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10 May 2022**

**Volume 714
No. 1**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 10 May 2022

Chronology of The Parliamentary Debates

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803), 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland's Debates, 22 vols.; Grey's Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett's Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

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Abrahams, Deborah Angela Elspeth Marie (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)
Adams, Rt Hon. Nigel (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)
Afolami, Abimbola (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)
Afriyie, Adam (Windsor) (Con)
Ahmad Khan, Imran Nasir (Wakefield) (Ind) [*Resigned, May 2022*]
Aiken, Nicola Jane (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)
Aldous, Peter James Guy (Waveney) (Con)
Ali, Rushanara (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)
Ali, Tahir (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)
Allan, Lucy (Telford) (Con)
Allin-Khan, Rosena Chantelle (Tooting) (Lab)
Amesbury, Michael Lee (Weaver Vale) (Lab)
Amess, Sir David Anthony Andrew (Southend West) (Con) [*Died, October 2021*]
Anderson, Fleur (Putney) (Lab)
Anderson, Lee (Ashfield) (Con)
Anderson, Stuart Paul (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)
Andrew, Rt Hon. Stuart James (Pudsey) (Con)
Ansell, Caroline (Eastbourne) (Con)
Antoniazzi, Antonia Louise (Gower) (Lab)
Argar, Edward John Comport (Charnwood) (Con)
Ashworth, Rt Hon. Jonathan Michael Graham (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op)
Atherton, Sarah Elizabeth (Wrexham) (Con)
Atkins, Victoria (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)

B

Bacon, Gareth Andrew (Orpington) (Con)
Bacon, Richard Michael (South Norfolk) (Con)
Badenoch, Olukemi Olufunto (Saffron Walden) (Con)
Bailey, Shaun Stephen (West Bromwich West) (Con)
Baillie, Siobhan Kathleen (Stroud) (Con)
Baker, Duncan Charles (North Norfolk) (Con)
Baker, Steven John (Wycombe) (Con)
Baldwin, Harriett Mary Morison (West Worcestershire) (Con)
Barclay, Rt Hon. Stephen Paul (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)
Bardell, Hannah Mary (Livingston) (SNP)
Barker, Paula (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)
Baron, John Charles (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)
Baynes, Simon Robert Maurice (Clwyd South) (Con)
Beckett, Rt Hon. Margaret Mary (Derby South) (Lab)
Begley, Órfhlaith Acife (West Tyrone) (SF)
Begum, Apsana (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)
Bell, Aaron Stuart (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)
Benn, Rt Hon. Hilary James (Leeds Central) (Lab)
Benton, Scott Lloyd (Blackpool South) (Con)
Beresford, Sir Alexander Paul (Mole Valley) (Con)
Berry, Rt Hon. James Jacob Gilchrist (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)
Betts, Clive James Charles (Sheffield South East) (Lab)

Bhatti, Mohammad Saqib (Meriden) (Con)
Black, Mhairi (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Blackford, Rt Hon. Ian (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)
Blackman, Kirsty Ann (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Blackman, Robert John (Harrow East) (Con)
Blake Dagnall, Olivia Frances (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)
Blomfield, Paul Christopher (Sheffield Central) (Lab)
Blunt, Crispin Jeremy Rupert (Reigate) (Con)
Bone, Peter William (Wellingborough) (Con)
Bonnar, Steven (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bottomley, Sir Peter James (Worthing West) (Con)
Bowie, Andrew Campbell (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)
Brabin, Tracy Lynn (Batley and Spen) (Lab) [*Resigned, May 2021*]
Bradley, Benjamin David (Mansfield) (Con)
Bradley, Rt Hon. Karen Anne (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)
Bradshaw, Rt Hon. Benjamin Peter James (Exeter) (Lab)
Brady, Sir Graham Stuart (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con)
Brady, Michael (Newry and Armagh) (SF)
Braverman, Rt Hon. Sue-Ellen Cassiana (Fareham) (Con)
Brennan, Kevin Denis (Cardiff West) (Lab)
Brereton, Jack Edgar (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)
Bridgen, Andrew James (North West Leicestershire) (Con)
Brine, Stephen Charles (Winchester) (Con)
Bristow, Paul (Peterborough) (Con)
Britcliffe, Sara Alice (Hyndburn) (Con)
Brock, Deidre Leanne (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)
Brokenshire, Rt Hon. James Peter (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con) [*Died, October 2021*]
Brooks-Osborne, Katharine Helen (Jarrow) (Lab)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
Brown, Lyn Carol (West Ham) (Lab)
Brown, Rt Hon. Nicholas Hugh (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab)
Browne, Anthony Howe (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)
Bruce, Fiona Claire (Congleton) (Con)
Bryant, Christopher John (Rhondda) (Lab)
Buchan, Felicity Christiana (Kensington) (Con)
Buck, Karen Patricia (Westminster North) (Lab)
Buckland, Rt Hon. Sir Robert James (South Swindon) (Con)
Burghart, Michael Alex (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con)
Burgon, Richard (Leeds East) (Lab)
Burns, Rt Hon. Conor (Bournemouth West) (Con)
Butler, Dawn Petula (Brent Central) (Lab)
Butler, Robert (Aylesbury) (Con)
Byrne, Ian Robert (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)
Byrne, Rt Hon. Liam Dominic (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)

C

Cadbury, Ruth Margaret (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)
 Cairns, Rt Hon. Alun Hugh (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)
 Callaghan, Amy (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)
 Cameron, Lisa (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)
 Campbell, Rt Hon. Sir Alan (Tynemouth) (Lab)
 Campbell, Gregory Lloyd (East Londonderry) (DUP)
 Carden, Daniel Joseph (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)
 Carmichael, Rt Hon. Alexander Morrison (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)
 Carter, Andrew John (Warrington South) (Con)
 Cartledge, James Roger (South Suffolk) (Con)
 Cash, Sir William Nigel Paul (Stone) (Con)
 Cates, Miriam Joy (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)
 Caulfield, Maria Colette (Lewes) (Con)
 Chalk, Alexander John Gervase (Cheltenham) (Con)
 Chamberlain, Wendy Anne (North East Fife) (LD)
 Champion, Sarah Deborah (Rotherham) (Lab)
 Chapman, Douglas (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)
 Charalambous, Charalambos (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)
 Cherry, Joanna Catherine (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)
 Chishti, Atta-Ur-Rehman (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)
 Chope, Sir Christopher Robert (Christchurch) (Con)
 Churchill, Johanna Peta (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)
 Clark, Feryal Demirci (Enfield North) (Lab)
 Clark, Rt Hon. Gregory David (Tunbridge Wells) (Con)
 Clark, Rebecca Faye (Taunton Deane) (Con)
 Clarke, Rt Hon. Simon Richard (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)
 Clarke, Theodora Roosevelt (Stafford) (Con)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan (Bassetlaw) (Con)
 Clarkson, Christopher Mark (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)
 Cleverly, Rt Hon. James Spencer (Braintree) (Con)
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey Robert (The Cotswolds) (Con)
 Coffey, Rt Hon. Thérèse Anne (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)
 Colburn, Elliot (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con)
 Collins, Damian Noel Thomas (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)
 Cooper, Daisy (St Albans) (LD)
 Cooper, Rosemary Elizabeth (West Lancashire) (Lab)
 Cooper, Rt Hon. Yvette (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)
 Corbyn, Rt Hon. Jeremy Bernard (Islington North) (Ind)
 Costa, Alberto Castrenze (South Leicestershire) (Con)
 Court, Robert Alexander (Witney) (Con)
 Coutinho, Claire Coryl Julia (East Surrey) (Con)
 Cowan, Ronald Jack (Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Cox, Rt Hon. Sir Charles Geoffrey (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)
 Coyle, Neil (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Ind)
 Crabb, Rt Hon. Stephen (Preseli Pembrokehire) (Con)
 Crawley, Angela (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)
 Creasy, Stella Judith (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op)
 Crosbie, Virginia Ann (Ynys Môn) (Con)
 Crouch, Tracey Elizabeth Anne (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)
 Cruddas, Jonathan (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)
 Cryer, John Robert (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)
 Cummins, Judith Mary (Bradford South) (Lab)
 Cunningham, Alexander (Stockton North) (Lab)

D

Daby, Janet Jessica (Lewisham East) (Lab)
 Daly, James Barry (Bury North) (Con)
 Davey, Rt Hon. Edward Jonathon (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)
 David, Wayne (Caerphilly) (Lab)
 Davies, David Thomas Charles (Monmouth) (Con)
 Davies, Gareth Mark (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)
 Davies, Geraint Richard (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)
 Davies, James Michael (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)
 Davies, Miriam Jane Alice (Mid Sussex) (Con)
 Davies, Philip Andrew (Shipley) (Con)
 Davies-Jones, Alexandra Mary (Pontypridd) (Lab)
 Davis, Rt Hon. David Michael (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)
 Davison, Dehenna Sheridan (Bishop Auckland) (Con)
 Day, Martyn (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)
 De Cordova, Marsha Chantol (Battersea) (Lab)
 Debbonaire, Thangam Elizabeth Rachel (Bristol West) (Lab)
 Dhesi, Tanmanjeet Singh (Slough) (Lab)
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline Julia (Gosport) (Con)
 Dines, Sarah Elizabeth (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)
 Djanogly, Jonathan Simon (Huntingdon) (Con)
 Docherty, Leo (Aldershot) (Con)
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin John (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)
 Dodds, Anneliese Jane (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)
 Donaldson, Rt Hon. Sir Jeffrey Mark (Lagan Valley) (DUP)
 Donelan, Rt Hon. Michelle Emma May Elizabeth (Chippenham) (Con)
 Doogan, David Michael (Angus) (SNP)
 Dorans, Allan Hopkins (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)
 Dorries, Rt Hon. Nadine Vanessa (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)
 Double, Stephen Daniel (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)
 Doughty, Stephen John (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op)
 Dowd, Peter Christopher (Bootle) (Lab)
 Dowden, Rt Hon. Oliver James (Hertsmere) (Con)
 Doyle-Price, Jacqueline (Thurrock) (Con)
 Dromey, John Eugene Joseph (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab) [*Died, January 2022*]
 Drummond, Felicia Jane Beatrix (Meon Valley) (Con)
 Duddridge, James Philip (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)
 Duffield, Rosemary Clare (Canterbury) (Lab)
 Duguid, David James (Banff and Buchan) (Con)
 Duncan Smith, Rt Hon. Sir George Iain (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)
 Dunne, Rt Hon. Philip Martin (Ludlow) (Con)

E

Eagle, Dame Angela (Wallasey) (Lab)
 Eagle, Maria (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)
 Eastwood, Colum (Foyle) (SDLP)
 Eastwood, Mark Simon (Dewsbury) (Con)
 Edwards, David Jonathan (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)
 Edwards, Ruth Rosamond (Rushcliffe) (Con)
 Efford, Clive Stanley (Eltham) (Lab)
 Elliott, Julie (Sunderland Central) (Lab)
 Ellis, Rt Hon. Michael Tyrone (Northampton North) (Con)

Ellwood, Rt Hon. Tobias Martin (Bournemouth East) (Con)
 Elmore, Christopher Philip James (Ogmore) (Lab)
 Elphicke, Natalie Cecilia (Dover) (Con)
 Eshalomi, Florence (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)
 Esterson, William Roffen (Sefton Central) (Lab)
 Eustice, Rt Hon. Charles George (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)
 Evans, Christopher James (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)
 Evans, Luke Morgan (Bosworth) (Con)
 Evans, Rt Hon. Nigel Martin (Ribble Valley) (Con)
 Evennett, Rt Hon. Sir David Anthony (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)
 Everitt, Ben (Milton Keynes North) (Con)

