlessly, relentlessly and somewhat tiresomely about the fact that Wales could not possibly survive outside the European Union; we have been reminded endlessly that our economic health has depended on our membership of it. The nation of Wales happened to take a different view from the hon. Gentleman, but I would love to know why he thinks that it is possible to survive outside the UK when apparently it is impossible to survive outside the EU.

**Hywel Williams:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Simon Hart:** I am not going to give way again, because I said that I would give way to the hon. Member for Llanelli.

**Nia Griffith:** Indeed, actions were taken quickly by the Treasury, but what happened in October and November 2020, when there was a huge delay? The Welsh Government recognised the need to use that half-term to have that firebreak, yet there seemed to be no movement by the UK Treasury. Where was the close working there? Where was the good relationship? Are there not ways, now, in which we could improve that relationship and make it work better, so that the UK Government take more notice of what the Welsh Government are saying and work better with them?

**Simon Hart:** Our intergovernmental relations paper was published last week. That would probably help me to answer the hon. Lady's question. I think I am right in saying that back at the time of the example that she gives, the Treasury did make absolutely clear to the Welsh Government what was possible and what was not in that timescale. I am afraid to say that the Welsh Government, in that case, completely ignored the information that was given by the Treasury, and then made what I thought was a rather salacious effort to exploit that in the press, when they knew very well that the Treasury was working to the fastest legal speed that it was able to. That was one of those cases where there was a little bit of political opportunism at a time when the nation was looking to us for a practical solution.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Simon Hart:** I will give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): May I draw my right hon. Friend back to the point about the furlough scheme, in the context of the strength of the Union, because I think the point about that scheme is even better than he alluded to? The truth is that the scheme was a much bigger success than anybody had anticipated. Far from there being a crisis of unemployment at the end of 2021—as so many Opposition Members had predicted—when the furlough scheme was unwound, we actually had a boom in job creation and no employment shortage up and down the country, so full credit to the Treasury and the decision making of the Chancellor and his colleagues.

**Simon Hart:** My right hon. Friend is right. The decision-making point that he makes is particularly apposite, because these decisions were being made at breakneck speed in unbelievably unpredictable conditions and under significant pressure, and they turned out to be the right calls. They were made for the right reason, at the right time. It is no coincidence that the unemployment figures now show that there are over 400,000 more people in work than there were before the pandemic.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): The furlough scheme was a great success, and I commend the Government for bringing it in. I do not know whether the Minister had the same experience as me, but throughout covid one of the difficulties was explaining to constituents the differences between Welsh and English policies. It was sometimes very difficult to get to the bottom of them, in particular with financial support for businesses in Wales, which could only be announced once the Welsh Government had had the money from the UK Government. That was difficult to explain to people, and to get out to people in a proportionate time. The single biggest question I have now is, why is HS2 considered to be an England and Wales project, when it does not benefit Wales at all?

**Simon Hart:** A neat means of getting in on the HS2 question.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, I believe that a consistent approach to interventions, whether regulations or financial interventions, would in many cases have been more desirable for exactly the reason he pointed out; it would have been simpler to understand precisely what was on offer and exactly why we were doing things in the way we were. It was unfortunate that, from time to time, those arrangements were not as consistent as they could have been.

By the way, the hon. Gentleman's point enables me to say that it was very important that the financial contributions that we were able to make to the Welsh Government were upfronted, rather than the usual Barnett system of them being provided retrospectively.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The issue here is consistency. I pay full credit to the Treasury when it acts properly and constructively with the Welsh Government, as it did over the Celsa Steel plant in my constituency during the height of the pandemic. It was a sensible co-operation and I thank the Secretary of State's office for assistance on that.

On the cladding issues, which affect thousands of my constituents—a serious situation that they have faced under covid—there is not that co-operation between the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Welsh Government to tackle it. There is a desire for co-operation with some sound politics behind it, as thousands of people are in very difficult circumstances, but often announcements are made up here without consultation with the Welsh Government in advance, so that they can supply information to the thousands of people affected.

**The Chair:** Order. Twenty-one people want to speak, so may we try to keep interventions short, in the asking and the answering?

**Simon Hart:** I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth that co-operation and collaboration is generally speaking a preferable route; it works both ways. The IGR—the intergovernmental review paper, which I commend to him—will address a number of the concerns that he has raised.

On the instructions of the Chair, rightly, let us press on. I do not have a lot more to cover, but the point about collaboration with the Welsh Government is well made. Of course, I completely accept that a bespoke approach is important. However, there are also occasions—we have to admit this, on whatever side of the political fence we sit—where evidence does not support the decisions that have been taken.

In the past few weeks—although the matters that have overtaken us are another example—curious interventions have suggested that people might be fined for going to work, but not necessarily for going to the pub. They could do indoor exercise, but not parkrun, which is well known to be a contributor to people's physical and mental health, and they could watch rugby from the clubhouse but not from the touchline. Things like that start casting doubt into people's minds about whether the interventions are evidence-based. Going back to the beginning of the pandemic, I recall the calls that we all heard to follow the science. However, the science seemed to be limited to medical science only, when economic and social sciences are almost as important elements of the evidence that we need to follow as anything else.

Let us cut to the quick: what have the UK Government done? We have become the fastest growing economy in the G7. We are a world leader in the vaccine roll-out. We have done more tests than any other country in Europe. We have got 400,000 more people in work than at the beginning of the pandemic. That is because we are part of a fantastic Union. It is because we recognise the value of the cross-border economic zones, whether that is Mersey Dee, Western Gateway or Mid-Wales and the West Midlands.

I want to finish with this: it is about the future, it is about being optimistic, it is about being creative, it is about sustaining the jobs we have and being imaginative about the jobs we need and the jobs that we can create. It is all about delivering. The Cabinet meeting today is all about delivering. It is about jobs, it is about livelihoods, it is about working with the Welsh Government but also not being afraid to challenge the Welsh Government when we think they have got it wrong. It is continuing the work that we are doing to assist and support them in their responsibilities on things such as coal tips.

Through the levelling-up fund, the shared prosperity fund and the community ownership fund, we will continue to deliver jobs and prosperity not just to well-known parts of Wales, but to every part. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be vigorously signing growth deals left, right and centre. We did the mid-Wales growth deal just a few days ago. We will recruit the first ever Veterans Commissioner in Wales to look after the interests of Welsh military veterans. And we will deliver—I always said it was when, not if—the first free port in Wales. We edge ever closer to that moment. We will continue to remain optimistic and co-operative as far as the Welsh Government are concerned in attempting to get that crucial job-creating opportunity on to the books and on to the map in Wales in the very near future.

We will, of course, be central to our plans for net zero in Wales, whether that is small modular reactors, floating offshore wind or continuing to highlight the fact that Wylfa Newydd is probably the world's—let alone the UK's—best site for large-scale nuclear. We will look at the value that a nuclear cluster in north Wales can bring, whether that is medical isotopes, thermal hydraulics or any of the other technologies that were unheard of not that long ago but may possibly now have their epicentre in Wales. That is what levelling up is about. That is what the strength of the Union brings to our country, and at no stage does it ever compromise the fact that we are a proud nation in ourselves.

As we come out of one of the more challenging periods of our history, we have a fantastic opportunity to deliver on all those commitments. I do not believe that voters anywhere in Wales much want to hear us talking about a constitutional convention or arguing about who has got what powers and who has responsibility for what. We all know what we are responsible for: the UK Government know what they are responsible for; the Welsh Government know what they are responsible for. As far as I am concerned, the UK Government must get on, do the things we do, do them as well as we can, as lively as we can and as proudly as we can. I am not remotely ashamed of, and nor will I ever apologise for, the fact that the UK Government will be more visible, more active, more effective and more successful in achieving the things that we all want, whether they are social, cultural or economic. Now that we have the pandemic somewhere in our sights, our absolute focus in every Department of the UK Government will be to deliver on that commitment.

**The Chair:** I remind the Committee that the English translation of contributions in Welsh will come through channel 2. I ask Members to unplug their headsets when they are not using them. That will mean that when someone speaks Welsh, everyone will have to plug in at once.

9.53 am

**Jo Stevens:** Bore da, good morning and thanks very much Mr Davies. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today with all Welsh Members of the House. After four years, we finally have a Welsh Grand Committee debate.

Where to begin? Shall we start with the Minister for the Union—the Prime Minister, whose job it is in everything he says and does to strengthen the Union?

He holds the most important office, one vital to the integrity of our politics, our government and our democracy. How shameful is it for the Union to have a Conservative Prime Minister mired in law breaking, deception and incompetence, leading a Government whose Ministers, at best, attempt to deflect from his inherent personal failings and, at worst, publicly and repeatedly endorse both them and him? Far from being strengthened by the Prime Minister and the Government, the Union is being degraded and weakened. For all his flag waving and plastic patriotism, no Prime Minister has done more to undermine the Union than this one. He has irretrievably damaged public trust and confidence in the UK Government and in UK politics. That is a bad enough legacy at any time, but during a health emergency it is unforgivable. As the Leader of the Opposition has quite rightly said, the Prime Minister is

“the worst possible Prime Minister at the worst possible time”—  
[*Official Report*, 15 December 2021; Vol. 705, c. 1051.]

It is not just the Prime Minister who degrades and devalues our Union. Denigration and disinterest towards all our devolved nations runs through the core of the Conservative party. Only last week, the Leader of the House branded the leader of the Scottish Tories a “lightweight”, just for calling for the Prime Minister’s resignation in the wake of Downing Street’s law-breaking parties. The following day, when challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West, the Leader of the House could not even remember the name of the leader of the Welsh Conservatives. These are not just slip-ups; they lay bare the true attitude of the Conservative party to Wales and to the Union.

Labour believes that our Union is strengthened through valuing the importance of our common endeavour, fostering co-operation between the nations and Governments of the UK, and sharing wealth according to need. We are better together than any of us would be apart, and each of our nations can speak with a progressive voice.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The Treasury has banked nearly £4 billion of surplus from the miners pension fund. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should change the arrangements so they are much fairer to miners and their widows in our coalfield communities?

**Jo Stevens:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point, and he is absolutely right. That is a perfect illustration of how the Government could act to do the right thing by our mine workers not just across Wales, but across the United Kingdom.

All our energies, at all levels of Government and across every nation of the UK, must be focused on recovering from the pandemic, but also on rebuilding our economy and addressing the climate emergency. That is why our Union of nations must be based on and strengthened by security, prosperity and respect.

I will deal first with security. Obviously, the first duty of any UK Government is the security of its citizens—that is, security for the United Kingdom, for Wales, and for every community, large and small, wherever we live. Instead of strengthening the Union, successive Conservative Governments have weakened the fabric of the UK and torn communities apart—nations, regions, cities and

[Jo Stevens]

villages; north and south, and east and west. These policies are driven by the aim of creating division, controlling power and, despite what the Secretary of State says, undermining devolution.

There is no clearer example of the impact on our security than the rising numbers of victims of crime. The Government have decimated police staffing numbers, with cuts of more than 25,000 police force staff across the country, including 11,000 fewer police officers, 8,000 fewer police staff and 7,000 fewer police community support officers. The Welsh Government have stepped in and funded 500 PCSOs in Wales, and will fund a further 1,000 during this current Senedd term, but these political choices by the Conservative party have resulted in less safe communities and more crime in Wales.

**Chris Bryant:** When I met with my local police recently, they told me—it was not the first time they have told me this—that the number of domestic abuse cases in the Rhondda far exceeds the number of three local constituencies added together, and in addition, that the numbers for the Rhondda Fach far exceed those for anywhere else in Wales. The police need resources because each case is complicated and difficult. We need far more resources to ensure that we tackle those issues. How are we going to get those resources if the Government in Westminster will not provide them?