F

Fabricant, Michael Louis David (Lichfield) (Con)
 Farris, Laura Rose (Newbury) (Con)
 Farron, Timothy James (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)
 Farry, Stephen Anthony (North Down) (Alliance)
 Fell, Simon Richard James (Barrow and Furness) (Con)
 Fellows, Marion (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Ferrier, Margaret (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)
 Finucane, John (Belfast North) (SF)
 Firth, Anna (Southend West) (Con) [*By-election, February 2022*]
 Fletcher, Colleen Margaret (Coventry North East) (Lab)
 Fletcher, Katherine (South Ribble) (Con)
 Fletcher, Mark Peter (Bolsover) (Con)
 Fletcher, Nicholas Anthony (Don Valley) (Con)
 Flynn, Stephen Mark (Aberdeen South) (SNP)
 Ford, Victoria Grace (Chelmsford) (Con)
 Foster, Kevin John (Torbay) (Con)
 Fovargue, Yvonne Helen (Makerfield) (Lab)
 Fox, Rt Hon. Liam (North Somerset) (Con)
 Foxcroft, Victoria Jane (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)
 Foy, Mary Kelly (City of Durham) (Lab)
 Francois, Rt Hon. Mark Gino (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)
 Freeman, George William (Mid Norfolk) (Con)
 Freer, Michael Whitney (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)
 French, Louie Thomas (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con) [*By-election, December 2021*]
 Fuller, Richard Quentin (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)
 Furniss, Gillian (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab)
 Fysh, Marcus John Hudson (Yeovil) (Con)

G

Gale, Rt Hon. Sir Roger James (North Thanet) (Con)
 Gardiner, Barry Strachan (Brent North) (Lab)
 Garnier, Mark Robert Timothy (Wyre Forest) (Con)
 Gibb, Rt Hon. Nicolas John (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)
 Gibson, Patricia (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)
 Gibson, Peter Alexander (Darlington) (Con)
 Gideon, Joanna Mary (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)
 Gildernew, Michelle Angela (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (SF)
 Gill, Preet Kaur (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)
 Gillan, Dame Cheryl Elise Kendall (Chesham and Amersham) (Con) [*Died, April 2021*]
 Girvan, William Paul (South Antrim) (DUP)
 Glen, John Philip (Salisbury) (Con)

Glindon, Mary Theresa (North Tyneside) (Lab)
 Goodwill, Rt Hon. Sir Robert (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)
 Gove, Rt Hon. Michael Andrew (Surrey Heath) (Con)
 Grady, Patrick John (Glasgow North) (SNP)
 Graham, Richard Michael John Ogilvie (Gloucester) (Con)
 Grant, Helen (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)
 Grant, Peter (Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gray, James Whiteside (North Wiltshire) (Con)
 Gray, Neil Charles (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) [*Resigned, March 2021*]
 Grayling, Rt Hon. Christopher Stephen (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)
 Green, Christopher James (Bolton West) (Con)
 Green, Rt Hon. Damian Howard (Ashford) (Con)
 Green, Katherine Anne (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)
 Green, Sarah Louise (Chesham and Amersham) (LD) [*By-election, June 2021*]
 Greenwood, Lilian Rachel (Nottingham South) (Lab)
 Greenwood, Margaret (Wirral West) (Lab)
 Griffith, Andrew (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)
 Griffith, Nia Rhiannon (Llanelli) (Lab)
 Griffiths, Kate Elizabeth (Burton) (Con)
 Grundy, James Nelson (Leigh) (Con)
 Gullis, Jonathan Edward (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)
 Gwynne, Andrew John (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)

H

Haigh, Louise Margaret (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)
 Halfon, Rt Hon. Robert Henry (Harlow) (Con)
 Hall, Luke Anthony (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)
 Hamilton, Fabian (Leeds North East) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Paulette Adassa (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab) [*By-election, March 2022*]
 Hammond, Stephen William (Wimbledon) (Con)
 Hancock, Rt Hon. Matthew John David (West Suffolk) (Con)
 Hands, Rt Hon. Gregory William (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)
 Hanna, Claire Aisling (Belfast South) (SDLP)
 Hanvey, James Neale (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba)
 Hardy, Emma Ann (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)
 Harman, Rt Hon. Harriet Ruth (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)
 Harper, Rt Hon. Mark James (Forest of Dean) (Con)
 Harris, Carolyn (Swansea East) (Lab)
 Harris, Rebecca Elizabeth Scott (Castle Point) (Con)
 Harrison, Trudy Lynne (Copeland) (Con)
 Hart, Sally-Ann (Hastings and Rye) (Con)
 Hart, Simon Anthony (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)
 Hayes, Helen Elizabeth (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)
 Hayes, Rt Hon. Sir John Henry (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)
 Hazzard, Christopher John (South Down) (SF)
 Heald, Rt Hon. Sir Oliver (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)
 Healey, Rt Hon. John (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)
 Heapey, James Stephen (Wells) (Con)
 Heaton-Harris, Rt Hon. Christopher (Daventry) (Con)
 Henderson, Gordon Leonard (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)
 Hendrick, Sir Mark Phillip (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)
 Hendry, Andrew Egan Henderson (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)

Henry, Darren George (Broxtowe) (Con)
 Higginbotham, Antony (Burnley) (Con)
 Hill, Michael Robert (Hartlepool) (Lab) [*Resigned, March 2021*]
 Hillier, Dame Margaret Olivia (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op)
 Hinds, Rt Hon. Damian Patrick George (East Hampshire) (Con)
 Hoare, Simon James (North Dorset) (Con)
 Hobhouse, Wera Benedicta (Bath) (LD)
 Hodge, Rt Hon. Dame Margaret Eve (Barking) (Lab)
 Hodgson, Sharon (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)
 Holden, Richard John (North West Durham) (Con)
 Hollern, Catherine Malloy (Blackburn) (Lab)
 Hollinrake, Kevin Paul (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)
 Hollobone, Philip Thomas (Kettering) (Con)
 Holloway, Adam James Harold (Gravesham) (Con)
 Holmes, Paul John (Eastleigh) (Con)
 Hopkins, Rachel Louise (Luton South) (Lab)
 Hosie, Rt Hon. Stewart (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Howarth, Rt Hon. Sir George Edward (Knowsley) (Lab)
 Howell, John Michael (Henley) (Con)
 Howell, Paul (Sedgefield) (Con)
 Hoyle, Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Harvey (Chorley) (Speaker)
 Huddleston, Nigel Paul (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)
 Hudson, Neil Peter Hammerton (Penrith and The Border) (Con)
 Hughes, Edmund Francis (Walsall North) (Con)
 Hunt, Jane Marion (Loughborough) (Con)
 Hunt, Rt Hon. Jeremy Richard Streynsham (South West Surrey) (Con)
 Hunt, Thomas Patrick (Ipswich) (Con)
 Huq, Rupa Asha (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)
 Hussain, Imran (Bradford East) (Lab)

J

Jack, Rt Hon. Alister William (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)
 Jardine, Christine Anne (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Jarvis, Daniel Owen (Barnsley Central) (Lab)
 Javid, Rt Hon. Sajid (Bromsgrove) (Con)
 Jayawardena, Ranil Malcolm (North East Hampshire) (Con)
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard Christison (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)
 Jenkinson, Mark Ian (Workington) (Con)
 Jenkyns, Andrea Marie (Morley and Outwood) (Con)
 Jenrick, Rt Hon. Robert Edward (Newark) (Con)
 Johnson, Rt Hon. Alexander Boris de Pfeffel (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)
 Johnson, Caroline Elizabeth (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)
 Johnson, Rt Hon. Dame Diana Ruth (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)
 Johnson, Gareth Alan (Dartford) (Con)
 Johnson, Kim Marie (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)
 Johnston, David Mervyn (Wantage) (Con)
 Jones, Andrew Hanson (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con)
 Jones, Darren Paul (Bristol North West) (Lab)
 Jones, Rt Hon. David Ian (Clwyd West) (Con)
 Jones, Fay Alicia (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)
 Jones, Gerald (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)
 Jones, Rt Hon. Kevan (North Durham) (Lab)
 Jones, Marcus Charles (Nuneaton) (Con)
 Jones, Ruth Lorraine (Newport West) (Lab)
 Jones, Sarah Ann (Croydon Central) (Lab)
 Jupp, Simon James (East Devon) (Con)

K

Kane, Michael Joseph Patrick (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)
 Kawczynski, Daniel Robert (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)
 Kearns, Alicia Alexandra Martha (Rutland and Melton) (Con)
 Keegan, Gillian (Chichester) (Con)
 Keeley, Barbara Mary (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)
 Kendall, Elizabeth Louise (Leicester West) (Lab)
 Khan, Mohammed Afzal (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)
 Kinnock, Stephen Nathan (Aberavon) (Lab)
 Knight, Rt Hon. Sir Gregory (East Yorkshire) (Con)
 Knight, Julian Carlton (Solihull) (Con)
 Kruger, Daniel Rayne (Devizes) (Con)
 Kwarteng, Rt Hon. Kwasi Alfred Addo (Spelthorne) (Con)
 Kyle, Peter John (Hove) (Lab)

L

Laing, Rt Hon. Dame Eleanor Fulton (Epping Forest) (Con)
 Lake, Ben Morgan (Ceredigion) (PC)
 Lammy, Rt Hon. David Lindon (Tottenham) (Lab)
 Lamont, John Robert (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)
 Largan, Robert (High Peak) (Con)
 Latham, Pauline Elizabeth (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)
 Lavery, Ian (Wansbeck) (Lab)
 Law, Christopher Murray Alexander (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Leadbeater, Kim Michele (Batley and Spen) (Lab) [*By-election, July 2021*]
 Leadsom, Rt Hon. Dame Andrea Jacqueline (South Northamptonshire) (Con)
 Leigh, Rt Hon. Sir Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough) (Con)
 Leigh, Lucy Claire (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)
 Levy, Ian (Blyth Valley) (Con)
 Lewell-Buck, Emma Louise (South Shields) (Lab)
 Lewer, Andrew Iain (Northampton South) (Con)
 Lewis, Rt Hon. Brandon (Great Yarmouth) (Con)
 Lewis, Clive Anthony (Norwich South) (Lab)
 Lewis, Rt Hon. Julian Murray (New Forest East) (Con)
 Liddell-Grainger, Ian Richard Peregrine (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)
 Linden, David Melvyn (Glasgow East) (SNP)
 Lloyd, Sir Anthony Joseph (Rochdale) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Carla Rebecca (Upper Bann) (DUP)
 Loder, Christopher Lionel John (West Dorset) (Con)
 Logan, Mark Rory (Bolton North East) (Con)
 Long-Bailey, Rebecca (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)
 Longhi, Marco (Dudley North) (Con)
 Lopez, Julia Louise (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)
 Lopresti, Giacomo Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)
 Lord, Jonathan George Caladine (Woking) (Con)
 Loughton, Timothy Paul (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)
 Lucas, Caroline (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)

M

MacAskill, Kenny Wright (East Lothian) (Alba)
 McCabe, Stephen James (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)
 McCarthy, Kerry Gillian (Bristol East) (Lab)
 McCartney, Jason (Colne Valley) (Con)

McCartney, Karl (Lincoln) (Con)
 McDonagh, Siobhain Ann (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)
 McDonald, Andrew Joseph (Middlesbrough) (Lab)
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm (Glasgow South) (SNP)
 McDonald, Stuart Campbell (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)
 McDonnell, Rt Hon. John Martin (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)
 McFadden, Rt Hon. Patrick Bosco (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)
 McGinn, Conor Patrick (St Helens North) (Lab)
 McGovern, Alison (Wirral South) (Lab)
 Mackinlay, Craig (South Thanet) (Con)
 McKinnell, Catherine (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)
 Mackrory, Cherilyn (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)
 McLaughlin, Elizabeth Anne (Glasgow North East) (SNP)
 Maclean, Rachel Helen (Redditch) (Con)
 McMahan, James (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op)
 McMorrin, Anna Rhiannon (Cardiff North) (Lab)
 Mc Nally, John Joseph (Falkirk) (SNP)
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 McPartland, Stephen Anthony (Stevenage) (Con)
 McVey, Rt Hon. Esther Louise (Tatton) (Con)
 Madders, Justin Piers Richard (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)
 Mahmood, Khalid (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)
 Mahmood, Shabana (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)
 Mak, Alan (Havant) (Con)
 Malhotra-Saluja, Seema (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op)
 Malthouse, Rt Hon. Christopher Laurie (North West Hampshire) (Con)
 Mangnall, Anthony James Holland (Totnes) (Con)
 Mann, Scott Leslie (North Cornwall) (Con)
 Marson, Julie (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)
 Maskell, Rachael Helen (York Central) (Lab/Co-op)
 Maskey, Paul John (Belfast West) (SF)
 Matheson, Christian John Patrick (City of Chester) (Lab)
 May, Rt Hon. Theresa Mary (Maidenhead) (Con)
 Mayhew, Jerome Patrick Burke (Broadland) (Con)
 Maynard, Paul Christopher (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)
 Mearns, James Ian (Gateshead) (Lab)
 Menzies, Mark Andrew (Fylde) (Con)
 Mercer, John Luther (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con)
 Merriman, Huw William (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)
 Metcalfe, Stephen James (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)
 Miliband, Rt Hon. Edward Samuel (Doncaster North) (Lab)
 Millar, Robin John (Aberconwy) (Con)
 Miller, Rt Hon. Maria Frances Lewis (Basingstoke) (Con)
 Milling, Rt Hon. Amanda Anne (Cannock Chase) (Con)
 Mills, Nigel John (Amber Valley) (Con)
 Mishra, Navendu Prabhat (Stockport) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Rt Hon. Andrew John Bower (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)
 Mohindra, Gagan (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)
 Molloy, Francis Joseph (Mid Ulster) (SF)
 Monaghan, Carol Frances (Glasgow North West) (SNP)
 Moore, Damien (Southport) (Con)
 Moore, Robert Peter (Keighley) (Con)
 Moran, Layla Michelle (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)

Mordaunt, Rt Hon. Penelope Mary (Portsmouth North) (Con)
 Morden, Jessica Elizabeth (Newport East) (Lab)
 Morgan, Helen Margaret Lilian (North Shropshire) (LD) [*By-election, December 2021*]
 Morgan, Stephen James (Portsmouth South) (Lab)
 Morris, Anne Marie (Newton Abbot) (Ind)
 Morris, David Thomas (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)
 Morris, Grahame Mark (Easington) (Lab)
 Morris, James (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con)
 Morrissey, Joy Inboden (Beaconsfield) (Con)
 Mortimer, Jillian Wendy (Hartlepool) (Con) [*By-election, May 2021*]
 Morton, Wendy (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)
 Mullan, Kieran John (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)
 Mumby-Croft, Holly (Scunthorpe) (Con)
 Mundell, Rt Hon. David Gordon (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)
 Murray, Ian (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 Murray, James Stewart (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)
 Murray, Sheryll (South East Cornwall) (Con)
 Murrison, Rt Hon. Andrew William (South West Wiltshire) (Con)

N

Nandy, Lisa Eva (Wigan) (Lab)
 Neill, Sir Robert James MacGillivray (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)
 Newlands, Gavin Andrew Stuart (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)
 Nichols, Charlotte Louise (Warrington North) (Lab)
 Nici-Townend, Lia (Great Grimsby) (Con)
 Nicolson, John MacKenzie (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)
 Nokes, Rt Hon. Caroline Fiona Ellen (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)
 Norman, Rt Hon. Alexander Jesse (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)
 Norris, Alexander James Jordan (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)

O

O'Brien, Neil John (Harborough) (Con)
 Offord, Matthew James (Hendon) (Con)
 O'Hara, Brendan (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Olney, Sarah Jane (Richmond Park) (LD)
 Onwurah, Chinyelu Susan (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)
 Opperman, Guy Thomas (Hexham) (Con)
 Oppong-Asare, Abena (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)
 Osamor, Kate Ofunne (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)
 Oswald, Kirsten Frances Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)
 Owatemi, Taiwo (Coventry North West) (Lab)
 Owen, Sarah Mei Li (Luton North) (Lab)

P

Paisley, Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim) (DUP)
 Parish, Neil Quentin Gordon (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con) [*Resigned, May 2022*]
 Patel, Rt Hon. Priti Sushil (Witham) (Con)
 Paterson, Rt Hon. Owen William (North Shropshire) (Con) [*Resigned, November 2021*]
 Pawsey, Mark Julian Francis (Rugby) (Con)

Peacock, Stephanie Louise (Barnsley East) (Lab)
 Penning, Rt Hon. Sir Michael (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)
 Pennycook, Matthew Thomas (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)
 Penrose, John David (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)
 Percy, Andrew Theakstone (Brigg and Goole) (Con)
 Perkins, Matthew Toby (Chesterfield) (Lab)
 Phillips, Jessica Rose (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)
 Phillipson, Bridget Maeve (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)
 Philp, Chris Ian Brian Mynott (Croydon South) (Con)
 Pincher, Rt Hon. Christopher John (Tamworth) (Con)
 Plunkett-Ernle-Erle-Drax, Richard Grosvenor (South Dorset) (Con)
 Pollard, Luke (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)
 Poulter, Daniel Leonard James (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)
 Powell, Lucy Maria (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)
 Prentis, Victoria Mary Boswell (Banbury) (Con)
 Pritchard, Rt Hon. Mark Andrew (The Wrekin) (Con)
 Pursglove, Thomas Christopher John (Corby) (Con)

Q

Qaisar, Anum (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) [*By-election, May 2021*]
 Quin, Jeremy Mark (Horsham) (Con)
 Quince, William James (Colchester) (Con)
 Qureshi, Yasmin (Bolton South East) (Lab)

R

Raab, Rt Hon. Dominic Rennie (Esher and Walton) (Con)
 Randall, Thomas William (Gedling) (Con)
 Rayner, Rt Hon. Angela (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)
 Redwood, Rt Hon. Sir John Alan (Wokingham) (Con)
 Reed, Steven Mark Ward (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)
 Rees, Christina Elizabeth (Neath) (Lab/Co-op)
 Rees-Mogg, Rt Hon. Jacob William (North East Somerset) (Con)
 Reeves, Eleanor Claire (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)
 Reeves, Rachel Jane (Leeds West) (Lab)
 Reynolds, Jonathan Neil (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op)
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bellavia Janet (Streatham) (Lab)
 Richards, Nicola Faye (West Bromwich East) (Con)
 Richardson, Angela Joy (Guildford) (Con)
 Rimmer, Marie Elizabeth (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)
 Roberts, Robert Joseph (Delyn) (Ind)
 Robertson, Laurence Anthony (Tewkesbury) (Con)
 Robinson, Gavin James (Belfast East) (DUP)
 Robinson, Mary Josephine (Cheadle) (Con)
 Rodda, Mathew Richard Allen (Reading East) (Lab)
 Rosindell, Andrew Richard (Romford) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas Gordon (Moray) (Con)
 Rowley, Lee Benjamin (North East Derbyshire) (Con)
 Russell, Dean (Watford) (Con)
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)
 Rutley, David Henry (Macclesfield) (Con)

S

Sambrook, Gary William (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con)
 Saville Roberts, Rt Hon. Liz (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)
 Saxby, Selaine Rachel (North Devon) (Con)
 Scully, Paul Stuart (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)
 Seely, Robert William Henry (Isle of Wight) (Con)
 Selous, Andrew Edmund Armstrong (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)
 Shah, Naseem Akhtar (Bradford West) (Lab)
 Shannon, Richard James (Strangford) (DUP)
 Shapps, Rt Hon. Grant (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)
 Sharma, Rt Hon. Alok Kumar (Reading West) (Con)
 Sharma, Virendra Kumar (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)
 Sheerman, Barry John (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)
 Shelbrooke, Rt Hon. Alec (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)
 Sheppard, Thomas (Edinburgh East) (SNP)
 Siddiq, Tulip Rizwana (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)
 Simmonds, David Timothy (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)
 Skidmore, Rt Hon. Christopher James (Kingswood) (Con)
 Slaughter, Andrew Francis (Hammersmith) (Lab)
 Smith, Alyn Edward (Stirling) (SNP)
 Smith, Catherine Jane Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)
 Smith, Chloe Rebecca (Norwich North) (Con)
 Smith, Greg (Buckingham) (Con)
 Smith, Henry Edward Millar (Crawley) (Con)
 Smith, Jeffrey (Manchester, Withington) (Lab)
 Smith, Rt Hon. Julian Richard (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)
 Smith, Nicholas Desmond John (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)
 Smith, Royston Matthew (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)
 Smyth, Karin Marguerite (Bristol South) (Lab)
 Sobel, Alexander David (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op)
 Solloway, Amanda Jane (Derby North) (Con)
 Spellar, Rt Hon. John Francis (Warley) (Lab)
 Spencer, Ben (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)
 Spencer, Rt Hon. Mark Steven (Sherwood) (Con)
 Stafford, Alexander Paul Thomas (Rother Valley) (Con)
 Starmer, Rt Hon. Sir Keir (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)
 Stephenson, Christopher Charles (Glasgow South West) (SNP)
 Stephenson, Andrew George (Pendle) (Con)
 Stevens, Joanna Meriel (Cardiff Central) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Andrew John (Carlisle) (Con)
 Stevenson, Jane Fiona Catherine (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)
 Stewart, Iain Aitken (Milton Keynes South) (Con)
 Stewart, Rt Hon. Robert Alexander (Beckenham) (Con)
 Stone, Jamie Hume (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Streeter, Sir Gary Nicholas (South West Devon) (Con)
 Streeting, Wesley Paul William (Ilford North) (Lab)
 Stride, Rt Hon. Melvyn John (Central Devon) (Con)
 Stringer, Graham Eric (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)
 Stuart, Graham Charles (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)
 Sturdy, Julian Charles (York Outer) (Con)
 Sultana, Zarah (Coventry South) (Lab)
 Sunak, Rt Hon. Rishi (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con)
 Sunderland, James (Bracknell) (Con)
 Swayne, Rt Hon. Sir Desmond Angus (New Forest West) (Con)
 Syms, Sir Robert Andrew Raymond (Poole) (Con)

T

Tami, Rt Hon. Mark Richard (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab)
 Tarry, Samuel Peter (Ilford South) (Lab)
 Thewliss, Alison Emily (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
 Thomas, Derek Gordon (St Ives) (Con)
 Thomas, Gareth (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)
 Thomas-Symonds, Rt Hon. Nicklaus (Torfaen) (Lab)
 Thompson, Owen George (Midlothian) (SNP)
 Thomson, Richard Gordon (Gordon) (SNP)
 Thornberry, Rt Hon. Emily (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)
 Throup, Margaret Ann (Erewash) (Con)
 Timms, Rt Hon. Stephen Creswell (East Ham) (Lab)
 Timpson, Anthony Edward (Eddisbury) (Con)
 Tolhurst, Kelly Jane (Rochester and Strood) (Con)
 Tomlinson, Justin Paul (North Swindon) (Con)
 Tomlinson-Mynors, Michael James (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con)
 Tracey, Craig Paul (North Warwickshire) (Con)
 Trevelyan, Rt Hon. Anne-Marie Belinda (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)
 Trickett, Jon Hedley (Hemsworth) (Lab)
 Trott, Laura (Sevenoaks) (Con)
 Truss, Rt Hon. Elizabeth Mary (South West Norfolk) (Con)
 Tugendhat, Thomas Georg John (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)
 Turner, Karl (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)
 Twigg, John Derek (Halton) (Lab)
 Twist, Mary Elizabeth (Blaydon) (Lab)

U

Ul-Ghani, Nusrat Munir (Wealden) (Con)

V

Vara, Shailesh Lakhman (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)
 Vaz, Rt Hon. Valerie Carol Marian (Walsall South) (Lab)
 Vickers, Martin John (Cleethorpes) (Con)
 Vickers, Matthew Alexander (Stockton South) (Con)
 Villiers, Rt Hon. Theresa Anne (Chipping Barnet) (Con)

W

Wakeford, Christian (Bury South) (Lab)
 Walker, Sir Charles Ashley Rupert (Broxbourne) (Con)

Walker, Robin Caspar (Worcester) (Con)
 Walker-Lynch, Holly Jamie (Halifax) (Lab)
 Wallace, Rt Hon. Robert Ben Lobban (Wyre and Preston North) (Con)
 Wallis, Jamie Hamilton (Bridgend) (Con)
 Warburton, David John (Somerton and Frome) (Ind)
 Warman, Matthew Robert (Boston and Skegness) (Con)
 Watling, Giles Francis (Clacton) (Con)
 Webb, Suzanne (Stourbridge) (Con)
 Webbe, Claudia Naomi (Leicester East) (Ind)
 West, Catherine Elizabeth (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)
 Western, Matthew Raymond (Warwick and Leamington) (Con)
 Whately, Helen Olivia Bicknell (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)
 Wheeler, Heather Kay (South Derbyshire) (Con)
 Whitehead, Alan Patrick Vincent (Southampton, Test) (Lab)
 Whitford, Philippa (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)
 Whitley, Michael (Birkenhead) (Lab)
 Whittaker, Craig (Calder Valley) (Con)
 Whittingdale, Rt Hon. John Flasby Lawrance (Maldon) (Con)
 Whittome, Nadia Edith (Nottingham East) (Lab)
 Wiggin, Sir William David (North Herefordshire) (Con)
 Wild, James Oliver (North West Norfolk) (Con)
 Williams, Alun Craig (Montgomeryshire) (Con)
 Williams, Hywel (Arfon) (PC)
 Williamson, Rt Hon. Sir Gavin Alexander (South Staffordshire) (Con)
 Wilson, Munira (Twickenham) (LD)
 Wilson, Rt Hon. Samuel (East Antrim) (DUP)
 Winter, Bethan (Cynon Valley) (Lab)
 Winterton, Rt Hon. Dame Rosalie (Doncaster Central) (Lab)
 Wishart, Peter (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)
 Wood, Michael Jon (Dudley South) (Con)
 Wragg, William Peter (Hazel Grove) (Con)
 Wright, Rt Hon. Jeremy Paul (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)