**Jo Stevens:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. If we look at the statistics, we know that there is an epidemic of violence against women and girls across the UK and in Wales. Women and girls feel unsafe at home and on our streets. The number of women homicide victims is at its highest level for 15 years. Rape prosecutions and convictions are at a record low. Labour has set out dozens of proposals in our Green Paper, but the Government have rejected them. A Labour Government would take our security seriously and provide crime prevention teams in every neighbourhood. New police hubs would be visible in every community, because security, for Labour, is a matter of social justice.

We would also introduce new employment rights and protections, so that people felt more secure at work. The Conservative party promised an employment Bill—its manifesto has turned out to be a complete work of fiction—that would make Britain the best place in the world to work. That would strengthen the Union, wouldn't it? But where is it? We have not seen it.

The pandemic taught us that everybody needs decent pay when they are sick. But that is not the case for millions of workers across the UK—for those on low wages or who have insecure work, or who are self-employed. When they have been ill or have had to self-isolate, it has been disastrous for them. The sorry state of sick pay in Britain was an issue before the pandemic, but the Chancellor's inaction has made people poorer and led to an increase in the spread of the virus. We know that Ministers have had advice throughout the pandemic from SPI-B that decent statutory sick pay was the key mechanism that the Treasury could use to ensure that people could afford to self-isolate. The Secretary of State talked about the Welsh Government apparently not following advice, but his own Government did not follow the advice of SPI-B.

We have the least generous sick pay scheme in Europe, at just £96.35 a week, which the former Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), admitted he could not live on. Two million workers, mostly women, do not even qualify for statutory sick pay. The Chancellor continues to ignore that—yes to national insurance rises, but no to increased or improved statutory sick pay. A Labour Government would improve the level of statutory sick pay and increase its coverage to reflect the modern world of work, and we would value the many employers who do provide decent sick pay for their workforce.

The Secretary of State gave us a list, and I will do my own list of how to keep citizens safe during the pandemic. The Prime Minister missed five Cobra meetings at the start of the pandemic; he delayed three lockdowns; he allowed people to enter the UK without checks; he handed contact tracing to private companies with no record of it; and he handed personal protective equipment contracts to cronies with no record of supplying it. The Government created a scheme to help the hospitality sector that actually helped the virus. They overpromised and underdelivered every step of the way. Contrast that with the actions of the Labour First Minister in Wales, who listened to the science, considered the evidence, took the advice of experts and did absolutely everything he could to keep Wales safe.

**Alun Cairns** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): In the list of examples of the First Minister following the scientific advice, would the hon. Lady explain where the delay in stopping hospital discharges to nursing homes comes? That policy led to many people dying needlessly in Wales.

**Jo Stevens:** I do not recognise the right hon. Gentleman's description. I am sure that when we have the UK-wide public inquiry into the pandemic response that the Government have promised—we are still waiting for it to start—those issues will be addressed.

**Fay Jones** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con) *rose*—

**Alun Cairns** *rose*—

**Jo Stevens:** I am going to make some progress because, as you have indicated, Mr Davies, 21 Members wish to speak.

Coming out of the pandemic, and after 12 years of the Conservative party starving our public services and failing to invest, we need to rebuild. Instead, we have inflation rocketing to 5.1%; GDP growth for this quarter has been revised down; and the Government are trapping all four nations in a low-growth, high-tax cycle, hitting working people with tax rise after tax rise, with national insurance and council tax going up in just a couple of months. By 2026-27, the average household will be paying over £3,000 more in tax than when the Prime Minister took office. Households are dealing with the cost of living crisis, and we heard about that from the Culture Secretary yesterday. There is a growing cost to businesses, with petrol, food and energy bills rocketing.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the cruellest cuts in the past few months was the £20 cut in universal credit? That has hit thousands of families right across Wales at the worst possible time.

**Jo Stevens:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Probably every single Conservative Member here voted for that £20 cut.

**Chris Bryant:** Not everybody—the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) did not.

**Jo Stevens:** I apologise—nearly everybody.

We want the UK to be a prosperous country again, with a proper industrial strategy to improve our productivity and ensure that we buy, make and sell more in Britain, and that we equip people with the skills and opportunities to contribute to that.

**Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab):** Let me take my hon. Friend back to the BBC point. Does she not find it rather perplexing that while the Government will not deal with the increased costs of energy or food prices or tackle inflation, the Secretary of State for Culture says that saving people a few pennies every month—a few pounds every year—will somehow deal with the real problems faced by many constituents in Wales and across the UK? It is truly absurd that the Government think that will solve the cost of living crisis.

**Jo Stevens:** My hon. Friend is right. As my colleague the shadow Culture Secretary said yesterday, it is focusing on red meat rather than the dead meat of the Prime Minister.

The example of the BBC—vandalising an envied British institution in its centenary year—is a pathetic attempt to divert attention from the Prime Minister, whose premiership is hanging by a thread. Did the Secretary of State not tell the Culture Secretary that the BBC's role in our creative industries in Wales is a huge success story? Every £1 of the BBC's economic activity in Wales generates £2.63 in our economy. Growth in the number of creative jobs and businesses as a result of the BBC's integral role in Wales has outstripped growth in the sector across the whole UK. Was the Secretary of State even consulted before the Culture Secretary was let loose on her Twitter account over the weekend? I know he will say that S4C is getting £7.5 million a year to support its digital offering, which is welcome. However, in 2010, S4C's annual budget was nearly £102 million. This year, it is £81.3 million. That is a real-terms cut of £51 million by this Government.

**Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab):** All this is taking place within a succession of stories about this Government wasting Welsh taxpayers' money. We have the PPE contracts that we have talked about; the Ministry of Defence and its £13 billion of procurement; the Ministry of Justice and its lost projects; and the Department for Work and Pensions losing control of universal credit fraud. Just yesterday, the Treasury gave away billions from the relief schemes that it is not chasing up. Is that not a criminal waste?

**Jo Stevens:** Absolutely, and the list could go on. I could add the privatisation of probation services, which was a huge waste of money.

The Union could also have been strengthened if the Government had made a better fist of negotiations over post-Brexit trade deals and tariffs. We have the humiliating

failure of the International Trade Secretary to get agreement from the US Administration for face-to-face talks on steel and aluminium tariffs. If the Prime Minister did not have to focus solely on his disintegrating premiership, he would be able to heed our call to personally intervene on this issue and show the leadership required to protect Welsh and UK jobs in steel and aluminium—

**Jessica Morden:** And in energy.

**Jo Stevens:** And in energy, indeed—my hon. Friend is quite right.

Finally, we probably could have had a whole Welsh Grand Committee on the issue of respect, because it is at the very core of strengthening the Union. Respect for people and places must be at the heart of our Union of nations. Everyone has a right to be treated with respect and no place should be left behind. Everyone matters. Respect between the four Governments of the United Kingdom needs to be embedded in everything we do.

**Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con):** Surely it would be a matter of respect to the nation of Wales and those who have suffered from covid for the Welsh Government to hold their own inquiry into the covid crisis, as is being done by the Governments of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Is that not the ultimate respect that the people of Wales are due?

**Jo Stevens:** I have listened to the hon. Gentleman but, in fact, it was his own party leader who promised a UK-wide inquiry into the covid pandemic response, and I am sure that within that there will be specifics on each nation. However, that is what the Prime Minister has promised, and that is what we are still waiting for. We have not seen it yet.

The 2019 Conservative manifesto contained an entire chapter on strengthening the Union. I looked at it yesterday: a nice little script for the Prime Minister, guaranteeing that promises would be delivered. However, there have been broken promises already, such as his pledge not to raise national insurance. We have also seen a deliberate effort to undermine and roll back the devolution settlement. How about the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 for starters, or the promise that Wales would not receive a penny less in replacement funding than it had received from EU structural funds? We are £375 million down and counting. There is the deliberate bypassing of the Welsh Government on areas of devolved competence within the levelling-up fund and the UK shared prosperity fund, of which we have not yet had the details.

**Stephen Doughty:** Does the shadow Secretary of State agree that there also has to be respect over issues of cross-border importance relating to the environment? There were proposals to build an incinerator on the edge of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West. The Welsh Government have now introduced a moratorium on incineration, and the project will not go ahead. The UK Government were advertising for investment in the project, which was opposed by residents in Cardiff and Newport.

**Jo Stevens:** That is a perfect example of non-co-operation between the UK Government and the devolved Government—completely the opposite of the examples that the Secretary of State gave. The UK Government's approach towards the Welsh Government has basically been, "Less say and less money."

Labour introduced devolution to empower Wales and Welsh communities, bringing decision making closer to the people of Wales, but the Government's deliberate policy of disrespect for the Welsh Government and the people of Wales is undermining the devolution settlement and doing the opposite of strengthening the Union.

**Craig Williams** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): On that point—[*Laughter.*]

**Jo Stevens:** We will need a new and durable constitutional settlement, which is why the Commission on the Future of the UK, led by the former Labour Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, will chart a new course for our Union of nations. I am pleased that I will be part of the commission, along with the First Minister, Mark Drakeford, but remember that it was a Labour UK Government who delivered devolution from that knife-edge referendum win in 1997. Regardless of whether the Conservative party likes it or not, devolution now consistently enjoys high majority support among the people of Wales.

**Alun Cairns:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Jo Stevens:** I have already given way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Respect for devolution, respect for the devolution settlement and respect for the Welsh Government has to be at the heart of our Union of nations. With a UK Labour Government in Westminster and a Welsh Labour Government in Cardiff, we will see that happen.

**The Chair:** I would now like to invite Ben Lake to speak on behalf of Plaid Cymru.

10.12 am

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn, Mr Davies. Mae'n bleser i wasanaethau dan eich cadeiryddiaeth chi a hefyd i wneud hynny drwy'r Gymraeg heddiw.

Rwy'n croesawu teitl y ddadl heddiw oherwydd ymddengys ei fod e'n cydnabod bod yna ddiffygion yn yr Undeb yn ei bresennol wedd a bod angen ei gryfhau er mwyn gwasanaethu pobl Cymru yn well. Felly mae gennym gyfle i drin a thrafod gwendidau polisïau'r Llywodraeth Brydeinig, ond hefyd efallai y cawn gyfle i ystyried y llwybrau sy'n agored i'n cenedl wrth i ni edrych tua'r dyfodol. Mae un llwybr wedi'i osod ar seiliau bregus y setliad cyfansoddiadol presennol, gwaddol cyfuniad anffodus o echdynnu economaidd ac ymleiddio gwleidyddol. Mae'r llwybr yma'n gofyn i ni israddio ein hadnoddau a'n huchelgeisiau fel cenedl er mwyn gwasanaethu blaenoriaethau'r Undeb yn lle, a derbyn nad oes modd gwella ar y status quo.

Y llwybr arall, a bydd neb efallai'n cael syndod o glywed hyn, y llwybr yr hoffwn i ac—efallai bydd hyn yn syndod i rai pobl—yr hoffai nifer gynyddol o bobl ledled Cymru ei gymryd, yw'r llwybr sy'n arwain at

annibyniaeth—llwybr llawn cyfle sy'n gofyn i ni ddyheu am ffyrdd tecach a mwy cynhwysol o lywodraethu, ond yn bwysicaf oll, yr her i gymryd y cyfrifoldeb dros wireddu hynny dros ein hunain.

Rwyf am ganolbwyntio fy sylwadau heddiw ar feysydd allweddol y dylai rhai sy'n credu yn yr Undeb weithredu arnynt ar fyrder os ydynt am gryfhau'r Undeb fel y mae teitl y ddadl yn crybwyll, oherwydd ar hyn o bryd, gwelwn eu bod nhw'n prysur danseilio'r berthynas rhwng cenedloedd ynysodd Prydain.

Yn fy marn i, mae problemau'r Undeb ar ei wedd bresennol yn deillio yn syml iawn o adeiladwaith diffygiol. Gwelwn Undeb rhwng sawl cenedl a rhanbarth yn cael ei ddomynddu gan un genedl ac un Senedd. Mae'r fath oruchafiaeth yn golygu y caiff hawliau a chyfrifoldebau'r cenedloedd eraill eu hanwybyddu yn aml. Mae anghymesuredd y setliadau datganoli gwahanol ond yn gwaethygu'r sefyllfa, ond does dim awgrym bod gan y rhai sydd am weld dyfodol i'r Undeb unrhyw fwiad, na hyd yn oed awydd, i ddiwygio'r setliad cyfansoddiadol presennol er mwyn mynd i'r afael â'i ddiffygion.

Ystyriwch am eiliad sut y mae San Steffan wedi canoli grym yn gynyddol yn Whitehall ers Brexit, ac wedi ceisio uno gwledydd Prydain trwy orfodaeth yn hytrach na meithrin y cydweithrediad hynny rhwng ei Llywodraethau. Mae ond angen i ni edrych ar Ddeddf y Farchnad Fewnol 2020 neu'r Bil Rheoli Cymorthdaliadau am enghreifftiau o hyn. Mae'r ddau wedi cael eu gorfodi ar Gymru. Yn wir, wrth gyfeirio at yr ail fesur hwnnw, dywedodd Gweinidog Cyllid Llafur Cymru:

"Er gwaethaf awgrymiadau gan Lywodraeth y DU bod ymgysylltu manwl wedi'i gynnal, nid yw'r Bil ond yn adlewyrchu buddiannau cul Llywodraeth y DU."

Pan wrthododd y Senedd y cynnig cydsyniad deddfwriaethol, anwybyddodd San Steffan ei gwrthwynebiad yn llwyr. Felly yn hytrach na chydweithio, yr hyn a welwn yw deddfwriaeth sy'n tanselio'n uniongyrchol alluoedd y gwledydd datganoledig i wella bywydau pobl yng Nghymru.

*(Translation) It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and to be able to do so through the medium of Welsh.*

*I welcome the title of today's debate, because it appears to recognise that there are shortcomings in the Union in its current format and that there is a need for it to be strengthened in order to serve the people of Wales better. We have an opportunity to deal with the weaknesses of the UK Government's policies, and perhaps an opportunity to consider the pathways that are open to our nation as we look to the future. One pathway is clearly set on the vulnerable foundations of the current constitutional settlement, with an unfortunate situation of political leadership. This pathway requires us to lower our ambitions, to follow the Union's principles, and to accept that we cannot continue with the status quo.*

*The other pathway, which perhaps nobody will be surprised to hear is the pathway that I and an increasing number of people in Wales and the UK would like to take, leads towards independence, an opportunity to look for fairer and more comprehensive ways of governing and, most important, the challenge of taking responsibility for realising that for ourselves.*

*I will focus my comments on the key areas that those who believe in the Union should take strong action on as a matter of urgency if we are to strengthen the Union, as*

the title of the debate suggests, because at the moment, we can see that they are undermining the relationship between the nations of the British isles.

*In my view, the problems of the Union in its current format emanate from a flawed structure. We are dominated by one nation and one Parliament, and such supremacy means that the rights and responsibilities of the other nations are frequently being disregarded. An imbalance in the different devolution settlements exacerbates the situation, but there is no suggestion that those who want to strengthen the Union have any intention or desire to reform the current constitutional settlement in order to address the flaws in it.*

*Consider for a moment how Westminster has increasingly centralised power in Westminster since Brexit and sought to unite the nations of Britain by enforcement, rather than nurturing collaboration between its Governments. We need only to look at the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 and the Subsidy Control Bill, both of which are being forced on Wales. Indeed, referring to the second piece of legislation, the Welsh Labour Finance Minister said:*

*“Despite suggestions from the UK Government that detailed engagement has been undertaken, the Bill only reflects the narrow interests of the UK Government.”*

*When the Senedd rejected the legislative consent motion, Westminster disregarded its opposition. Rather than collaboration, what we see is legislation that directly undermines the abilities of the devolved nations to improve the lives of people in their countries.*

**Hywel Williams:** Onid ydy hyn yn codi allan o ryw ddrysych sylfaenol sy'n cael ei arddangos gan y Llywodraeth ac, yn wir, gan yr Wrthblaid swyddogol? Hynny yw, eu bod nhw'n aml iawn yn cymysgu buddiannau Prydain a Lloegr. Dw i'n meddwl y gwnaethon ni glywed Aelod anrhydeddus dros De Clwyd yn nodi hynny gynnu, pan ddywedodd o “Llywodraeth Lloegr”. Does yna'r un!

*(Translation) Does not this situation arise from a fundamental confusion on the part of the Government and, indeed, the official Opposition? That is, they often confuse the interests of Britain and England. I think we heard the hon. Member for Clwyd South indicate as much when he referred to the “English Government”. There is no English Government.*

**Ben Lake:** Rwy'n ddiolchgar iawn i'm Ffrind anrhydeddus am ei sylwadau. Yn wir, rwy'n un o'r rheiny sy'n credu'n fawr y byddai'r Undeb, os ydyw e am barhau tuag at y dyfodol, yn buddio'n llwyr o gael Llywodraeth i Loegr a Senedd i Loegr, oherwydd ar hyn o bryd does dim sefydliad o'r fath yn bodoli ac mae'n rhaid i'r Senedd Brydeinig a'r Llywodraeth Brydeinig wisgo dwy het. Rwy'n bell o fod yn berffaith, ond rwy'n credu ei bod hi'n anodd iawn i unrhyw Lywodraeth gyfiawnhau dwy swydd mor bwysig ar yr un pryd.

*(Translation) I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. I am one of those who strongly believes that the Union, if it is to continue in the future, would really benefit from there being a Government and a Parliament for England. At the moment, there is no such institution, and the UK Government and Parliament have to wear two hats. Despite the fact that I am far from perfect, I think it is difficult for any Government to justify two such important jobs at the same time.*

**Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con):** You talk about the UK Government not respecting devolution. I think the words you used, if the translation was correct, was a failure to reform, but is it not the case that since 2010—since we have had Conservative Governments—the Senedd has undergone several reformations? It is perhaps a little over 18 months since it has become a full-blown Welsh Parliament, and it is continually changing and evolving, as the people of Wales have expressed that it should. Is it therefore not the case that Conservative Governments have consistently shown respect for devolution, and not, as you say, undermined it?

**The Chair:** I have not said anything.

**Ben Lake:** Thank you, Mr Davies. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bridgend for that intervention. I acknowledge the truth of what he is saying, in that a number of the Wales Acts have been introduced in the last 10 years under Conservative Administrations, although I would point out that we still have an asymmetric devolution settlement in which Wales does not enjoy the same level of autonomy and discretion over policy areas that Northern Ireland and Scotland take for granted. Indeed, even certain city regions in England have greater discretion and influence over certain policy areas than the Welsh Government, such as policing. I will come on to that point in a moment.

Y meysydd polisi sy'n amlygu canlyniadau anffodus yr ymagwedd hon fwyaf yw polisi isadeiledd trafniadaeth a llywodraethiant Ystad y Goron yng Nghymru. Os trown ni'n gyntaf at ein rheilffyrdd, mae'n ffaith bod nifer o aelodau ar ddwy ochr y Pwyllgor wedi crybwyll yn y gorffennol bod rheilffyrdd Cymru yn cael eu hesgeuluso'n ddifrifol dan y setliad presennol a bod gwaith adnewyddu a gwella'r rhwydwaith yn dioddef o danariannu sylweddol. Mae gan Gymru tua 11% o rwydwaith rheilffyrdd y Deyrnas Unedig, ond ar gyfartaledd mae'n derbyn dim ond tua 6% o wariant Prydeinig ar weithrediadau, gwaith cynnal a chadw ac, yn bwysig iawn, gwaith adnewyddu. Mae Llywodraeth Cymru wedi cyfrifo y bydd rheilffyrdd yng Nghymru yn dioddef tanfuddsoddiad o tua £2.9 biliwn yn y cyfnod rhwng 2001 a 2029 am y rheswm hynny.

Nid yw'r ffigurau hyn yn syndod, wrth gwrs, os cofiwn ni fod Llywodraeth y Deyrnas Unedig wedi ymrwymo i fuddsoddi jyst £350 miliwn yng Nghymru yn y cyfnod hwn ar welliannau o gymharu â thua £50 biliwn ledled y DU. Yn wir, bu Llywodraeth Cymru yn go blwmp ac yn blaen am y sefyllfa, yn dadlau bod methiannau'r Undeb yn y maes hwn wedi arwain at ddirisio a thanfuddsoddi yn rhwydwaith rheilffyrdd Cymru

“o gymharu â'r rhwydwaith yn Lloegr.”

Mae hyn yn amharu nid yn unig ar yr economi ond hefyd ar ein gallu i ddatgarboneiddio ein rhwydwaith trafniadaeth.

Efallai y cawn yr enghraifft gliriaf o fethiant, ac yn wir ffolineb, y setliad presennol yn HS2, prosiect fydd, yn ôl un adroddiad gan Lywodraeth Prydain—ac rwy'n eithaf siŵr mai'r Trysorlys ei hun wnaeth gomisiynu adroddiad gan KPMG—yn golygu y byddai Cymru'n gweld colled o tua £150 miliwn y flwyddyn mewn allbwn economaidd. Ond er gwaetha'r ffaith yma, mae'r Trysorlys yn parhau i adnabod y prosiect fel un sydd o fudd i

[Ben Lake]

Gymru a Lloegr. O ganlyniad i hyn, mae Cymru mewn perygl o golli rhwng £4 biliwn a £5 biliwn mewn buddsoddiad yn yr isadeiledd trafniadaeth, a hynny oherwydd yr ymdriniaeth a gaiff gan y Trysorlys.

*(Translation) The main policy areas that manifest the unfortunate results of this attitude are transport infrastructure and the Crown Estate in Wales. A number of Members on both sides of the Committee have suggested that Welsh railways are being seriously neglected by the current settlement and that refurbishment work really lacks funding. Wales has around 11% of the UK rail network but on average receives only about 6% of the current expenditure on maintenance and, importantly, refurbishment and renewal work. The Welsh Government have estimated that railways in Wales will suffer an underinvestment of about £2.9 billion between 2001 and 2029 for that reason.*

*Those figures are no surprise if we bear in mind that the UK Government committed to investing around £350 million in Wales in that period on improvements, compared with around £50 billion across the United Kingdom. The Welsh Government were quite clear about the situation, arguing that failings of the Union in that regard had led to the devaluing of and underinvestment in the Welsh rail network*

*“compared to the network in England.”*

*That impairs not only the economy but our ability to decarbonise our transport network.*

*A clear example of the failure, and indeed stupidity, of the current settlement is the HS2 project. The UK Government said—I am sure that it was the Treasury that commissioned a KPMG report—that Wales could see a loss of £150 million a year in economic output. But despite that, the Treasury continues to recognise the project as one that is beneficial to Wales and England. Wales is in danger of losing between £4 billion and £5 billion in investment in transport infrastructure as a result of the treatment that it receives from the Treasury.*

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies):** Rwy'n ddiolchgar i'r Aelod anrhydeddus am ildio. Ydy e'n derbyn bod Network Rail wedi dweud bod Cymru, yn enwedig gogledd Cymru, yn mynd i elwa o'r ffaith bod ni'n mynd i gael cysylltiadau gwell gyda Llundain oherwydd HS2?

*(Translation) I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he accept that Network Rail has said that Wales—particularly north Wales—was going to benefit from better connections with London as a result of HS2.*

**The Chair:** Order. May I ask people to speak up? Apparently, the translators could not hear what you said, David. Could you repeat it and speak up?

**David T. C. Davies:** Sorry, Mr Davies; that is not normally a problem I suffer from. Network Rail has said to us that it believes north Wales will benefit greatly from the better connections with London that will come about as a result of HS2.