Y

Yasin, Mohammad (Bedford) (Lab)
 Young, Jacob (Redcar) (Con)

Z

Zahawi, Rt Hon. Nadhim (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)
 Zeichner, Daniel Stephen (Cambridge) (Lab)

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(FORMED BY THE RT HON. BORIS JOHNSON, MP, DECEMBER 2019)

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY, MINISTER FOR THE UNION AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—
The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE—The Rt Hon. Dominic Raab, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS, AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND
EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt Hon. Priti Patel, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE—The Rt Hon. Ben Wallace, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER AND MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE—The Rt Hon. Stephen Barclay, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES AND MINISTER FOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS—
The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE—The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY—The Rt Hon. Kwasi Kwarteng, MP

COP26 PRESIDENT—The Rt Hon. Alok Sharma, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—
The Rt Hon. Anne-Marie Trevelyan, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS—The Rt Hon. Dr Thérèse Coffey, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION—The Rt Hon. Nadhim Zahawi, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—The Rt Hon. George Eustice, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT—The Rt Hon. Grant Shapps, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt Hon. Brandon Lewis CBE, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt Hon. Alister Jack, MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt Hon. Simon Hart, MP

LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND LORD PRIVY SEAL—The Rt Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT—The Rt Hon. Nadine Dorries, MP

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO—The Rt Hon. Oliver Dowden, MP

MINISTER FOR BREXIT OPPORTUNITIES AND GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY—The Rt Hon. Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Kwasi Kwarteng, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Greg Hands, MP (Minister for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change)

Lord Grimstone of Boscobel Kt (Minister for Investment) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

George Freeman, MP

Paul Scully, MP

Lee Rowley, MP §

Lord Callanan

Cabinet Office—

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY, MINISTER FOR THE UNION AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—
The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt Hon. Stephen Barclay, MP

MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE AND PAYMASTER GENERAL—The Rt Hon. Michael Ellis, QC, MP

COP26 PRESIDENT—The Rt Hon. Alok Sharma, MP

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO—The Rt Hon. Oliver Dowden CBE, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Jacob Rees-Mogg, MP (Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency)

Lord True CBE

The Rt Hon. Nigel Adams, MP (Minister without Portfolio)

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES—

Leo Docherty, MP (Minister for Defence People and Veterans) §

Andrew Griffith, MP (Minister for Policy and Head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit)

Heather Wheeler, MP §

Defence—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Ben Wallace, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Jeremy Quin, MP (Minister for Defence Procurement)

Baroness Goldie DL

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

James Heappey, MP (Minister for the Armed Forces)
 Leo Docherty, MP (Minister for Defence People and Veterans) §

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Nadine Dorries, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—Julia Lopez, MP (Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Nigel Huddleston, MP
 Chris Philp, MP
 Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay §

Education—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Nadhim Zahawi, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Michelle Donelan, MP (Minister for Higher and Further Education)
 Robin Walker, MP (Minister for School Standards)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Baroness Barran MBE
 Alex Burghart, MP
 Will Quince, MP

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. George Eustice, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Minister for the Pacific and the International Environment) §
 Victoria Prentis, MP (Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Rebecca Pow, MP
 The Rt Hon. Lord Benyon
 Jo Churchill, MP

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES—The Rt Hon. Elizabeth Truss, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. James Cleverly, MP (Minister for Europe and North America)
 The Rt Hon. Amanda Milling, MP (Minister for Asia and the Middle East)
 Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Minister for South and Central Asia, North Africa, the United Nations and the Commonwealth)
 The Rt Hon. Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Minister for the Pacific and the International Environment) §
 Kemi Badenoch, MP (Minister for Equalities) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Vicky Ford, MP
 Baroness Stedman-Scott OBE DL (Minister for Women) §
 Mike Freer, MP (Minister for Equalities) §

Health and Social Care—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Sajid Javid, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Edward Argar, MP (Minister for Health)
 Gillian Keegan, MP (Minister for Care and Mental Health)

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Maggie Throup, MP
 Lord Kamall
 Maria Caulfield, MP

Home Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Priti Patel, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Damian Hinds, MP (Minister for Security and Borders)
 The Rt Hon. Kit Malthouse, MP (Minister for Crime and Policing) §
 The Rt Hon. Baroness Williams of Trafford §
 Lord Greenhalgh (Minister for Building Safety and Fire) §
 Lord Harrington of Watford (Minister for Refugees) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Kevin Foster, MP
 Rachel Maclean, MP
 Tom Pursglove, MP §

International Trade—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Anne-Marie Trevelyan, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Penny Mordaunt, MP (Minister for Trade Policy)
 Lord Grimstone of Boscobel Kt (Minister for Investment) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Ranil Jayawardena, MP
 Mike Freer, MP §

Justice—

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Dominic Raab, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Kit Malthouse, MP (Minister for Crime and Policing) §
 Victoria Atkins, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Tom Pursglove, MP §
 James Cartlidge, MP §

Law Officers—

ATTORNEY GENERAL—The Rt Hon. Suella Braverman, QC, MP

SOLICITOR GENERAL—Alex Chalk, QC, MP

ADVOCATE GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Lord Stewart of Dirleton, QC

Leader of the House of Commons—

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt Hon. Mark Spencer, MP

Leader of the House of Lords—

LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt. Hon. Baroness Evans of Bowes Park

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt Hon. Earl Howe CBE

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities—

SECRETARY OF STATE AND MINISTER FOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS—The Rt Hon. Michael Gove, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

The Rt Hon. Stuart Andrew, MP (Minister for Housing)
 Kemi Badenoch, MP (Minister for Levelling Up Communities) §
 Lord Greenhalgh (Minister for Building Safety and Fire) §
 Lord Harrington of Watford (Minister for Refugees) §

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Eddie Hughes, MP
 Neil O'Brien, MP

Northern Ireland Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Brandon Lewis CBE, MP

MINISTER OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Conor Burns, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Lord Caine

Scotland Office—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Alister Jack, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Iain Stewart, MP
 Lord Offord of Garvel

Transport—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Grant Shapps, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Andrew Stephenson, MP
 Wendy Morton, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

Baroness Vere of Norbiton
 Robert Courts, MP
 Trudy Harrison, MP

Treasury—

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY, MINISTER FOR THE UNION AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt Hon. Boris Johnson, MP

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak, MP

CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Simon Clarke, MP

FINANCIAL SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Lucy Frazer, QC, MP

ECONOMIC SECRETARY—John Glen, MP

EXCHEQUER SECRETARY—Helen Whately, MP

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt Hon. Chris Heaton-Harris, MP

LORDS COMMISSIONERS—

Rebecca Harris, MP
 Michael Tomlinson, MP
 Alan Mak, MP
 Lee Rowley, MP §
 Amanda Solloway, MP
 Gareth Johnson, MP

ASSISTANT WHIPS—

Scott Mann, MP
 David T. C. Davies, MP §
 James Cartlidge, MP §
 Heather Wheeler, MP §
 Andrea Jenkyns, MP
 Steve Double, MP
 Sarah Dines, MP

UK Export Finance—

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt Hon. Anne-Marie Trevelyan, MP
 PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Mike Freer, MP §

Wales Office —

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Simon Hart, MP
 PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—David T. C. Davies, MP §

Work and Pensions—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt Hon. Dr Thérèse Coffey, MP
 MINISTER OF STATE—Chloe Smith, MP (Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work)
 PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
 Mims Davies, MP
 Guy Opperman, MP
 David Rutley, MP
 Baroness Stedman-Scott OBE DL §

Her Majesty's Household—

LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt Hon. Lord Parker of Minsmere, KCB
 LORD STEWARD—The Earl of Dalhousie
 MASTER OF THE HORSE—Lord de Mauley
 TREASURER—The Rt Hon. Christopher Pincher, MP
 COMPTROLLER—Marcus Jones, MP
 VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—James Morris, MP
 CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt Hon. Lord Ashton of Hyde
 CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD—Earl of Courtown
 BARONESSES IN WAITING—
 Baroness Scott of Bybrook OBE
 Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist
 Baroness Penn (Minister on Leave)
 LORDS IN WAITING—
 Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay §
 Viscount Younger of Leckie
 Lord Sharpe of Epsom OBE

§ *Members of the Government listed under more than one Department*

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING THE CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—Andrew Selous, MP
 REPRESENTING THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION—Christian Matheson, MP
 REPRESENTING THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY—
 Sir Charles Walker, MP
 REPRESENTING THE HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—Sir Charles Walker, MP
 REPRESENTING THE PARLIAMENTARY WORKS SPONSOR BODY—The Rt Hon. Mark Tami, MP
 CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION—The Rt Hon. Sir Edward Leigh, MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Dame Eleanor Laing, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Dame Rosie Winterton, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt Hon. Mr Nigel Evans, MP

PANEL OF CHAIRS—

Rushanara Ali, Hannah Bardell, Mr Clive Betts, Mr Peter Bone, Sir Graham Brady, Sir Christopher Chope, Judith Cummins, Geraint Davies, Philip Davies, Peter Dowd, Dame Angela Eagle, Clive Efford, Julie Elliott, Yvonne Fovargue, The Rt Hon. Sir Roger Gale, Ms Nusrat Ghani, James Gray, Sir Mark Hendrick, Mr Philip Hollobone, The Rt Hon. Stewart Hosie, The Rt Hon. Sir George Howarth, Dr Rupa Huq, The Rt Hon. Sir Edward Leigh, Steve McCabe, Siobhain McDonagh, The Rt Hon. Esther McVey, The Rt Hon. Maria Miller, The Rt Hon. David Mundell, Mrs Sheryll Murray, The Rt Hon. Caroline Nokes, Ian Paisley, The Rt Hon. Mark Pritchard, Christina Rees, Mr Laurence Robertson, Andrew Rosindell, Mr Virendra Sharma, Sir Gary Streeter, Graham Stringer, Derek Twigg, Sir Charles Walker

SECRETARY—Chris Stanton

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—

The Rt Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Nickie Aiken MP, Dr John Benger (Clerk of the House and Head of the House of Commons Service), The Rt Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP, Marianne Cwynarski CBE (Director General, Operations), Thangam Debbonaire, MP, Mr Shrinivas Honap (External Member), The Rt Hon. Mark Spencer, MP (Leader of the House), Sir Charles Walker, MP, Louise Wilson (External Member), Pete Wishart, MP

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY—Edward Potton

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 17 DECEMBER 2019]

SEVENTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 714

FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 2022-2023

House of Commons

Tuesday 10 May 2022

*The House met at twenty-five minutes past
Eleven o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE TO ATTEND HER MAJESTY'S COUNSELLORS OF STATE

*Message to attend Her Majesty's Counsellors of State
delivered by the Lady Usher of the Black Rod.*

*The Speaker, with the House, went up to attend Her
Majesty's Counsellors of State; on their return, the Speaker
suspended the sitting.*

Speaker's Statement

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: The House has directed the Speaker to make a statement at the beginning of each Session about the duties and responsibilities of hon. Members. I begin by reminding hon. Members of their duty to observe the code of conduct agreed by the House and to behave with civility and fairness in all their dealings. The behaviour code applies to Members as it applies to others who visit or work in Parliament, and it provides clear guidance. Unacceptable behaviour will be dealt with seriously, independently and with effective sanctions.

The House asserts its privilege of freedom of speech. That privilege is enjoyed by Members of Parliament only in their work in this House; as private individuals, we are equal under the law with those whom we represent. It is there to ensure that our constituents can be represented by us without fear or favour. It is an obligation upon us all to exercise that privilege responsibly.