**Ben Lake:** Rwy'n ddiolchgar iawn i'r Gweinidog am ei ymyriad. Mae Plaid Cymru wedi cydnabod o'r cychwyn cyntaf y byddai rhai o welliannau HS2—pe baen nhw'n

cael eu gwireddu yn llawn, wrth gwrs—yn fuddiol i ogledd Cymru. Ond os edrychwn ni at Gymru yn ei chyfanrwydd, mae'r adroddiad a gomisiynwyd gan y Trysorlys ei hunan yn dangos y bydd colled net o £150 miliwn y flwyddyn mewn allbwn economaidd. Mae'n rhaid i ni ystyried yr effaith mae hyn yn ei gael a bod y Trysorlys yn gostwng y ffactor cymaroldeb a'r gwariant ar gyfer yr Adran Drafniadaeth yn y datganiad cyllid.

Dyna pam rwyf am annog Aelodau yma heddiw i wrando ar argymhelliad y Pwyllgor Materion Cymreig y dylai HS2 cael ei adnabod fel prosiect sy'n buddio Lloegr yn unig. Fe fyddwn i'n mynd yn ymhellach, ac annog pobl i gefnogi datganoli cyfrifoldeb dros y rheilffyrdd i Senedd Cymru. Yn wir, yn ôl Canolfan Llywodraethiant Cymru, pe byddai'r cyfrifoldeb hwn eisoes wedi ei ddatganoli i Gymru, byddai buddsoddiad ychwanegol o hanner biliwn o bunnoedd wedi bod rhwng 2011 a 2020.

Enghraifft arall o ddiffyg yn y setliad presennol yw triniaeth yr Undeb o Ystad y Goron yng Nghymru. Er gwaetha'r ffaith y datganolwyd rheolaeth Ystad y Goron i'r Alban yn 2017, mae San Steffan yn cadw rheolaeth dros yr ystad yng Nghymru. Mae hyn yn golygu bod referniw o adnoddau naturiol Cymru yn cael ei drosglwyddo i'r Trysorlys yn hytrach nag aros yn y cymunedau lle cânt eu cynhyrchu. Ddoe, fe welon ni bod Ystad y Goron yr Alban wedi cwblhau ei arwerthiant diweddaraf o hawliau gwely'r môr i ddatblygwyr ynni gwynt. Trwy 17 o brosiectau, mae'r Alban wedi sicrhau bron i £700 miliwn ac wedi denu consortiwm byd-eang o ddatblygwyr i fuddsoddi ymhellach yng nghadwyn gyflenwi yr Alban. Er bod ein hadnoddau adnewyddadwy ni yn llai yng Nghymru, dangosodd y rownd ddiweddaraf o arwerthiannau yr hyn sy'n bosibl yn ein hadnodd ynni gwynt morol. Gwelwyd gwerth portffolio morol Cymreig Ystad y Goron yn cynyddu'n sylweddol o tua £50 miliwn i dros £500 miliwn.

Mae Plaid Cymru wedi gwthio ers tro am ddatganoli Ystad y Goron ac rwy'n falch cael dweud bod y cytundeb cydweithredu rydym wedi'i gyrraedd gyda Llywodraeth Lafur Cymru yn cynnwys sicrhau ei ddatganoli fel prif amcan.

*(Translation) I am grateful to the Minister for his intervention. Plaid Cymru has recognised from the very outset that HS2 improvements, if they were fully realised, would be beneficial to north Wales. For Wales in its entirety, however, the report commissioned by the Treasury shows that there will be a net loss of £150 million a year in economic output. We have to consider the impact all of that, and the fact that the Treasury depleted the comparative factor for Department for Transport expenditure in the finance statement.*

*That is why I encourage Members to listen to the Welsh Affairs Committee recommendations that HS2 be recognised as a project that benefits only England. I would go a step further and encourage people to support the devolution of responsibility for the railways to the Senedd. According to the Wales Governance Centre, if that responsibility had already been devolved to Wales, there would have been additional investment of half a billion pounds between 2011 and 2020.*

*Another flaw in the current settlement is the treatment in the Union of the Crown Estate in Wales. Despite the fact that control of the Crown Estate was devolved to Scotland in 2017, Westminster retains control of the*

*Crown Estate in Wales, meaning that revenue from natural resources in Wales is transferred to the Treasury rather than remaining in Wales. Yesterday, the Crown Estate in Scotland completed its latest sale, with 17 projects that will bring in £700 million, and attracted a global consortium of investors to invest further in supply in Scotland. Even though our renewable resources are fewer in Wales, that latest round of sales shows what is possible in our marine energy. Welsh Crown Estate marine energy increased in value from £50 million to more than £500 million.*

*Plaid Cymru has pushed for some time for the devolution of the Crown Estate, and I am pleased to say that the agreement we have reached with the Labour Welsh Government includes devolution as one of its main objectives.*

**Stephen Crabb:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ben Lake:** I will, but it will be the last time.

**Stephen Crabb:** The hon. Gentleman is making a really interesting point about the Crown Estate and the Scottish Government's announcement yesterday about the slew of investment going into offshore wind projects. He will know, as he also serves on the Welsh Affairs Committee, that we have the same opportunity in west Wales. Why does he think that devolving the Crown Estate to Wales will unlock investment in the Welsh offshore wind fields faster? What is different about an independent Welsh Crown Estate that it would change that?

**Ben Lake:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Simply put, I think we will see quicker action. When action is taken, we can realise some of the abundant potential we have on the coast of his wonderful constituency in south-west Wales. We will see those benefits being retained closer to the community that he represents and closer to the communities in which the revenues are generated.

Rydw i'n brysur rhedeg allan o amser, felly wnai beidio cymryd unrhyw ymyriadau pellach, ond hoffwn sôn am ddwy broblem arall sydd yn codi o'r setliad presennol. Yr un pennaf yw'r hon sy'n ymwneud â'r system gyfiawnder. Tra bod cyfiawnder yn Lloegr, yr Alban a Gogledd Iwerddon wedi'i hintegreiddio yn llawn i bolisiau cynhenid y gwledydd hynny, yng Nghymru, cedwir pŵerau dros gyfiawnder yn San Steffan. Dywedodd y Comisiwn ar Gyfiawnder yng Nghymru, dan arweiniad yr Arglwydd Thomas, nad oedd unrhyw sail rhesymegol i'r sefyllfa presennol a bod y sgil effeithiau yn rhai anffodus dros ben.

Rydym eisioes wedi clywed gan yr Aelod anrhydeddus dros Caerdydd Canolog bod tangyllido cronig gan San Steffan mewn gwasanaethau cyfiawnder wedi golygu bod Cymru wedi gorfod llenwi'r bwlch a adawyd gan yr Undeb. Ond yn waeth na hyn, gwelwn fod polisiau San Steffan wedi cyfrannu at lefelau anghynladwy o garcharu a olygai yn 2019 bod gan Gymru y cyfraddau carcharu uchaf yng ngorllewin Ewrop. Mae'r setliad cyfansoddiadol presennol, felly, wedi methu mewn dyletswydd sylfaenol: y dyletswydd hynny i sicrhau mynediad teg a chyfartal i gyfiawnder. Gan ddod i'r casgliad unfrydol bod pobl Cymru ar eu colled yn y system bresennol, argymhellodd y comisiwn yn 2019 y dylid datganoli cyfiawnder

deddfwriaethol llawn ynghyd â phŵerau gweithredol i Gymru. Fel dywedodd y Comisiwn Thomas, yn eithaf huawdl yn fy marn i:

“Mae angen gwell system ar bobl Cymru, ac maent yn haeddu hynny.”

Nid ynys yw cyfiawnder a dylid ei integreiddio â pholisiau ar gyfer Cymru gyfiawn, deg a llewyrchus.

Mi wnaf i ysgubo trwy ambell i ddarn o'm haraith, ond hoffwn ddweud bod Plaid Cymru wedi croesawu ers tro ymrwymiad rhethregol y Llywodraeth hon i ddatblygu economi Cymru a'i chefnogi i fod yn gydradd â gweddill y Deyrnas Unedig. Wrth wneud hynny, rydym yn disgwyl i'r Llywodraeth ddatganoli pŵer i ffwrdd o'r Trysorlys, sicrhau bod penderfyniadau a gweithredo yn digwydd yn nes at ein cymunedau, a bod eu rhethreg yn gyfateb i'r cyllid caiff ei glustnodi ar gyfer y dasg.

Mae'n rhaid i mi gyfaddef, serch hynny, bod yna eisioes rheswm i boeni na chaiff yr addewidion lu eu gweithredu, ac yn hytrach fod anghydraddoldeb rhanbarthol yn rhan annatod o economi a phenderfyniadau sefydliadol gwladwriaeth y Deyrnas Unedig. Er enghraifft, yn Llundain mae cynhyrchiant ac enillion rhwng traean a hanner yn uwch na chyfartaledd y Deyrnas Unedig, yn ôl yr Institute for Fiscal Studies. Yng Nghymru, mae ein cynhyrchiant o leiaf 15% yn is na chyfartaledd y Deyrnas Unedig ac enillion bron 40% yn is nag yn Llundain. Yng Ngheredigion, mae'r gwerth ychwanegol gros lleol y pen bron i 37% yn is na chyfartaledd y Deyrnas Unedig. Gwelwn, wedyn bod buddsoddiad mewn ymchwil, sy'n allweddol i sbarduno arloesedd a chynhyrchiant gwell, wedi ei ganolbwyntio ers tro yn Llundain a de-ddwyrain Lloegr, gyda gwariant y pen yn 2019 yn rhyw £577: mwy na dwywaith y swm cyfatebol i Gymru.

Nid mewn termau economaidd yn unig y mynegir yr anghydraddoldeb hwn. Gwelwn goruchafiaeth Llundain a'r de-ddwyrain ym mhob man, o argaeledd ac ansawdd cysylltiadau trafniadaeth i gefnogaeth i amgueddfeydd ac orielau. Ystadegyn syfrdanol oedd bod gwariant y pen ar ddiwylliant yn Llundain rhwng 2010-11 a 2017-18 gymaint â £687 y pen—bron i bum gwaith cyfartaledd gweddill Lloegr, heb sôn am Gymru. I'r pant y rhed y dŵr, fel y dywed yng Ngheredigion.

Cyn cloi, rwy'n troi at yr argyfwng presennol o ran costau byw. Rydym yn gwybod eisioes bod sefyllfa Cymru yn un eithaf bregus yn y maes hwn, ac ar ben popeth, nawr mae'n rhaid i deuluoedd ledled Cymru wynebu argyfwng y costau ynni nad yw Llywodraeth y Deyrnas Unedig wedi gwneud dim i fynd â'r afael ag ef hyd yn hyn. Mae'r diffyg yma yn cael effaith ofnadwy ar Gymru, lle mae 11% o aelwydydd yn byw mewn tloidi tanwydd a'r ffigwr ar fin gwaethygu. Yn anffodus, nid yw bod yn rhan o'r Undeb wedi ein hinswleiddio rhag yr argyfwng yma. Nid problem tymor bir fydd hi chwaith. Datgelodd y Gyllideb Prydeinig mai dim ond rhyw 0.8% y flwyddyn y disgwylir i incwm gwario gwirioneddol aelwydydd ledled Prydain dyfu dros y pum mlynedd nesaf. Roedd incwm gwario gros yng Nghymru yn gyfateb i ond tua 80% o gyfartaledd y Deyrnas Unedig yn 2019, sef yr ail isaf ar draws Prydain, felly mae'n syndod nad oes gweithredu ar fyrder yn digwydd tuag at y perwyl yma.

Yn olaf, ar ôl sôn am sefyllfa'r economi ar hyn o bryd, rhaid hefyd inni edrych tuag at y dyfodol. Yn fyr iawn, o ran polisi masnach, caf i ddim amser i fynd i berfedd y peth heddiw, ond yr hyn ddywedaf yw y pe

[Ben Lake]

bai gan Unoliaethwyr unrhyw fwriad i ddiogelu dyfodol yr Undeb, byddent yn ymrwmo ar unwaith i'r egwyddor bod rhaid i Lywodraeth y Deyrnas Unedig geisio cael cytundeb y Seneddau datganoledig cyn arwyddo cytundebau masnach newydd.

*(Translation) I am running out of time, so I will not take further interventions. I want to briefly talk about two problems that arise from the current settlement. The predominant one relates to the justice system. While justice in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland is fully integrated into the policies of those countries, powers for justice in Wales are retained in Westminster. The Commission on Justice in Wales led by Lord Thomas stated that there was "no rational basis" for the current situation and that the knock-on effects were extremely unfortunate.*

*We have heard from the hon. Member for Cardiff Central that chronic underfunding by Westminster of justice services has meant that Wales has had to fill the gap left by the Union. Even worse, Westminster policies have contributed to unsustainable levels of incarceration and have meant that in 2019 Wales had the highest levels of incarceration in western Europe. The constitutional settlement has failed in its fundamental duty—the duty to ensure fair and just access to justice. Coming to the unanimous conclusion that the people of Wales are missing out in the current settlement, the 2019 commission stated that full legislative powers for justice should be devolved to Wales. As the Thomas commission stated quite eloquently, in my view,*

*"The people of Wales both need and deserve a better system."*

*Justice should be integrated into policies for a just, fair and prosperous Wales.*

*Plaid Cymru has for some time welcomed the rhetoric of the Government on developing the economy of Wales and supporting it to be equal to the rest of the United Kingdom. In doing so, we expect the Government to devolve power away from the Treasury and ensure that decisions and actions take place closer to our communities. Their rhetoric should correspond to the finance earmarked for the task.*

*I must admit, though, that we already have reason to be concerned that those promises will not be fulfilled and that, instead, regional inconsistency and inequality will be part of the state of the United Kingdom. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, productivity and earnings are between one third and a half higher than the UK average. In Wales, production is at least 15% lower than the UK average, and earnings are almost 40% lower than in London. In Ceredigion, local gross value added per capita is almost 37% lower than the UK average. Investment in research, which is key to propelling better productivity, has focused for some time on London and south-east England, with investment per capita around £577, which is more than twice the equivalent sum for Wales.*

*It is not only in economic terms that these inequalities can be expressed. We see the supremacy of London and the south-east everywhere, from the availability and quality of transport connections to support for museums and galleries. An astounding statistic is that expenditure on culture per capita between 2010 and 2017-18 was as much as £687 in that region—almost five times the average of the rest of England, let alone Wales. Money follows money.*

*Before I conclude, I will turn to the current crisis around living costs. The situation in Wales is quite fragile in this regard. On top of everything else, families across the whole of Wales now have to face the crisis around energy costs that the UK Government have done nothing to deal with so far. This flaw is having an awful impact on Wales, where 11% of households live in fuel poverty—a figure that is about to deteriorate further. Unfortunately, being part of the Union really has not insulated us from this crisis. It is not a short-term problem, either. The UK Budget expressed that real household income was expected to grow by 0.8% over the coming five years. Gross household expenditure in Wales only corresponded to 80% of the average for the UK in 2019—the lowest across Britain—so it is surprising that there has been no urgent action taken towards this issue.*

*Finally, after talking about the situation of the economy at the moment, we must also look towards the future. I will not have time to go into the detail of trade policy today, but I will say that if Unionists had any intention of safeguarding the future of the Union, then they would take action immediately on the principle that the UK Government have to seek agreement with the devolved Governments before they sign any new trade agreements.*

**Simon Hart:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ben Lake:** In a moment, very briefly.

Cyhyd ag y byddwn yn rhan o'r Undeb, rhaid iddi fod yn Undeb gyfartal, ac mae'n bryd i'r polisi masnach adlewyrchu hyn.

*(Translation) As long as we are part of the Union, it has to be an equal Union. It is about time that trade policy reflects that.*

**Simon Hart:** I know we have raised this before, but the hon. Gentleman has avoided talking about the fiscal deficit. We can have an argument about it; it is worth something like £15 billion. If he is going down that road, perhaps he would at least treat the Committee to what his vision of the tax regime would be under the arrangements that he suggests. He seems to have rather conspicuously avoided what that would actually mean for families and businesses in Wales.

**Ben Lake:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that intervention. I only wish he had intervened earlier in the debate, when I might have had time to entertain him with some of my thoughts. All I would point out before closing is that, to my knowledge, I do not think the British state has run a surplus for many years in the past century, so if a deficit is good enough for the UK Government, why not for the Welsh Government?

I gloi, os ystyriwn holl diffygion y setliad cyfansoddiadol presennol, oes syndod o gwbl bod y rhai sy'n teimlo'n angerddol ynghylch yr Undeb mor bryderus i'w chryfhau? Mae Cymru yn haeddu gwell, yn fy marn i, ond does dim dwywaith y bydd rhaid i'r Undeb newid os fydd hi am wrosgodi. Y cwestiwn i'r Aelodau hynny sy'n ei chefnogi yw: ydyn nhw o ddiffri amdani ac yn barod i wneud y newidiadau angenrheidiol hynny i sicrhau ei goroesiad? Neu a fyddan nhw, drwy eu hystyfnigrwydd, yn selio ffawd eu Hundeb annwyl?

*(Translation) In conclusion, if we consider all the shortcomings of the current constitutional settlement, is it any surprise or wonder whatsoever that those who feel passionately about the Union are so concerned about strengthening it? Wales deserves better. There is no question*

*but that the Union will have to change if it is to survive. The question for those Members who support it is: are they serious about it and are they ready to make the necessary changes to enable and ensure the Union's survival—or will they be sealing the fate of their dear Union?*

10.32 am

**Stephen Crabb:** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, although it does mean that we will not benefit from a contribution from you to today's debate. I will start by commending the Secretary of State on calling this meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee. It represents something of a revival, or a resuscitation, of the Committee, given that it looked like it was going to go the way of the Scottish Grand Committee and disappear from parliamentary proceedings quietly into the night. It is a timely moment to have a grand Welsh debate today, given the extraordinary period that we have come through as a nation and given the significant and serious challenges that lie before us. I hope the rest of the debate will be constructive and honest as we address these issues.

The pandemic has tested our nation's financial and institutional capabilities, and proved a test to our constitution. We should all be able to agree today that, as we emerge from this current phase of the pandemic and hopefully enter a more benign phase, we can agree that the United Kingdom comes out of it with its relevance and importance highlighted more than ever. Contrary to what the Opposition have been primed to say, the fact is that the UK Government got the big calls right all the way through the pandemic. As the Secretary of State has highlighted, there was a period of very fast decision making at the time of uncertain, partial information and evidence. Whether one looks at the decisions around the furlough scheme and business support, the decisions around vaccine development, procurement and roll-out of the vaccines once approved, or at the most recent decisions on how we responded to the omicron variant and the very fine balance that we had to strike just before Christmas, taking precautionary measures but not damaging the economy, which had started to rebound following the earlier lockdowns, the Government's decision making has been proved broadly correct. I look forward to the future review demonstrating that. The truth is that the UK compares very favourably with nations similar to ours, in terms of how ready we are to move ahead in this better phase of the pandemic, and to continue the economic growth.

**Beth Winter** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): We have had in excess of 150,000 deaths from covid in this country. It is an absolute disgrace. My constituents in Cynon Valley had the third highest death rate in the UK. How can the right hon. Gentleman say that the UK Government's decision making during the covid pandemic should be commended when we have had one of the highest death rates from covid in the world?

**Stephen Crabb:** I am sorry to respond to the hon. Member: it is not true that we have the worst covid death rate in the world. The standardised measurement of per 100,000 shows that Britain compares to similar sized nations such as Spain, France and Germany. There are a lot of other countries that have sadly

experienced far greater deaths. Every single death is a tragedy, as the hon. Member is right to say. My other point in response is that decisions about public health in Wales were almost wholly the responsibility of the Welsh Government.

The decisions taken at UK level that affected Wales were around the financial architecture of how to support individuals, families and businesses. The public health measures were taken by the Welsh Government. As I will explain, generally the Welsh Government have veered to a tendency for more lockdown rather than fewer, wanting to be stricter, often on very flimsy scientific evidence—as the hon. Lady herself demonstrates in her question, to such little effect.

I draw hon. Members' attention to the latest jobs data published this morning, with record job vacancies again and the employment picture continuing to improve. That is not what many people predicted for this phase of the pandemic, once the furlough scheme had been unwound. People were predicting a crisis of unemployment, but the truth is that that never happened. What happened was that the UK economy was well placed to rebound strongly last summer and it has continued to create jobs.

That is a really good thing, and it is down to the decision making of the Treasury team, to create that furlough scheme, which meant that there was not a tsunami of business failures and redundancies. Businesses were able to use that as a platform to grow again once the economy had been reopened. We do face challenges: the cost of living is certainly one of them, inflation, energy price hikes and, as revealed in this morning's data, the fact that wage levels are not keeping pace with the cost of living, which is a serious issue that we need to address.

I reinforce the message of the Secretary of State that, when it came to those big decisions about how to get the country through the economy, the UK Government have been proved right. The Prime Minister continually emphasises the importance of seeing this as the one United Kingdom emerging from the pandemic. He is always incredibly polite and careful in his remarks about the Welsh Government and the First Minister. Even in private, when we coax him to say something critical about the Welsh First Minister, he is always incredibly polite, when sometimes we would like him to be stronger.

He is doing that in a genuine spirit of teamwork. That reflects well on the Prime Minister: he genuinely wants to foster a team UK ethos, respecting the fact that the Welsh Government have a different set of competences and have the freedom to take different decisions about public health protection measures. He is genuinely trying to foster an atmosphere of team UK.

**Wayne David:** I have a wry smile on my face because the right hon. Gentleman is talking about an individual we know does not exist. His view is not shared by the majority of his colleagues who are twittering and twattering in the corridors about the next leader of the party all the time.

**Stephen Crabb:** I am talking about our response to the pandemic and the Prime Minister's determination to get this country through it as one United Kingdom,

[Stephen Crabb]

in the spirit of teamwork, as far as politics allows. I find the posture of Welsh Government towards UK Government throughout the pandemic disappointing and somewhat dismaying, because it is in contrast to the politeness from the Prime Minister about the Welsh First Minister and the sense of team UK that the Prime Minister has been trying to foster.

The stance of the Welsh Government has been constant, incessant criticism, complaint and grievance towards UK Government. I will highlight a few examples of the complaints from the Welsh Government, which are corrosive and not grounded in reality.

The most common complaint from the Welsh Government over the years is financial—they never get enough money from the UK Treasury. As Welsh politicians representing our constituencies, we always want more for our constituents if possible, but I have always regarded with a bit of suspicion the complaint that they do not have enough money. I look at some of the money that they have made available to Cardiff airport, to take a stake in sports car company TVR and some of the other odd investments the Welsh Government have made in certain property deals. I am a bit suspicious when they complain that they never have enough money. Certainly, when it comes to the pandemic, the sums of money that the Treasury has made available to the Welsh Government are unprecedented, really significant and really welcome.

One of the other grievances of the Welsh Government, as you know, Mr Davies, is about a lack of communication and dialogue between them and the UK Government. We both sit on the Welsh Affairs Committee, Mr Davies, and have had the chance to ask the Secretary of State about that, as well as other UK Ministers and Welsh Ministers. We are very grateful that Welsh Government Ministers make themselves available for our evidence sessions. The testimony we have heard from so many Welsh Government Ministers is that their own Departments' dialogue with the UK Government is really good—lots of meetings and discussions. That backs up the point that the Secretary of State made in his testimony to the Committee that there has been an almost unprecedented number of meetings and forums between the UK Government and the Welsh Government during the pandemic. Far from it being a period when, somehow, the UK Government have been snubbing or not valuing the opinion of the Welsh Government, the pandemic has set a high water mark of engagement between UK Government and devolved Government.