The Speaker does not have the power to police the accuracy of Members' contributions. Therefore, it is incumbent on Members to be accurate in what they say in this House, but if a Member is inaccurate by mistake, they should correct that mistake as soon as possible. Members must be mindful of the impact of what they say, not only on other Members but on others who follow our proceedings, and Members should be heard courteously, whatever their views.

In this place we are honourable Members and the language we use about each other should reflect that. If a Member falls short of the standards expected of us all, there are ways of dealing with that, but not by accusations made as sideswipes during questions or debates. If we fail to treat each other with respect in debate, that diminishes our work, but it also risks raising the temperature of discussions outside this place—particularly on social media—which already too often descend into online abuse against hon. Members.

I also wish to give some advice about seeking to speak in the Chamber. The Deputy Speakers and I take into account a number of factors when determining who to call during business that is not balloted, and one factor we consider carefully is how often a Member speaks—Jim Shannon is not with us. [*Laughter.*] In other words, if you have spoken much more than a colleague then, other things being equal, that colleague is more likely to be called—or certainly more likely to be called earlier—in the next debate for which you both apply.

I know it can be frustrating not to be called in a debate or to be called very late; prioritising the debates, question times, urgent questions and statements in which you seek to participate is one way of trying to avoid that happening. Now that we have started a new Session, everybody's scores start, after the reset button, at zero. I should make it clear that different principles apply to Front Benchers from the three largest parties, who are nominated to speak on behalf of their parties. Staff in my office are happy to offer further advice.

Finally, I want all Members and everyone in the parliamentary community to be able to go about their work safely, both online and here in Westminster.

The security of this building and those who work here depends on us all. We have a duty to be vigilant and to assist those whose job it is to maintain this place as a safe place to work. Before moving to the first business of the new Session, I would like to express my very best wishes to all hon. Members and to all those who work in this House.

OUTLAWRIES BILL

A Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries was read the First time, and ordered to be read a Second time.

Queen's Speech

Mr Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge, the Counsellors of State, acting on Her Majesty's behalf, in the House of Peers, and that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales delivered Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament on Her Majesty's behalf, in pursuance of Her Majesty's commands, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are already available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

Her Majesty's Government's priority is to grow and strengthen the economy and help ease the cost of living for families. Her Majesty's Government will level up opportunity in all parts of the country and support more people into work. Her Majesty's Ministers will continue to support the police to make the streets safer, and fund the National Health Service to reduce the COVID backlogs. In these challenging times, Her Majesty's Government will play a leading role in defending democracy and freedom across the world, including continuing to support the people of Ukraine.

Her Majesty's Government will drive economic growth to improve living standards and fund sustainable investment in public services. This will be underpinned by a responsible approach to the public finances, reducing debt while reforming and cutting taxes. Her Majesty's Ministers will support the Bank of England to return inflation to its target.

A bill will be brought forward to drive local growth, empowering local leaders to regenerate their areas, and ensuring everyone can share in the United Kingdom's success. The planning system will be reformed to give residents more involvement in local development.

Her Majesty's Government will improve transport across the United Kingdom, delivering safer, cleaner services and enabling more innovations. Legislation will be introduced to modernise rail services and improve reliability for passengers.

Her Majesty's Ministers will bring forward an Energy Bill to deliver the transition to cheaper, cleaner, and more secure energy. This will build on the success of the COP26 Summit in Glasgow last year. Draft legislation to promote competition, strengthen consumer rights and protect households and businesses will be published. Measures will also be published to create new competition rules for digital markets and the largest digital firms.

Her Majesty's Government will establish the UK Infrastructure Bank in legislation, with objectives to support economic growth and the delivery of net zero.

Reforms to education will help every child fulfil their potential wherever they live, raising standards and improving the quality of schools and higher education. Her Majesty's Ministers will publish draft legislation to reform the Mental Health Act.

Her Majesty's Government will continue to seize the opportunities of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, to support economic growth. Regulations on businesses will be repealed and reformed. A bill will

enable law inherited from the European Union to be more easily amended. Public sector procurement will be simplified to provide new opportunities for small businesses.

New legislation will strengthen the United Kingdom's financial services industry, ensuring that it continues to act in the interest of all people and communities. The United Kingdom's data protection regime will be reformed.

Her Majesty's Government will continue to champion international trade, delivering jobs across the country and growing the economy. Legislation will be introduced to enable the implementation of the United Kingdom's first new Free Trade Agreements since leaving the European Union.

Her Majesty's Ministers will encourage agricultural and scientific innovation at home. Legislation will unlock the potential of new technologies to promote sustainable and efficient farming and food production.

Her Majesty's Government will protect the integrity of the United Kingdom's borders and ensure the safety of its people. Her Majesty's Ministers will take action to prevent dangerous and illegal Channel crossings and tackle the criminal gangs who profit from facilitating them. Legislation will be introduced to ensure the police have the powers to make the streets safer.

A bill will be brought forward to further strengthen powers to tackle illicit finance, reduce economic crime and help businesses grow. Measures will be introduced to support the security services and help them protect the United Kingdom.

Her Majesty's Government will lead the way in championing security around the world. It will continue to invest in our gallant Armed Forces. Her Majesty's Ministers

will work closely with international partners to maintain a united NATO and address the most pressing global security challenges.

The continued success and integrity of the whole of the United Kingdom is of paramount importance to Her Majesty's Government, including the internal economic bonds between all of its parts. Her Majesty's Government will prioritise support for the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and its institutions, including through legislation to address the legacy of the past.

Her Majesty's Government will ensure the constitution is defended. Her Majesty's Ministers will restore the balance of power between the legislature and the courts by introducing a Bill of Rights. Legislation will prevent public bodies engaging in boycotts that undermine community cohesion.

Her Majesty's Government will introduce legislation to improve the regulation of social housing to strengthen the rights of tenants and ensure better quality, safer homes. Legislation will also be introduced to ban conversion therapy. Proposals will be published to establish an independent regulator of English football.

In this year of the Platinum Jubilee, Her Majesty looks forward to the celebrations taking place across the United Kingdom and throughout the Commonwealth, and to the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham this summer.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the public services will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

Other measures will be laid before you.

Her Majesty prays that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

[1ST DAY]

Mr Speaker: Before I call the mover and seconder, I want to announce the proposed subjects of debate during the remaining days on the Loyal Address, which are: Wednesday 11 May—preventing crime and delivering justice; Thursday 12 May—fairness at work, power in communities; Monday 16 May—making Britain the best place to grow up and grow old; Tuesday 17 May—tackling the short-term and long-term cost of living increases; Wednesday 18 May—achieving economic growth.

I now have the pleasure of calling the shy and retiring Graham Stuart to move, and then Fay Jones to second, the Address.

2.37 pm

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which was addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

It is a great honour for me and my constituents in Beverley and Holderness that I propose the Humble Address, and all the more so in this platinum jubilee year—I think we can all take it as read that this packed Chamber is intimidating and creates a certain amount of nerves. We wish Her Majesty the best of health and thank her for her seven decades of service to the country. Her Majesty has demonstrated a selflessness that puts the rest of us, perhaps not least in here, to shame.

The legislative agenda we are debating today must be seen within the most alarming of international contexts. Russia's unprovoked and unjustifiable attack on Ukraine has united the whole House in condemnation. We stand together with our friends in Ukraine, and I congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the Leader of the Opposition, on his party's wholehearted backing for the measures to support the Ukrainians. We are providing rocket launchers, complete with rockets—so different from the Trident submarines that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's party previously proposed, which were to have been built but, hon. Members will remember, never armed.

No one in politics minds being senior but, equally, no one wishes to be seen as past it, yet today I fulfil the role of the old duffer whose best days are behind him, while my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) plays the part of the up-and-coming talent. The Chief Whip certainly made the right decision with the latter, as we shall soon hear. But given my part today, I thought I would dispense some advice, both to those seeking to enter Parliament and to young thrusters already here, many of whom were elected as long as two years ago—you know who you are. I cannot believe that you are still not in the Cabinet. Some of us are here for a long time, some for a short time—and some, according to our media friends, for a good time. *[Laughter.]*

For candidates, my advice is to keep going and realise how much simply comes down to luck. When I applied to Beverley and Holderness Conservative association, the senior officers had already decided who they were going to have as their candidate: none other than their then Member of the European Parliament, who would not be able to continue in that role, now my right hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Sir Robert Goodwill). After I won that selection, by two votes, two elderly lady members congratulated me and told me they had voted for me. The first one said to me, "You spoke very well, Mr Stuart." "Thank you", I said. The other one came in with, "Yes, but Robert Goodwill—he was brilliant", to which the other replied, "He's got a job already."

Robert, of course, won selection in Scarborough. He then went on to overturn Lawrie Quinn's 3,500 majority, and was, I think, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), the only Conservative candidate in the whole of the north of England to take a seat from the Labour party at that election. The Leader of the Opposition must wish it was so today. Instead the only thing opening up for him in the north is a police investigation. *[Laughter.]* Some months after the election, I met a member of my association's executive committee, who actually congratulated me and said that he was glad that I had been selected as a candidate after all. I thought at last my hard work was being recognised, and then he added, "Because you'd have never won Scarborough."

My constituency of Beverley and Holderness comprises four towns—Beverley, Hornsea, Withernsea and Hedon—and many other hamlets and villages that are dotted across east Yorkshire. It is a beautiful part of the world and has history as well as charm. Beverley has contributed more than most places to the improvement of our democratic system over the years—admittedly chiefly by running elections in such a corrupt manner that the law had to be changed afterwards. After the unseating of the victorious candidate in 1727 by a petition, his agents were imprisoned and Parliament passed a whole new bribery Act. But Beverley's notorious freemen were not to be put off so easily. Beverley continued to be a byword for electoral malpractice. The novelist Anthony Trollope stood in the Liberal interest, unsuccessfully, in 1868, and such was the level of wrongdoing that a royal commission was established especially and a new law passed disenfranchising the town and barring it from ever returning a Member of Parliament again. Obviously the law did change. Free beer and cash inducements were the electoral controversies then, rather than, say, beer and curry today. Never in the history of human conflict has so much karma come from a korma.

I said I would provide some advice for our up and coming parliamentarians. When I arrived here, I was just about wise enough to back the winner of the leadership contest that summer, David Cameron. What I was not wise enough to do was stop telling him every way in which I thought he was going wrong, and I do mean every way. Funnily enough, that resulted in an 11-year wait to be asked to go on to the Front Bench—a wait that ended only when he stepped down. It may be that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) saw merit where her predecessor did not, but it is more likely that she had just seen a lot less of me. Lesson one for the up and coming: do not make an enemy of your party leader.

There is of course more to this place than the Front Bench. In my first term, community hospitals were being closed in swathes right across the country, and all three in my constituency were lined up for the chop. Having led marches and demonstrations in all the towns across my constituency, it became obvious to me that the problem would not be solved locally, so I set up a campaign group, CHANT, or Community Hospitals Acting Nationally Together. Along with my deputy chairman, the then Member for Henley, I recruited colleagues from right across the House. We waged guerrilla warfare on Labour's Department of Health, breaking the record for the number of petitions presented in one day in this House.

We held a rally outside this place. There were hundreds of people, and banners and placards galore. David Cameron spoke; so did Labour MPs; and I remember my deputy giving a rousing speech. So carried away with the righteousness of our cause was he that he called on everyone to join us on a march to Parliament Square. So it was that our now Prime Minister found himself being intercepted by a police inspector, who told him that no permission existed for such a march, and that we must go back. There are two lessons here: never stop campaigning for what you believe in; and, having marched your troops to the top of the hill, never be afraid to march them down again, if circumstances necessitate it.

When the call did come, I was lucky enough to go into the Whips Office, the only communal playpen in Westminster aside from the crèche. Being there made me realise how little I knew after 11 years here, because as a Whip, you learn a lot. That is another lesson: join the Whips Office if asked.

Given my position, I would like to tell the House that being in government is not all it is cracked up to be, but actually it is. I served both my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) and my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss) when they were Secretary of State for International Trade. Both were exceptional. They were tireless and demanding, but delivered, from a new Department, outcomes that no one thought possible. So, young thrusters, enjoy any Department that you are in, and value it for itself, and not just as a stepping stone to something else. After all, as I discovered last September, you never know when you will be prematurely on the Back Benches.