The third grievance we have heard continuously from the Welsh Government, which is demonstrably false, is that somehow the UK Government were taking unsafe, reckless decisions about reopening the economy. We heard that very recently from the Welsh First Minister. The data just do not support that. As I said, every death is a tragedy in this country, but there is no evidence to suggest that the stricter—sometimes oddly strict—measures that the Welsh Government have taken have been based in sound science and have achieved any better outcomes. I look at some of the decisions that the Welsh Government have made around their restrictions, such as that nonsensical ban on outdoor parkruns, criminalising people wanting to go to their workplace—they could go to the pub but they could not go to work. There is a whole range of

these things that are odd and divisive, and have made the Welsh Government and Wales an outlier in the United Kingdom.

**Jo Stevens:** I am rather confused by the right hon. Gentleman describing the Welsh Government's recent covid measures as an outlier. The UK Government are the outlier. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are not outliers in this case.

**Stephen Crabb:** I disagree, and I would point the hon. Lady to the most recent set of decisions on responding to omicron, which included some—what phrase did the Prime Minister use?

**Fay Jones:** Baroque inconsistency

**Stephen Crabb:** Yes. [Interruption.] “Baroque eccentricities” is the phrase that the Prime Minister used to describe some of the Welsh Government's decisions.

I will draw my remarks to a close in a moment. What most concerns me about the posture of the Welsh Government during the pandemic is just how divisive they have been. There have been times when I felt they tried to politicise the border and to lean into what I describe as nationalist sentiment. The Secretary of State opened his remarks by saying that the majority of people in Wales support Unionist parties, but is the Welsh Labour party really still a Unionist party? I look at that agreement that it signed with Plaid Cymru in the Senedd—Plaid and Welsh Labour Members are sitting together almost seamlessly this morning—I hear the First Minister when he appears before the Welsh Affairs Committee and says that the Union is finished, and I look at some of the other decisions taken by the Welsh Government to create space between themselves and the United Kingdom, and I question what kind of journey Welsh Labour is on. Welsh Labour used to be an absolute bastion of the Union and could be relied on to defend the United Kingdom. I question what kind of journey it is on, because I do not see it as that same Unionist party.

**Nia Griffith:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Crabb:** I will give way to the hon. Member because I like her a lot.

**Nia Griffith:** Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, time after time, the First Minister has referred to the fact that, during the pandemic, Wales gave personal protective equipment to England, and Wales benefited from PPE coming from England to Wales? Most recently, Wales has given 10 million tests to England. Time after time, the First Minister has emphasised the importance of working together across the United Kingdom.

**Stephen Crabb:** I thank the hon. Lady for the intervention. I have heard Vaughan Gething describe himself as a Unionist. I may be wrong, but I am not sure I have heard the First Minister describe himself as a Unionist. I think there is a division at the heart of Welsh Labour that should concern us all, as it is in perpetual government in Cardiff Bay. I will leave that thought hanging. I thank Committee members for their time.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**The Chair:** We have until 11.25 am. Speeches should be around six minutes long. I call Beth Winter.

10.47 am

**Beth Winter:** Diolch yn fawr, Mr Davies, am y cyfle i siarad heddiw, ac am y cyfle i siarad yn Gymraeg.

Rydyn ni'n trafod cwestiwn yr Undeb Prydeinig, ac fel pob undeb arall, mae'r nerth yn dod o dderbyn a pharchu gwahaniaethau, gan gynnwys iaith, diwylliant a gwleidyddiaeth. Mae'r cyfarfod Pwyllgor heddiw yn ddigwyddiad amserol i ni, gyda'r cytundeb cydweithio a gyhoeddwyd yn ddiweddar rhwng y blaid Lafur a Phlaid Cymru i ddod â pholisïau radical i fodolaeth yng Nghymru, gan roi buddiannau pobl Cymru o flaen llinellau plaid cul. Roeddem yn gallu gwneud hyn yng Nghymru, a'i wneud mewn ffordd ystyrlon, oherwydd bod ein harweinwyr gwleidyddol yn deall eu bod wedi'u hethol i wasanaethu buddiannau'r bobl y maent yn eu cynrychioli ac nid am unrhyw reswm arall.

Hefyd, ein hanes sydd wedi'n gwneud ni fel yr ydym. Mae gan Gymru draddodiad o hanes radical, o godi'r faner goch gyntaf ar gomin Hirwaun, drws nesaf i'r pentref lle rwyf i'n byw, Penderyn, yn ystod oes y Siartwyr, hyd at sefydlu'r gwasanaeth iechyd gwladol. Y traddodiad hwn sydd wedi ysbrydoli Llywodraeth Cymru i ddatblygu polisïau o safon mwy uchelgeisiol na'i chymar yn San Steffan: er enghraifft, diogelu'r gwasanaeth iechyd gwladol fel gwasanaeth mewn eiddo cyhoeddus, ac ein hymateb gofalus yn y Senedd i covid.

Senedd ddatganoledig Cymru oedd y gyntaf yn y byd i basio argyfwng hinsawdd. Yn ddiweddar, mae'r Senedd wedi sefydlu Gweinidogaeth ar newid yr hinsawdd. Roedden ni'n gyntaf gyda Deddf Llesiant Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol (Cymru) 2015, ac yn ysbryd y ddeddfwriaeth honno, pasiodd Llywodraeth Cymru Fesur yn caniatáu i bobl 16 ac 17 mlwydd oed bleidleisio yn etholiadau Cymru.

Mae Cymru hefyd yn helpu i arwain y ffordd o ran datblygu economi gynhwysol, sylfaenol, yn bennaf gan ddefnyddio dull partneriaeth gymdeithasol i hyrwyddo gwaith teg. Mae hyn wedi'i wneud yn erbyn cefndir o ddiffyg cyllid digonol. Mae dros 10 mlynedd o lymder creulon wedi tynnu £1.6 biliwn o gyllidebau cynghorau Cymru, ac mae fy awdurdod lleol, Rhondda Cynon Taf, wedi colli dros £90 miliwn. Nid yw fformiwla Barnett ar gyfer cyfrifo cyllid Cymru yn addas, nac yn ddigonol, i ddiwallu anghenion Cymru. Felly, rydyn ni'n dal i ddioddef y problemau tloidi, amddifadedd ac anghydraddoldeb y mae gweddill y Deyrnas Unedig yn eu hwynebu.

Bydd yr argyfwng costau byw yr ydym i gyd yn ei wynebu yn ergyd drom i bobl Cymru. Gwyddom oll eisoes am bobl yn ein hetholaeth sy'n gorfod dewis rhwng bwyta neu gynhesu. Bydd y sefyllfa yn galetach eleni wrth i realiti polisïau'r Torïaid, fel y torïadau lles, y costau tanwydd cynyddol, a'r cynnydd mewn yswiriant gwladol a ddaeth yn sgil y Llywodraeth Dorïaidd hon, ein taro. Nid yn unig nad yw'r Llywodraeth Dorïaidd hon yn poeni am neu'n deall anghenion pobl fel ein hetholwyr, maent yn rhoi'r gwaith da a wnaed hyd yma gan Lywodraeth Cymru i ddiogelu gwasanaethau a datblygu ein heconomi mewn perygl difrifol wrth iddynt symud i ganoli pŵer a thanseilio'r setliad datganoli. Amlygir hyn gan y Ddeddf Marchnad Fewnol y Deyrnas Unedig 2020, ac ar hyn o bryd, y gronfa codi'r gwastad,

fel y'i gelwir. Ni fydd yn syndod bod y rhan fwyaf o'r cyllid lefelu wedi mynd i etholaethau a ddelir gan y Torïaid yng Nghymru. O'i gymharu â chyllid yr Undeb Ewropeaidd, roedd yn gyfraniad gwarthus.

*(Translation) Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak, Mr Davies, and to do so in Welsh. We are here to discuss the question of the Union. Like all other unions, its strength comes from accepting and respecting differences, including in language, culture and politics. The Committee meeting is a timely event for us with the collaborative agreement announced between Plaid Cymru and Welsh Labour to bring radical policies into existence in Wales, putting the interests of the people of Wales before narrow party lines. We can do this in Wales, and in a meaningful manner, because our political leaders understand that they have been elected to serve the interests of the people they represent and not for any other reason.*

*Our history has made us as we are. Wales has a tradition of radical history, from raising the first red flag—on Hirwaun common, next to the village where I live now, Penderyn—during the time of the Chartists, to establishing the national health service. This tradition inspires the Welsh Government to develop policies with more ambitious standards than we see here in Westminster, including safeguarding the NHS as a public service; the Senedd's careful response to covid.*

*The devolved Senedd in Wales was the first in the world to declare a climate emergency, and recently established a Ministry on climate change. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 was also a first. In the spirit of that legislation, the Welsh Government passed a Bill to permit 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in Welsh elections.*

*Wales is also helping to lead the way in developing an inclusive, foundational economy, predominantly using a social partnership approach to promote fair work. That has been done against the background of a lack of adequate funding. More than 10 years of cruel poverty has pulled £1.6 billion out of Welsh council budgets, and my local authority, Rhondda Cynon Taf, has lost over £90 million. The Barnett formula is not appropriate or adequate to meet the needs of Wales. We therefore continue to suffer the problems of poverty, deprivation and inequality that the rest of the United Kingdom faces.*

*The cost of living crisis that we all face will hit the people of Wales hard. We already know of people in our constituencies who have to choose between eating and heating, and the situation will be even harder this year as the reality of Tory policies, such as the welfare cuts, the increasing cost of fuel and the national insurance increase hit us. Not only do the Tory Government not care about and fail to understand our constituents' needs, but they have put the good work of the Welsh Government to safeguard services and develop our economy in serious jeopardy as they move to centralise power and undermine the devolved settlement. That is manifest in the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 and also in the so-called levelling-up fund. It is no surprise that the majority of the levelling-up funding has gone to constituencies held by Tory Members in Wales. Compared with European funding, it is a shameful contribution.*

**Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con):** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Beth Winter:** Sorry, but I will not give way.

Mae enghreifftiau eraill o'r Llywodraeth Doriaidd yn diystyru hawliau pobl Cymru a'i Llywodraeth ddatganoledig yn cynnwys y Mesur Cenedligrwydd a Ffiniau, sy'n tanseilio dyhead Cymru i fod yn genedl—

*(Translation) There are other examples of the Tory Government disregarding the rights of the people of Wales and their devolved Government, including the Nationality and Borders Bill, which undermines Wales's desire to be a nation—*

**Simon Hart:** Will the hon. Lady give way on a very important point? I hope she will at least acknowledge that Rhondda Cynon Taf—her own local authority—was one of the major recipients of funding in the latest round. She should withdraw or at least qualify the comments that she made about the financial arrangements favouring Conservative seats. She needs to look at the statistics and possibly come back to the Committee with a correction.

**Beth Winter:** I disagree, sorry. All the local elected representatives are clear about the reduction in funding and the terrible impact that that has had on our constituents. If the Government looked at the research, it will confirm what I say.

Felly nid yn unig y mae'r Llywodraeth hon yn benderfynol o anwybyddu a chael gwared ar Lywodraethau datganoledig, mae'n benderfynol o danseilio ein hawliau democrataidd yn llwyr. Rydyn ni ar bwynt peryglus, yn fy marn i, o ran democratiaeth a datganoli. Nid yw diwygio cyfansoddiadol a datganoli yn faterion anghysbell, ymylol. Mae arnom angen system lle mae'r pedair gwlad yn cael eu trin yn gyfartal, nid system o'r top i lawr fel yr hyn sydd yna ar hyn o bryd. Dylai pob rhan o'r Deyrnas Unedig gael ei hariannu'n briodol ac yn deg, heb fod angen bowlen gardota pryd bynnag y bydd anghenion ychwanegol yn codi.