Today's Queen's Speech unveils a substantial legislative programme under four main headings: boosting economic growth and helping with the cost of living; making our streets safer; funding the NHS and tackling the backlog; and, providing leadership in troubled times. To pick out one item, if I may, the energy Bill is of particular importance to my constituents. It will make possible the development of hydrogen, and of carbon capture and storage, on which I expect the Humber to be not only a national but a global leader. It will take us to net zero and give us energy security and huge export potential.

The Conservative party, under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, has work to do. We were elected to deliver our manifesto and level up the United Kingdom, and that is what we will do. Despite the human weakness that is all too present in this place, I believe that nearly everyone here is in politics for the right reasons, and that elected public service continues to be a noble calling. I hope that

potential candidates from all sides will continue to come forward; that young thrusters will show ambition for their country, as well as for themselves; and that before we fire legislative bullets at the challenges that face us, we will, in this platinum jubilee year, take aim and, like our Ukrainian friends, say with total conviction, "God save the Queen." I commend the Gracious Speech to this House.

Mr Speaker: I call Fay Jones to second the motion.

2.50 pm

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): It is a real honour to be asked to second the Loyal Address this afternoon, and an even greater one to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart). His was a pitch-perfect speech—an exemplar of how to do it—that undermined his status as a self-confessed old duffer. Members with more experience than me have seen many state openings, but this year's is undoubtedly special. Despite Her Majesty's absence this morning, the platinum jubilee is a lasting reminder of the Queen's immense devotion to duty. I know that everyone in the House wishes Her Majesty a speedy recovery.

At last year's Queen's Speech, I sat up in the Gallery, as seats in the Chamber were especially limited because of the covid regulations. As I watched my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher), get to her feet, I remember thinking to myself, "All the best, Fletch. I wouldn't want to be in your shoes right now," but karma comes at us fast, does it not, Chief Whip? Unlike my northern friend, I have the honour of addressing a packed Chamber, with faces free of the burden of face masks. Much as I loathed wearing a face mask in the Chamber, they certainly helped me by hiding the looks of disinterest and abject boredom whenever I got up to speak. This year, however, the cameras are on, so Members should at least try to look as though they are enjoying this.

On being asked to second the motion on the Gracious Speech, I turned to trusted friends and colleagues for advice.

The Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household (Christopher Pincher): Name them!

Fay Jones: All in good time, Deputy Chief Whip. The instant reaction of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) was, "Oh my God, love. You'd better be funny." My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken) told me that I would be "a total mess." Even my dad, a former Member and my inspiration in many ways, said after yesterday's rehearsal, "Well, you're going to have to tell the jokes better than that." But that is actually better feedback than he gave me at the start of my political career, at my count in 2019. The result had been declared, and I took to the podium to make my acceptance speech. My mum was beaming in the front row, and I saw my dad move to the back of the hall, presumably to get a better view or to take a photograph. Just a minute or so into my speech, however, he had had enough, and he gave me the signal to wind it up and get off the stage.

[Fay Jones]

With friends like those, I ran straight for the warm embrace of the House of Commons Library, where I discovered that I am the seventh Member from Wales to have taken part in the speech on the Loyal Address since 1874. I am the first woman from Wales and the first Conservative from Wales. However, I am very proud to say that my constituents in Brecon and Radnorshire have a long association with the Loyal Address. In 1975, one of my predecessors, Caerwyn Roderick, a senior figure in the Labour party, proposed the address. As Members will know, Brecon and Radnorshire is two thirds of the historic county of Powys, so with a proposer and now a seconder coming from the undisputed better half of the county, I wonder how my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) feels this afternoon, knowing that he is neither the “has been” nor the “will be” [Laughter.] I withdraw that, Mr Speaker.

My being asked to give this speech came as a surprise to many, most of all me. I was always afraid that I had torpedoed my political career long before it even began. In 2005, when I was at university, I shared a flat with a friend who was working on the campaign to make my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) the Conservative party leader. It was suggested to me and a few friends that wearing a pink T-shirt that said “It’s DD for me” would go down a storm at party conference. Turns out, it did! Sorry, David. So 14 years later, when I was asked at my selection meeting for Brecon and Radnorshire, “Have you ever done anything to embarrass the Conservative party?”, I had to say yes. I was later asked what I had learned from the incident, and I said that I do not look good in pink.

Today is a proud day for my constituency and my family. Apart from stints in London for university and working in Europe, I have lived my whole life in Wales. I was raised in a firmly Conservative household, and I think being a Conservative in Wales has helped me to develop the thick skin that I hope will get me through today. It certainly helped after last week’s results, anyway. In 2019, my hon. Friends the Members for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton) and for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) and I became the first three women to be elected to the Conservative Benches representing Welsh constituencies. I like to think that the three of us were worth the 100-year wait.

While we have some difficult questions to answer and challenges to meet on the treatment of women in this place, it is imperative that we do not put anyone off becoming a Member of Parliament. Yes, the House of Commons is a strange place to work and, yes, sometimes some people do not realise that they are part of the problem, but despite that, this is a place where women achieve great things.

It was a woman who introduced the Autism Act 2009—the late, and much-missed across this House, right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham. It was a woman who delivered the children’s funeral fund and who continues to be a pain in the Government’s neck on hormone replacement therapy—the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who I am sorry to see is not in her place today. It was a woman who secured inclusion in today’s Gracious Speech of the Government’s intention to license pedicabs right across the Cities of London and Westminster for the very first time—no

prizes for guessing who that was. And it was a woman, long before my time, who stood up to the might of the unions, empowered council tenants to buy their homes and, 40 years ago this year, protected the Falkland Islands. It is important that we say today that a woman’s place is in the House of Commons. By the way, it was also a woman who got £20 million out of the Treasury for the global centre of rail excellence, made cyber-flashing a criminal offence and got the Ministry of Defence to scrap the closure of Brecon barracks—just saying! [Interruption.] Yes, of course.

As much as we must attract more women to this place, we must do our utmost to attract a wide range of talents, so that our Benches are filled with the plain-speaking common sense of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), the distinguished professional experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) and, dare I say it, the political diplomacy of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis).

My Liberal Democrat opponents tell me that all I do is talk about farming and the military, so today I will keep them happy and do exactly that. During my maiden speech, I said that I felt I had won first prize in the lottery of life by becoming the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire. That is as true today as it was then. It is a glorious part of the world, stretching from the upper Swansea valley to just outside Ludlow. It is kept thriving by thousands of farmers, not trustafarian farmers who inherit their wealth, but the ordinary, mud-under-the-fingernail grafting farmer, who works year round to put food on our plates and give their kids a future.

The cost of living crisis is having a particular effect in rural areas. Costs of fuel and fertiliser are eye-watering, and that presents a real risk to our ability to feed ourselves. It is deeply tragic that it has taken war in Ukraine for us to focus on UK food security. If I do anything in this place, it will be to bang on about the importance of farming to this country—hence why I welcome the measures in the Gracious Address that will see British produce on tables around the world, and even the Online Safety Bill, which will protect the unsuspecting farmer from nefarious internet videos.

If you walk down the Watton in Brecon, Mr Speaker, as I know you have, you will see 24 trees honouring the 24th of Foot. A better name for them is the South Wales Borderers, and they fought at the battle of Rorke’s Drift, which was made iconic in the film “Zulu”. Whether Brecon barracks, the Sennybridge training area or the Navy’s outdoor leadership training centre in Talybont, my constituency is extremely proud of its military footprint. We are also home to the Cambrian Patrol, which is the Olympic gold medal in infantry training, a 60 km march for teams of eight over just 48 hours. He will be far too modest to tell you himself, Mr Speaker, but the Secretary of State for Wales is in fact a finisher of that event. So modest was he, so keen to keep his light under a bushel, that when we visited the Cambrian Patrol back in October, he brought his finisher’s certificate along with him and put it out on Twitter. It was dated 1987, and I took great joy in pointing out that I was two years old at the time—and I take great joy recounting it again now.

Over the years, many wrongs have been done to military veterans, and I applaud the efforts of those right across the House to correct that. The hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) has led on the Opposition

Benches in that effort. On this side of the House, my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and for Wrexham have spoken for male and female veterans in ways few can match. So on behalf of the many veterans I represent—particularly those who served in Northern Ireland and who tell me that they have been frightened of opening the post for decades—I warmly welcome the inclusion of the legacy Bill in today's Gracious Speech.

Let me conclude my seconding of the Loyal Address so that I can give way to the Leader of the Opposition. I know we are all delighted that he has not cancelled this afternoon's speech—I warmly welcome it on behalf of my constituents.

Today's Queen's Speech contains a commitment to right the historic imbalance that has pervaded this country for too long, and to level up all four corners of the United Kingdom. It offers leadership in turbulent times, it looks to the long term, ironing out our challenges of food and energy insecurity, and it makes best use of our new-found legislative freedoms. It helps this country to stand tall on the world stage, as it has done for so long, and it is my honour to commend this Gracious Speech to the House.

3.4 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Before I turn to the Address, I thank His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales for delivering the Address this morning. I, too, pay tribute to Her Majesty in the year of her platinum jubilee. Her dedication to Britain has been a reassuring constant in an ever-changing world, her commitment to public duty a reminder of the responsibilities that we all owe each other, and her dignity and leadership an inspiration to all of us. She will forever have all our thanks for 70 years of service to our country. We all wish her well.

I congratulate the Prime Minister, who has achieved a new first: the first resident of Downing Street to be a constituent of a Labour council. I am sure that it will serve him well. I also congratulate the mover and seconder on their fine and funny speeches. I understand that the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) owns over 900 copies of *Eagle* comic books. He is no old duffer. He is an extensive collector of the adventures of Dan Dare from the Inter-Planet Patrol: a comic book with a hero with a moral message, a spirit that he has channelled into his 17 years in this House. Although there is some mischief in him, as he demonstrated in his speech—I particularly liked his advice that you should not make an enemy of your party leader—so I think he is a little bit more Dennis the Menace.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) is dedicated not only to what was obviously a punishing consultation exercise on what to put into her speech but a punishing exercise regime. She is a former cox with Twickenham Rowing Club, a half-marathon runner and even an ironman competitor. Maybe she is an iron lady in the making.

I know that if they were here, David Amess and James Brokenshire would have been proud of both the mover and the seconder. We all miss them both. I know that the pain on the Conservative Benches is still raw, with their friends taken too soon, but their passing leaves us united in our resolve to defeat the evils of both extremism and cancer.

I also want to pay tribute to my dear friend, Jack Dromey. Jack picked fights on behalf of working people, and he won them. In 1975, he led the first Equal Pay Act strike. He campaigned for the rights of cleaners everywhere, from the House of Commons to MI5, and, in the last year of his life, he campaigned for a public inquiry on behalf of the families bereaved by covid. The only way in which we on the Labour Benches can really pay tribute to Jack is by aspiring to champion working people as well as he did.

Times are hard, but they are much tougher than they should be. As we emerge from the pandemic, find a new place in the world outside the European Union and transition to a carbon-neutral economy, our country faces great challenges, but at the same time, great opportunities are within our reach. We can rebuild stronger, learning where our society and our services need more resilience. We can do more than just get Brexit done; we can ensure that Britain is in the best position to thrive outside the European Union, and we can lead the world in zero-carbon industries, generating high-skilled, high-wage jobs across the country. But for that to happen, we need a Government of the moment with the ideas that meet the aspirations of the British public. This thin Address, bereft of ideas or purpose and without a guiding principle or a road map for delivery, shows just how far the Government are from that. Too out of touch to meet the challenges of the moment, too tired to grasp the opportunities of the future, their time has passed.

The first great challenge our country faces is the cost of living crisis. Inflation stands at 7% and rising; household bills have gone up by hundreds of pounds; the cost of the weekly shop has rocketed; and people are seeing their wages run out much earlier in the month and the value of their savings fall. I wish I could say that the worst is over, but last Thursday the Bank of England revised down Britain's growth and revised up inflation. This Government's failure to grow the economy over a decade, combined with their inertia in the face of spiralling bills, means that we are staring down the barrel of something we have not seen in decades: a stagflation crisis. That is a truly shocking legacy of this Government. It should humble those on the Conservative Benches who have ignored the red lights on our economy even while wages were frozen for over a decade, and whose complacency is best summed up by a Prime Minister whose response to the crisis was to make fun of those who were worrying about inflation.