Dylid gwneud penderfyniadau gwleidyddol a gwariant mor agos â phosibl at y bobl y maent yn effeithio arnynt. Ni allwn ganiatáu i'n pwerau gwario gael eu cymryd i reolaeth ganolog. Bydd yn atal Llywodraethau datganoledig a lleol rhag mynd ar lwybrau gwahanol economaidd sy'n bodloni amcanion polisi cyhoeddus rhanbarthau a chenedloedd y Deyrnas Unedig. Mae angen i ni gydio yn y cyfle ac archwilio a thrafod opsiynau sydd o'n blaenau ac ystyried beth sydd orau i bobl Cymru.

Yn arbennig, mae angen i ni ymgysylltu â'r holl bobl a chymunedau lleol a'u cynnwys yn y drafodaeth a'r ddadl ar yr hyn y mae datganoli yn ei olygu iddynt hwy a'r hyn a welwn fel ein dyfodol. Bydd y comisiwn cyfansoddiadol a benodwyd yn ddiweddar yng Nghymru yn gyfle i godi proffil y ddadl hon a fydd yn cynnwys cymaint o bobl â phosibl.

*(Translation) Not only are this Government intent on getting rid of devolved Governments, but they are determined to undermine our democratic rights. We are at a dangerous point for democracy and devolution. Constitutional changes and devolution are not distant matters. We need a system whereby all four countries are treated equally, not the top-down system that currently exists. All areas of the UK should be funded appropriately and fairly without having to beg when additional needs arise. Any political decisions on funding should be made as closely as possible*

*to the people they affect. We cannot allow our spending powers to be taken under central control. That will prevent devolved and local governments from going down different economic paths to satisfy regional public policies and different nation policies.*

*We need to grab the opportunity to investigate and discuss the opportunities ahead and to consider what is best for the people of Wales. In particular, we need to interact with all our local communities and include them in the discussions and debates on what devolution means for them at the moment and what they see as our future. The constitutional commission that was recently appointed in Wales will be an opportunity to raise the profile of this debate and include as many people as possible.*

**David T. C. Davies:** A yw'r Foneddigeis anrhydeddus, fel aelod o'r blaidd Lafur, yn gyfforddus gyda'r ffaith bod y comisiwn wedi dweud eu bod nhw'n mynd i edrych ar bob cwestiwn, gan gynnwys annibyniaeth? A yw hi'n hapus, fel cefnogwr yr Undeb, eu bod nhw'n mynd i ystyried hyn?

*(Translation) Is the hon. Lady, as a member of the Labour party, comfortable that the commission has said that it is going to look at every question, including the question of independence? Is she happy that it will consider that?*

**Beth Winter:** Diolch am y cwestiwn. Rwy'n hapus bod y comisiwn yn mynd i edrych ar bob posibilrwydd achos penderfyniad pobl Cymru yw e beth fydd y dyfodol i Gymru. Does dim problem gyda fi ynglŷn â hynny. Mae'r comisiwn ei hun yn cynnwys trawstoriad eang o gymdeithas Cymru gan gynnwys academyddion ac undebwyr llafur yn ogystal â gwleidyddion ac mae ganddynt feddwl agored, fel rydych chi wedi dweud, o ran beth y gallai'r argymhellion fod yn y dyfodol. Mae angen i ni drawsnewid y Deyrnas Unedig yn bartneriaeth wirfoddol o genhedloedd sy'n gyfartal ac yn ddemocrataidd lle mae pobl yn teimlo eu bod wir yn gallu cymryd rheolaeth yn ôl.

Os ydym yn wleidyddion er mwyn cynrychioli buddiannau mwyafrif y bobl, mae angen gweledigaeth o fath gwahanol o wlad: un sy'n seiliedig ar degwch, a rhoi pobl cyn elw, ac sy'n datganoli pŵer gan roi cyfoeth, cyfle a phŵer yn nwylo pobl a chymunedau lleol.

Mae'n hen bryd ein bod ni'n cael y drafodaeth hon am ddyfodol yr Undeb oherwydd mae'n ymwneud â democratiaeth, ynglŷn â sut yr ydym yn llunio ein dyfodol a chymryd rheolaeth yn ôl, rhoi llais i'r rhai yr ydym yno i'w cynrychioli a gweithio ochr yn ochr gydag eraill i greu dyfodol tecach, gwyrddach ledled y Deyrnas Unedig sy'n cydnabod ac yn parchu gwahaniaeth ac felly'n wirioneddol ddiwallu anghenion pobl Prydain.

*(Translation): Thank you for the question. I am happy that the commission will look at every possibility, because it is the people of Wales who should decide the future of Wales, so I have no a problem with that.*

*The commission itself comprises a wide cross-section of Welsh society, including academics and labour unions as well as politicians, and they have an open mind as to what the recommendations could be in the future. We need to transform the UK into a voluntary partnership of nations that are equally democratic and where people feel that they can really take back control. If we are politicians*

*to represent the interests of the majority of the people, there needs to be a different vision of a country, based on fairness, putting people before profit and devolving powers, thus giving wealth, opportunities and power into the hands of local communities.*

*It is high time we had this discussion about the future of the Union, because it is to do with democracy and how we form our future and take back control, to give voice to those we are here to represent and work hand in hand with others to create a fairer, greener future across the UK that recognises and respects differences and therefore satisfies the needs of the people of Britain.*

10.56 am

**Simon Baynes:** Bore da—good morning. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. Like my Welsh colleagues here today, I take great heart from the fact that under this Conservative Government, the Union, specifically as it relates to Wales but also across our United Kingdom, has grown stronger and continues to do so. It gives me particular pleasure to be seated next to my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham, with whom I share the county borough of Wrexham. It is a great pleasure to work hard with her on a wide range of issues that affect our two constituencies—in particular, recently, city status and city of culture status for Wrexham.

There has already been much mention in this morning's debate of the way in which the UK Government have assisted the Welsh Government, and Wales overall, during the pandemic. There are two particular points that I would like to draw out and perhaps have not been mentioned so far. The first is that the vaccines are of course the way out of the pandemic, and the UK Government have secured and purchased vaccines on behalf of the whole United Kingdom; over 6.5 million doses have now been delivered across Wales. I think it is very important to stress that the speed and scale of that programme would never have been possible if we had stayed in the EU, which is very much the avowed policy of the First Minister and many members of the Welsh Labour party.

Secondly, the UK's armed forces continue to play a crucial role in the fight against covid-19 in Wales and we are hugely grateful for their commitment and expertise. Four hundred and eleven military personnel are currently available to support the pandemic response in Wales. That includes 313 personnel supporting the Welsh ambulance service and 98 personnel deployed to assist the seven health boards across Wales. That is an absolutely key example of the benefits of the Union to Wales and across the rest of the UK.

There has been much talk about the financial benefits that have flowed from the UK Government's policies, so I will not go back over those, but I know from my own experience in my constituency of Clwyd South how many businesses have said to me, when I have visited them, that they are extremely grateful for the prompt, well directed and generous support that has been provided by the UK Government to businesses across Wales. My constituency of Clwyd South has historically been starved of investment by the Welsh Labour Government in Cardiff Bay, but under the UK Government over the last two years we have seen renewed vigour to correct that injustice, with unprecedented

levels of funding coming into the region. A key example is the £13.3 million levelling-up fund bid, developed by Wrexham and Denbighshire councils and which I sponsored, which has been successful. It will be matched by £1.7 million of funding, giving a total package of £15 million.

There are three interconnected projects that make up this levelling-up fund bid, which will transform parts of my constituency. First, there is the Trevor Basin Technical Masterplan. Not only does it improve the famous site with the great aqueduct created by Thomas Telford, but it will be highly regenerative to parts of the constituency that are suffering under a post-industrial situation. It is a combination of regeneration and of valuing our heritage and assets, which are so important to us in the constituency of Clwyd South.

The second area that the fund will benefit is Denbighshire. The project supports cross-border visitor connectivity in the Dee Valley at the Horseshoe Falls, the Four Great Highways and Plas Newydd in Llangollen, and also the Llangollen active travel corridor, including the old railway line and Chirk. The third part, which is perhaps for me the most exciting part, is in the Corwen area. Corwen is a beautiful town, but it has been left behind because it has not received much investment—indeed, hardly any at all—from the Welsh Government over a long period. It will enable us to create a new and improved Western Gateway to the Dee Valley and the world heritage site, and it will improve connectivity and infrastructure.

The funding will improve the town centre assets in Corwen and the area between the railway and the car park, including a new platform canopy. This links together the famous Llangollen steam railway, and it will take visitors up along the railway to Llangollen and then links into the canal. It is doing what we desperately need in Clwyd South: bringing hope, vigour and investment to a key heritage asset and to important parts of the constituency. It will not only provide jobs and a much-needed economic boost, but will improve the wellbeing of our residents by widening access to recreation, outdoor and other amenity activities. It will also celebrate the amazing history, language and culture of our part of Wales and bring them to a wider audience.

Another example of UK Government investment has been the step-free access at Ruabon railway station. I was pleased to welcome the Secretary of State for Transport on a visit to the station last year, and he has said that the station can now progress to the next stage of the Access for All programme to help secure step-free access for station visitors. That comes after many years of campaigning by representatives, organisations and residents in Ruabon, and I believe it also highlights the commitment of the UK Government to our communities in Clwyd South and the rest of north Wales, which for so long have been taken for granted by a complacent Labour party in Cardiff Bay.

Finally, in contrast to the investment from the UK Government, we can see a corresponding lack of interest and funding from Welsh Labour. For example, I had the opportunity recently to visit the landslip on Newbridge Road in my constituency, where I was able to see first hand the damage that had been caused on the road, which has severed the vital link between Newbridge, Cefn and the wider communities of Chirk, Plas Madoc and Ruabon.

[*Simon Baynes*]

I used the visit to call on the Welsh Government to urgently conduct essential repairs, which have been badly needed since the storms hit a year ago. Since the visit, funding of £175,000 from the Welsh Government has been confirmed to make technical studies regarding the repair, which is a small step in the right direction on fixing the damage to Newbridge Road, but clearly a great deal more needs to be done. It is astonishing that the Welsh Labour Government have taken so long to react, and there can be no further delays on their part in ensuring that these repairs are done as quickly as possible. To quote a frustrated local,

“If this road had been in South Wales, we would be talking about the opening date by now.”

That is the opinion of my constituents about the care of the Welsh Government when it comes to major infrastructure projects in Clwyd South.

In conclusion, it was my pledge in the 2019 election to work constructively to deliver the change and investment that Clwyd South needs. I am proud to have worked closely with the Secretary of State, the team at the Wales Office and many Ministers across the UK Government. But it is high time that Mark Drakeford and the Welsh Labour Government step up and deliver, particularly for our communities in north Wales, if we are to make a difference and improve the lives of the people of Wales.

**Jo Stevens:** Has the hon. Gentleman seen the polls in Wales recently?

**Simon Baynes:** The polls come and go, but the essence of what I am saying is that we are delivering a constructive and particular project. I have tried to focus on my own constituency, so that my remarks are not generalised but particular. In a part of Wales that has been left behind and has significant deprivation, the UK Government are stepping in where the Welsh Labour Government should have been for decades.

I would like to finish on the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb). He referred to the way in which the Welsh Government are playing a dangerous game consorting with the nationalist cause. As someone who grew up in Wales and has lived there most of my life, I think the value of the Union is of huge importance. It is extremely dangerous that the Welsh Labour party is not providing the support, vigour and representation for that cause.

**Hywel Williams:** First, may I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on winning Clwyd South? He, myself and the Prime Minister have stood there, but the hon. Gentleman is the only won who has ever won. I invite him to say, or perhaps not say, that co-operation between us and the Labour party to bring forward a large number of positive policies—46 points in the agreement—is not necessarily damaging to the Union.