A Government of the moment would use the great powers they have to tackle this head on and bring forward an emergency Budget with a windfall tax for oil and gas producers which would raise billions—money that could be used to slash the cost of energy bills and help businesses keep their costs down. Even the bosses at BP do not agree when the Prime Minister says it would deter investment. It is a common sense solution, but instead the Government are bereft of leadership: the Chancellor ruling the windfall tax in, the Business Secretary ruling it out, and a Prime Minister who does not know what he thinks.

It is not just about the short-term measures. A Government of the moment would take a step back from the crisis and ensure that Britain is never again so vulnerable to a surge in international prices, forced to go cap in hand from dictator to dictator looking for a

[Keir Starmer]

quick fix of imported oil. That means standing up to those vested interests who oppose onshore wind, the cheapest and most reliable source of electricity that we have, but this Prime Minister is too weak to stand up to his Back Benchers. It means investing in the insulation we need to use less energy in our homes. That would take £400 off energy bills every year and cut gas imports by 15%, but this Prime Minister is far too concerned with vanity projects ever to prioritise investment in insulating homes. So we are left with an energy Bill not up to the moment. It is the latest chapter in a pathetic response to the cost of living crisis. Where there should have been support, it has been tax rise after tax rise on working people—the only country in the G7 to do so during a cost of living crisis.

The low growth that led to the stagnation we see today is the same reason wages have been frozen for so long. Over 12 years of Tory Government the economy has grown far slower than when Labour was in power, and it is set to go even slower in coming years—the slowest-growing economy in the G7 next year. As the director general of the CBI said:

“For a country that is used to growth at 2 - 2.5%”—

the Conservative record—

“is simply not good enough.”

We cannot afford to go on like this. If the Tories had simply matched Labour’s record on growth in Government, people would have had higher incomes, boosting public finances, and we could have spent over £40 billion more on public services without having to raise a single tax.

So the second great challenge our country faces is to get Britain growing again. A Government of the moment would have grasped the nettle and set out a new approach to the economy; an approach based on a stronger partnership between Government and businesses; a partnership dedicated to growth. There would have been an industrial strategy to grow the industries of the future, with the Government providing initial investment that brings confidence and security and acts as a catalyst for the private sector to invest in gigafactories, hydrogen and steel—in high productivity jobs right here in Britain. A Government of the moment would finally abolish business rates and replace them with a fair system that creates a level playing field with online giants, so that our businesses can compete, invest and grow. And a Government of the moment would have a plan to revive our town centres with new businesses, providing finance for a new generation of start-ups in our town centres and giving councils the power to take over empty shops and fill the space with workshops and offices offering the jobs of the future.

Instead of that new approach to the economy, we have a Chancellor who thinks it would be silly to do anything different; a Chancellor who, rather than partnering with business, has loaded them up with debt and wonders why they are struggling to invest; a Chancellor who seems content to have the slowest growth of any G20 country bar one, Russia; a Chancellor whose legacy will be low growth, high inflation and high tax, and with it, the diminishing of Britain’s living standards—no hope of taking on the big challenges, no hope of seizing the great opportunities, hopeless. And because the Government are not up to the challenge of growing the economy, all

those tax hikes are not going into improving public services, with no chance of a doctor’s appointment, people forced to wait months for urgent mental health treatment, and super-sized classrooms the norm again. Never before have people been asked to pay so much for so little.

The third great challenge we face is ending the poverty of ambition that this Government have for our public services. That means a Government of the moment relentlessly focused on school improvement. Labour would improve leadership and teaching standards at state schools, funding it by ending tax breaks for private schools. It means a Government of the moment that would finally deliver world-class mental health provision that matches years of empty rhetoric on parity with physical health. Labour would hire new clinicians so that we can guarantee mental health treatment in four weeks, paid for by closing loopholes to private equity firms.

Instead, we have a Government that went into the pandemic with record waiting lists and have no plan to get them down any time soon; a Government that take the public for fools by pretending that refurbishing a wing of a hospital is the same as building a new hospital; a Government that cannot hire the GPs they promised or get the GPs we have to see more patients—lost in spin, with no ambition, not up to the challenge of the moment.

It is not just education and health that need reform. Fraud has become commonplace, with 7 million incidents a year and Britain routinely ripped off, but the Business Secretary has suggested that it does not even count as crime. Fraud is just the tip of the iceberg. Victims are being let down while this Government let violent criminals off. The overall charge rate stands at a pathetic 5.8%, meaning that huge swathes of serious offences like rape, knife crime and theft have effectively been decriminalised.

A Government of the moment would say, “Enough is enough”—[*Interruption.*] Nobody can be proud of this record of 12 years. A Government of the moment would invest in community policing, pulling resources away from vanity projects like the Prime Minister’s ministerial yacht. They would strengthen protection for victims of crime and antisocial behaviour and increase the number of specialist rape units in the justice system so that it stops routinely failing women. Instead, we have a Government who talk tough while letting the justice system fall apart—no care for victims or their communities, not good enough, not up to the moment. We have a Government whose time has passed, a Cabinet out of ideas and out of energy, led by a Prime Minister who is entirely out of touch.

It does not have to be this way; it will not always be this way. A Labour Government would tackle the cost of living crisis head on, get Britain growing again after 12 years of failure, and improve public services so that they deliver for the people paying for them. A Labour Government would rise to the moment where this Government have badly failed.

3.20 pm

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): Mr Speaker, allow me to join you and Members across this House in thanking His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales for delivering the Gracious Speech and in sending our warmest

wishes to Her Majesty the Queen. The whole House knows the reluctance with which Her Majesty made today's decision, and her extraordinary service to this nation continues to inspire us all.

As we come to the halfway point of this Parliament, this country has seen off the biggest challenge that any post-war Government have faced, but the cost of the pandemic has been huge, with the biggest fall in output for 300 years, which necessitated Government expenditure of £400 billion. The aftershocks are still being felt across the world, with a global spike in energy prices and the impact that we are seeing on the cost of food. It is precisely because this Government got the big calls right and made the tough decisions during the pandemic that we had the fastest economic growth in the G7 last year—and will return to that status, by the way, by 2024—and therefore have the fiscal firepower to help families up and down the country with all the pressures that they face now.

We will continue to use all our ingenuity and compassion for as long as it takes—my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I will be saying more about this in the days to come—but at the same time as we help people, we need the legislative firepower to fix the underlying problems in energy supply, in housing, in infrastructure and in skills, which are driving up costs for families across the country. This Queen's Speech takes those issues head on.

Above all, we are tackling the economic challenges with the best solution of all, and that is an ever-growing number of high-wage, high-skill jobs, Mr Speaker. Jobs, jobs, jobs! We drive up employment by creating the right platform for business to invest; making our streets safer, with 20,000 more police; creating a healthier population, with 50,000 more nurses; funding the NHS to help it to clear the covid backlogs; giving the confidence that people know that they will be looked after in old age, by fixing social care; delivering gigabit broadband, giving the remotest parts of the country the access that they need; and using our Brexit freedoms to enable revolutionary technologies like gene editing to help our farmers to grow more nutritious and more productive crops.

It is that combination of public and private sector together that is tackling unemployment, with half a million more people on the payroll now than before the pandemic began, and it is that strength at home that enables this country to show leadership abroad, as we have done and will continue to do in supporting the people of Ukraine. So this Queen's Speech delivers on our promises: it will not only take us through the aftershocks of covid, but build the foundations for decades of prosperity, uniting and levelling up across the country.

Mr Speaker, allow me to join the Leader of the Opposition in paying tribute to those colleagues we lost in the last parliamentary Session. Time will not dim our shock at the despicable murder of Sir David Amess, a friend to so many, who lost his life giving the service he loved most: a constituency surgery in a local church. Among the many legacies of Sir David, which include his amazing work on animal welfare and his campaign to support women with endometriosis, I am proud to say that today Southend-on-Sea stands as a city in tribute to him.

Yesterday we gathered at St Margaret's Church to remember James Brokenshire, a true gentleman who faced his battle with cancer with enormous courage,

generosity and strength of character. It was typical of our dear friend that even in the midst of his own battle, he was supporting and encouraging others to seek help, campaigning for better lung cancer screening and becoming the first MP to secure a debate on the issue on the Floor of this House. We willed him to pull through because the world needs more people in public life like him. His loss is felt deeply in all parts of the House, and by all those whose lives he touched.

Finally, we began the year joining the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) in paying tribute to her wonderful husband Jack Dromey, one of the great trade unionists of our time, who, having married someone who would go on to become, in his words, the “outstanding parliamentary feminist of her generation”, will also be forever remembered, in his words, as Mr Harriet Harman, né Dromey. We all knew him as a man of great warmth, energy and compassion, and he commanded the utmost respect across the House.

The response to the Gracious Speech was magnificently proposed—self-deprecatingly, I thought—by my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), whose campaigning brilliance I saw at first hand, as he pointed out, when, as Back Benchers almost 20 years ago, he and I organised a demonstration against Labour's plan to close community hospitals. The campaign group was called CHANT—Community Hospitals Acting Nationally Together. His memory of it is much more glorious than mine; I remember only a tiny handful of desperadoes. We were stopped almost immediately by the police, who turned us back, but my hon. Friend none the less succeeded in forcing the Government—the then Labour Government, I should stress—to perform a U-turn on the funding for community hospitals. As a great pace bowler—or a medium-pace bowler, it is probably fair to say these days—he bowled them middle stump. It is fitting that today he has proposed the response to the Gracious Speech for a Government who are delivering the biggest NHS catch-up programme in history, and who, far from closing hospitals, are building new hospitals—48 of them, in fact—so that we have the best health service in the world.

I know, by the way, that my hon. Friend has personal experience of healthcare in a less fortunate country. He was lying in bed with a fractured rib after a skiing accident in Chamonix when three men in white coats arrived claiming that they were there to perform the operation. On closer inspection, they turned out to be my right hon. Friends the Members for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and my noble Friend Lord Lancaster. At that point, it is said, my hon. Friend levitated miraculously from his bed and made his escape. His speech today was in the finest traditions of this House.

I was delighted that the motion was seconded by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones). Some more seasoned Members will recall the 14 years of service rendered to the people of Cardiff, North by her father, Gwilym, who joins us in the Gallery today. I am delighted to see him there, and I am sure he will be filled with admiration at the speech just delivered by his daughter. I know that my hon. Friend sadly lost her mother earlier this year, and I have no doubt that she too will be simply bursting with pride as she looks down on us today, because while my hon.

[The Prime Minister]

Friend may have been an MP for only a few short years, she has already established herself as a fantastic campaigner. As she said herself, that included changing the law to ban cyber-flashing, saving Brecon barracks, and—with 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards—securing the return of a permanent Welsh regiment in Wales. Nor was she prepared to remain silent while the Leader of the Opposition's colleagues in Cardiff tried to keep Wales in perpetual lockdown. She is a tireless advocate for Welsh veterans and the armed services generally, an issue that is personal as well as political for her.

As a fellow enthusiast for dogs at polling stations, I was delighted to see my hon. Friend take Nancy the Labrador to the polling station on Thursday. Nancy is, of course, named in honour of Nancy Astor, a great Conservative woman who certainly left a mark on this place and this country, and whose influence and achievements I am sure my hon. Friend will emulate in the long and successful career that so clearly awaits her. It was a pleasure to hear from her today, and I thank her for seconding the motion.

On Sunday, I spoke to my G7 counterparts, together with President Zelensky, urging our international partners to join us in going further and faster in supporting Ukraine. I am sure the whole House will share my sorrow and revulsion at events in Mariupol in eastern Ukraine, which has endured weeks of merciless Russian bombardment and some of the worst atrocities of the war. At the same time, I am pleased to report that our brave Ukrainian friends are succeeding in repelling the Russian assault on Kharkiv, defending their second city with the same fortitude that saw off Putin's attack on their capital. We should be proud that, when the very survival of a great European democracy was in peril, our United Kingdom has led the way, providing Ukraine with the weapons to defend itself and helping the world to impose the toughest economic sanctions on Putin. As I walked through the streets of Kyiv last month, I saw at first hand what the wholehearted support of this House and this country has meant to the brave people of Ukraine, so let the message ring out from this Chamber today: we will persevere in our support for the Ukrainians until Putin has failed and Ukraine has won.

During the pandemic, this Government worked night and day at extraordinary speed to protect lives and livelihoods across our whole United Kingdom, whether by injecting £400 billion of direct support to the economy and supporting jobs through our world-leading furlough scheme, by becoming the first country in the world to administer and approve covid vaccines, or by delivering the largest testing programme and the fastest vaccine booster campaign in Europe. All this allowed us to retain one of the most open economies and societies across the continent—which we would not have done, by the way, if we had listened to the advice of the Labour party—with the fastest growth in the G7 last year.