**Simon Baynes:** I am pleased that I am the one of the trio who made it across the line in Clwyd South. I have every respect for the hon. Gentleman as a Member of Parliament and a vigorous representative of his constituents. With regard to his point about the programme put

forward jointly by the two parties, it is important that there is clear accountability for Plaid Cymru in that arrangement. It strikes me that they are trying to have their cake and eat it by supporting the Government but not being quite part of them, and not being willing to be held to account for what they are doing. There needs to be clarity in how they operate and what they are trying to do.

To go back to my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire, the Labour party in Wales needs to be clear whether it is really supporting the Union, or whether political expediency is allowing it to blur the line. There are two particular quotations that its members have come up with recently: they have called the UK nothing more than “an insurance policy” and said that support for the existence of the UK “is not unconditional”. Welsh Labour needs to be clear about where it stands on the Union, to the benefit of everybody across Wales.

**Anna McMorris** (Cardiff North) (Lab): Would the hon. Gentleman not agree that saving lives is above everything? The Welsh Government have put saving lives above everything. If that runs contrary to what the UK Government are doing in England, they are doing more to cause the break-up of the Union than anyone else.

**Simon Baynes:** I thank the hon. Member for her contribution. I have listened to many of her contributions in the Chamber and I have a great deal of respect for the vigour and integrity of what she says, but in this case, actually, the death rate is higher in Wales than in England. This is not a statistic that I particularly wanted to dwell on, because we are all in this together, but to be specific, the death rate is 260 per 100,000 in England and 289.5 per 100,000 in Wales.

With reference to the intervention by the shadow Secretary of State for Wales, the Welsh Government cannot have it both ways. We have seen some of that already this morning: they try to blur the line on whether they are responsible for the death rate and the way the covid crisis has been dealt with, but on the other hand, day to day, they are always saying how good they have been in treating the pandemic. All I am saying is: let us have a bit of honesty and accountability on these matters. I think that would benefit everyone.

In conclusion, the last two years have shown the huge support that the Conservative Government are delivering for Clwyd South and the rest of Wales. Only the Welsh Conservatives can be trusted to defend Wales’s place in our strong United Kingdom.

11.11 am

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I am grateful to you for calling me to speak this morning, as this afternoon I will be in the Chamber dealing with the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill. Anyone who is here will be welcome to join us in the Chamber this afternoon.

Our country is at a crossroads; our Government are partying and the Union is in peril. Far from being strengthened, our United Kingdom is being let down by a Prime Minister who is out of his depth and a Government who are out of step with the needs, wants and aspirations of people across Newport West and the whole of Wales.

We have heard from colleagues already that so much of life as we know it has worsened as we approach the 12th anniversary of the election of a Conservative Prime Minister. As the Leader of the Opposition has noted, we have the worst possible Prime Minister at the worst possible time.

The current sleaze in this place goes right to the top. Time after time, this Conservative Government have treated the people of Newport West and Wales with utter contempt. They make laws for us and then break them when they want to, as though the rules just do not apply to them.

The facts are simple. No. 10 denied that any party or gathering took place—according to them, it just did not happen—and then a picture came out showing the exact opposite: the Prime Minister and others enjoying wine and cheese in the Downing Street gardens. I raised this in the Chamber last week with the Paymaster General, who was sent to cover for the Prime Minister. I asked him why anyone should believe a word the Prime Minister says ever again. The answer was dither, delay and deflection. I was given no reason to trust the Prime Minister, and following Prime Minister's questions the following day, like many across Newport West, I trust him even less.

While the people of our community were unable to see loved ones and family, Mr Johnson was partying. While the people of Newport West were anxious about breaking the rules and endangering others, he was chatting and having a glass of wine at a party. While he would hold his 5 pm press conference every day, telling people to obey the rules, he was quite happy to break them himself for a good time.

There are only two possibilities: either Mr Johnson did not understand what his covid regulations meant and never has, or he knew what they were and broke them anyway. Either way, his time is up. He has been found wanting and we all now know that he is incapable of remaining Prime Minister. He is out of excuses and, as the Labour leader said last week, he should resign immediately.

The leader of the Scottish Tories has called for the Prime Minister to resign. We can only hope that the Welsh Conservatives, here and in the Senedd, find a backbone and call for his resignation too. We do not need to wait for an investigation to find out whether the Prime Minister broke the rules because he has admitted it on the Floor of the House. The facts speak for themselves, and the anger, frustration and outrage of my constituents speaks even louder. I have had so many emails from angry constituents who cannot believe the disgrace that is going on here.

On our welfare system, on peace and justice, on law and order and on global Britain, every step of the way we have seen dithering, delay and disdain for those most in need. This Government are letting down Newport West, letting down Wales and letting down the United Kingdom.

People in Pill, Rogerstone and Stow Hill in Newport West are tired of finding it hard to make ends meet, tired of watching the Government engage in dismantling and destroying the BBC rather than protecting it, and tired of trying to heat their homes and feed their families without breaking the bank. That is why the

work of the First Minister of Wales and his Government is so important. We have seen that expertly demonstrated over the last two years.

I am grateful to Mr Drakeford for his leadership as our First Minister, and I want to highlight some of the Welsh Labour Government's successes, such as the inoculation of more than 1.5 million people with their first dose of covid vaccine just over three months after the launch of the programme. They provided free PPE for everyone working in the NHS and social care, including care homes. They set up the most successful covid contact tracing system in the UK—a public service run by local people. That did not happen in England.

The Welsh Government protected more than 165,000 jobs by providing the most generous business support scheme in the UK. They supported our social care providers through the £150 million covid fighting fund and investing more than £24 million to protect charities and promote volunteering. They helped 3,200 into temporary accommodation across Wales, and helped many more from becoming homeless. They also guarantee free school meals—during the holidays, too—for all eligible pupils up to and including Easter 2022. That is how the people of Wales got through the crisis to where we are today, setting an example to all parts of the United Kingdom.

On Brexit, this Government have been wanting every step of the way. Our departure should have been a chance to see a new way forward in a Union of equals. Instead, the Prime Minister has tickled the fancies of his right-wing Back Benchers, while selling out the good people of Northern Ireland. We were promised money from the EU would be matched by the UK Government, and in Wales we are still waiting.

On the environment, we have yet to see tangible outcomes from the COP26 summit in Glasgow. I would like to use this opportunity to urge the Government to adopt Labour's pledge to deliver a standalone clean air Act. On trade, this Government have sold out Welsh farmers to make the Australians and Americans happy. Forget down under—with this Government, Welsh farming will go under. On steel, following years of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip insulting President Obama, Secretary Clinton and the Democrats, the British are now at the back of the queue into the Oval Office. Is the Prime Minister more focused on making excuses for his string of Downing Street parties than taking steps to lift the damaging steel tariffs?

Our Union is stronger together, our generations of shared values and experiences endure, and our vision of a better world stands resolute. To meet the expectations of a better, more inclusive world, with Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales thriving and succeeding, we need a Labour Government, respectful of the devolved settlement and focused on developing better relations between the Welsh Labour Government and a Labour Government in Westminster. I look forward to that happening very soon.

**The Chair:** Diolch yn fawr. Let us keep up with the Joneses—I call David Jones.

11.17 am

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Davies. I congratulate the Secretary of State on securing this session of the Welsh Grand Committee. The Committee has an important

[Mr David Jones]

function. It is a great shame that, because of the pandemic, it has not been able to meet in this Parliament, but I hope that this will be the first of many sessions.

The Union is a matter of central importance to almost all right hon. and hon. Members here today. Most of us are members of Unionist parties. I must take issue with my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire, because clearly the Welsh Labour party is a Unionist party; after all, the shadow Secretary of State is sporting a fetching face covering emblazoned with the initials “UK”—I mention that for the benefit of *Hansard*. I believe that the Union is precious and nothing should be done to weaken it; indeed, everything possible should be done to strengthen it.

Devolution has been a feature of the political landscape of this country for many years—in the case of Wales, over 22 years. It is an established part of the British constitutional system, to the extent that the Wales Act 2017 carries the ringing declaration that devolution is a permanent part of our constitutional arrangements.

The Welsh Assembly, founded in 1999, has now evolved into a Senedd with a range of primary law-making powers and, with the Welsh Government, it is a firm part of the UK’s constitution. Devolution should not mean, however, that Wales is any less an integral part of the United Kingdom, the constitutional face of which has changed radically over the last 25 years. Wales has two Governments: one in Cardiff and one here at Westminster. That state of affairs is well understood, and most Welsh residents are entirely comfortable with it. Those two Administrations should be working in a co-operative and complementary fashion. Each has its own place, and each should co-operate with the other in delivering the best for Wales and her people.

I have no doubt at all that Wales, as a small constituent nation of the United Kingdom, benefits hugely from its place in the Union, most obviously in financial terms. In 2020-21, public expenditure in Wales was £14.5 billion more than the revenue raised there. That equates to £4,500 per head of the Welsh population. Those financial benefits became all the clearer during the coronavirus pandemic. An extra £3.8 billion has been provided to the Welsh Government this year, in addition to the £5.2 billion extra that Wales received in covid funding in the last financial year, coupled with interventions in Wales by Her Majesty’s Government, including furlough, the self-employment income support scheme, the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme, the bounce back loan scheme, and goodness knows how many other interventions. It is clear that a huge number of Welsh residents have benefited from Wales’s place as a constituent part of a major world economy with the financial clout to look after all its citizens.

This is not just about money, however. Wales benefits hugely, in practical terms, from its place in the Union. Residents in north Wales, for example, usually value the medical services that they obtain from specialist centres in north-west England, whether orthopaedic services

delivered in Gobowen, cardiac treatment at Broadgreen hospital, paediatric services at Alder Hey children’s hospital, or neurosurgery at the Walton Centre in Liverpool. Patients in north Wales know that they can access the services they need that are not regularly obtainable within the boundaries of north Wales.

Frankly, the only barrier or cause of delay in obtaining those services is usually the fact that the Welsh health boards do not pay at the same rates as English commissioners. Treatments obtainable in England are frequently slower for patients resident in Wales. That is a matter that the Welsh Government should address. It is nothing new; politicians across Wales have been complaining it for some considerable time.

Similarly, medication obtainable in England is sometimes not available in Wales, and one has to ask why. The drug Inclisiran, for example, is potentially life-saving for cardiac-arrest and stroke patients—one of my constituents is trying to access it. It is available in England since NHS England did a deal with Novartis, the drug’s developer, to obtain it at a discounted rate, but it is not available in Wales. Why did the Welsh Government not join with NHS England in seeking to obtain the drug at a similar rate? The national health service is, after all, supposed to be a national UK health service. It should provide an equivalent service for everyone in the UK, and the niceties of devolution should not frustrate that essential principle. If Wales cannot do that itself—in which there is no shame—it should join England in seeking to obtain the drugs at the same rate.

Of course, some differences are an inevitable consequence of devolution. Those differences will sometimes be for the benefit of the citizens, but not always. It sometimes makes more sense to do things the same way as in other parts of the country. After all, devolution should not result in poorer services. People in Wales pay their taxes at exactly the same rate as people in England, so they are entitled, broadly speaking, to equivalent services. That is not always the case, however.

Educational attainment in Wales is significantly worse than in other parts of the UK. Wales is continuously slipping further and further behind in the PISA rankings for science, reading and maths, and that is before the impact of the pandemic is taken into account. Quite clearly, that state of affairs needs to be addressed. One wonders to what extent the Welsh Government are consulting with other constituent Governments of the United Kingdom in an effort to improve performance. Devolution does not mean that individual Governments operate in a silo; it should mean sharing best practice and trying to benefit from the experience of others.

**The Chair:** Order. Sorry to cut you off mid-stream, Mr Jones, but I will call you again when the meeting resumes at 2 pm.

11.25 am

*The Chair adjourned the Committee without Question put (Standing Order No. 88).*

*Adjourned till this day at Two o’clock.*