Now we will bring that same urgency, impatience and determination to deliver on our mission of getting our country back on track and easing the burdens on families and businesses across the land. That is why we have already committed £9.1 billion to assist with energy costs alone. We are giving back £150 to people in their council tax, cutting fuel duty, increasing the warm

home discount, creating a tax cut for 30 million workers by raising the national insurance threshold and delivering the biggest ever increase in the national living wage, worth an extra £1,000 a year to those working full time. But however great our compassion and ingenuity, we cannot simply spend our way out of this problem; we need to grow out of the problem by creating hundreds of thousands of new high-wage, high-skilled jobs across the country.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: As I give way to the hon. Lady, I remind the House that there has never been a Labour Government who left office with unemployment lower than when they came in.

Mr Speaker: It is not normal to give way in these speeches, but obviously the Prime Minister has agreed to do so.

Sarah Owen: I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. We have heard a lot of words being very rapidly delivered, but what we have not heard yet is an apology to the pensioners who are choosing between heating and eating, an apology to the children who have gone hungry throughout the school holidays and an apology to the hundreds of thousands of family members of covid victims who were lost during the pandemic.

The Prime Minister: Of course this Government are doing all we can to help people during the pandemic and to help pensioners, and by the way it was this Government who introduced the triple lock for pensioners, to protect them. This Government help people with the cost of heating, with the £9.1 billion that we are putting in, with the holiday activities and food programme and with the extra billions that we are putting in to support local councils. But be in no doubt—this is what everybody in this country needs to understand: we are making sure that we have a strong economy with high-wage, high-skilled jobs that will enable us to take this country forward. That would simply not have been possible if the hon. Lady had listened to the advice of those on her Front Bench, who wanted to keep us in lockdown—[*Interruption.*] That is absolutely true. It was worth giving way just to make that point. That is why we are going to continue with our levelling-up and regeneration Bill, which will help—

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab) *rose*—

The Prime Minister: No, no; sit down. The Bill will help to create jobs wherever people live, in communities across the whole United Kingdom. That is the objective of this Queen's Speech. It is all focused on driving growth and jobs, and our schools and higher education Bills will ensure that people have the skills to do them, raising standards in our classrooms and implementing the lifetime skills guarantee so that people can retrain and acquire new qualifications at any stage of their lives.

Our energy Bill will power our new green industrial revolution, creating hundreds of thousands—

Mr Perkins: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: No. The energy Bill will create hundreds of thousands of new green jobs, taking forward this Government's energy security strategy—it is about time this country had one—with £22 billion—*[Interruption.]* Labour did not want a single nuclear power station. Come on, be honest. Look at them, the great quivering jellies of indecision that they are. Our £22 billion UK Infrastructure Bank is supporting the transition to net zero and vast new green industries, in which our United Kingdom will again lead the world.

Just as we got Brexit done, so with this Queen's Speech we finish the job of unleashing the benefits of Brexit to grow our economy and cut the cost of living. By bringing urgency and ambition to how we exercise the freedoms we have regained, our Brexit freedoms Bill will enable us to amend or replace any inherited EU law with legislation in UK law that puts the interests of British business and British families first. That is what we are going to do.

We will seize the chance to make our United Kingdom the best-regulated economy in the world. We are going to take forward the trade deals we have with 70 different countries worth over £800 billion a year, with specific legislation in this Queen's Speech—I hope I am not speaking too fast for the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen)—for our new free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand.

We are using our new freedoms to control our borders, with a new plan for immigration so that we can fix our broken asylum system, tackle the illegal immigration that undermines the legal immigration that we support and crack down on the vile people smugglers. I know that the Leader of the Opposition—perhaps I should, in deference to his phrase, refer to him as the Leader of the Opposition of the moment—likes to claim he opposes these plans, but it turns out that legislation to permit the offshoring of asylum seekers—

Mr Perkins: Will the Prime Minister give way?

Mr Speaker: Order. Only one person can be on their feet at the same time. The Prime Minister is not giving way.

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition of the moment purports or claims to oppose the plans, but it turns out that they were actually pioneered in 2004 by a Labour Government. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may have got Tony Blair to take part in his election campaign, but it is a shame he cannot get behind Tony Blair's policies.

During the pandemic, we marvelled at the courage and commitment of so many people: all the people working in our public services, from the extraordinary men and women in our NHS, risking their lives to save others, to those toiling to keep our country going, whether in schools or shops, or on public transport. It is therefore right that this Government are now investing more in our NHS than any other Government in history, giving our NHS the funding it needs to help to clear the covid backlogs. We will also make sure that every penny is well spent. Whether through pop-up clinics in our communities, more face-to-face GP appointments, or new cancer screening machines, we maximise the ability of our NHS to check and treat its patients.

But when times are tough and families are facing such pressures, we must also cut the cost of government and cut the burdens that the Government place on taxpayers and citizens. We cannot have expensive delays in delivering passports and driving licences that see families stranded and unable to go on holiday and HGV drivers unable to transport goods around this country in the way that is so integral to the economy we need. We are going to fix that.

Let me send a clear message from this House today: this Government will tackle the post-covid “mañana” culture. We will take whatever steps are necessary to deliver for the British people, because the British people are not prepared to wait, and we share their impatience.

We will get through the aftershocks of covid, just as we got through covid, as I have told you, Mr Speaker, with every ounce of ingenuity, compassion and hard work. We will do so not by irresponsible spending that merely treats the symptoms of rising prices while creating an ever-bigger problem for tomorrow, but by urgently pressing on with our mission to create the high-wage, high-skilled jobs that will drive economic growth across the United Kingdom—the whole United Kingdom. That is the long-term, sustainable solution to ease the burden on families and businesses. That is the way to get our country back on track after the pandemic, to unite and to level up across our whole country, exactly as we promised. That is what this Queen's Speech delivers. I commend it to the House.

Mr Speaker: I now call the leader of the SNP, Ian Blackford.

3.40 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. May I thank the Duke of Rothesay for coming to Parliament today and for leading us in the state opening with the address that we had? May I also send best wishes from everyone across the House, and certainly from our Benches, to the Queen, in what is such a momentous year for her? We also need to reflect on those we sadly lost during the last Session of Parliament. We think of James Brokenshire, David Amess and, of course, Jack Dromey, three outstanding but different parliamentarians who were all a fine example to all of us of how to conduct ourselves in this place.

I thank the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) for moving the motion. He gave an erudite treatise on his history in government. I hope he still has a lot to give. He has made it very clear that he was removed early from office by the Prime Minister and perhaps he still has some days ahead of him. It is important that he stressed the unity there is in this House on the topic of Ukraine. We all stand together with our friends in Ukraine, standing up to the warmonger and war criminal that still resides in Moscow. He will face justice and we will make sure that, ultimately, the people of Ukraine prevail.

I thought it was interesting that the hon. Gentleman told us that the recent difficulties the Prime Minister has had with the Metropolitan police are not new; he has had his collar felt in the past as well. I also thank the seconder of the motion, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones). What we had really was a job application for government from the Member.

[*Ian Blackford*]

I am sure she has a long and fruitful career in front of her as a Member of this House and a member of the governing party.

As much as I hate to rub salt into wounds, I have to say that this Queen's Speech has one very obvious backdrop that deserves a mention: the democratic drubbing the Prime Minister and his party got last Thursday. I know they might want to hide from that reality, but the message from people right across these islands was crystal clear. The people made it clear that this is now a Prime Minister facing his final days in office and a Tory Government on their last legs.

I am proud to say that Scotland sent the strongest message of all. I understand that this might be a wee bit uncomfortable listening for those on the Conservative Benches, but they need to hear it all the same because they need to hear what Scottish democracy is telling them and has been telling them for years. Last Thursday saw the best ever result for pro-independence parties in the local elections. The Scottish National party is the largest party in the largest number of councils—the greatest ever result in a local election in our party's history. This is the 11th election victory in a row for the SNP and the eighth election in a row the SNP has won under the leadership of Nicola Sturgeon. A party in government winning more votes and winning more seats—can you imagine that, Prime Minister? That is what we did—what about the Conservatives? Down by 100,000 votes, and they lost 66 seats in Scotland. The worst news for all of them is, after all that, they still kept their leader.

Democracy has spoken in Scotland. It has spoken before and it will speak again and again. All our democratic decisions say exactly the same thing: Scotland rejects this Westminster Government, we reject the Tory Party and we demand the choice of an independent future. The Scottish people know the cost of living with Westminster. We know the price we pay with the Prime Minister and the price of being stuck with a Tory Government we did not vote for. It is a price that none of us in Scotland—not one of us—can afford to pay any longer.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I would like to ask the right hon. Gentleman a direct question: how does it feel, eight years after Scotland said no so conclusively to separation, for the pro-independence parties to get the same proportion of votes as they achieved eight years ago, despite everything that has been thrown at us, and, frankly, everything we have thrown at ourselves? When will he admit that the game is up?

Ian Blackford: I have to say to my hon. Friend—I will call him that because I enjoy his company—that if the game is up for anybody or any party, the game is up for the Tory party in Scotland and for the Union. He needs to reflect on the fact that the SNP has won the last 11 elections. We went to the public and asked for a mandate to have an independence referendum. [HON. MEMBERS: “You didn't get one!”] I hear from a sedentary position that we did not get one. I ask Conservative Members to reflect carefully. Let us consider the first-past-the-post elections to the Scottish Parliament last year when we won 62 of the 73 seats. There is a pro-independence majority in the Scottish Parliament.

The Queen's Speech mentioned respecting democracy. Why do the Scottish Conservatives and those in London deny democracy to the people of Scotland? How many times do the people of Scotland have to elect the SNP into government yet Westminster says no? What price democracy when this place ignores the sovereign right and the will of the Scottish people? A day of reckoning will come for those who seek to frustrate the rights of Scots to have a referendum. That day will come and not only will there be a referendum, but we will win it because that is what democracy is about.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reason that this shower of corrupt, criminal Conservatives are blocking Scotland's democratic and legal right to have a mandate over its own future is that they know—

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is in breach of the House's regulations for somebody to call someone else a criminal in this Chamber.

Mr Speaker: A particular Member was not referred to, as you know—[*Interruption.*] Just a minute—I do not think I need any help. What I would say is that we want moderate and tolerant language that does not bring the House into disrepute or expect those outside to copy the behaviour. I want good behaviour and moderate language. I want people to think before they speak. I call Ian Blackford.

Hannah Bardell *rose*—

Mr Speaker: No.

Ian Blackford: I agree with my hon. Friend. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: We don't want to get into this.

Ian Blackford: I will come on to those points in a moment. Let me say respectfully, particularly to the hon. Members for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) and for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) that I think they know that a referendum will come.

Let me take the Speaker's warnings about behaviour in this House and how we should all reflect on it and how we interact with each other. That applies across the House—I say that to my friend the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) on the Labour Front Bench, too. When we have that referendum, it is incumbent on us all to engage constructively.

Let us examine, and by all means pull apart, the arguments for and against Scottish independence, but let us treat the electorate with respect. Let us trust the electorate who have given the Scottish Government a mandate to have that referendum. [HON. MEMBERS: “2014!”] I hear what Members say about 2014. The whole point is that the electorate are given a choice in an election to elect a Government—and a Government with a mandate for an independence referendum. Let us not forget that, in 2014, we were explicitly told that if we stayed in the United Kingdom our rights as European citizens would be respected. What did this House do to Scotland? This House took Scotland out of the European Union against

its will, and it is perfectly right that, under those circumstances, the people of Scotland have the right to revisit whether they wish to become independent.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Blackford: I will make some progress.

The most glaring omission in this Queen's Speech is the complete lack of any immediate action to help people faced with the biggest inflationary crisis in 50 years. Democracy spoke last Thursday, but it is pretty evident that the Government have not listened and, certainly, given what we have seen today, that the Prime Minister has not learned. People turned out last week to punish the Prime Minister for the scandal of partygate. Let us not forget that the public know that this is the only Prime Minister who has been found to have broken his own laws in office and yet he still sits here as Prime Minister. That should shame this House as it shames us.

The electorate also turned out to punish a Prime Minister and a Chancellor who have been so consumed by the crisis of partygate that they have failed to lift a finger to fight the Tory-made cost of living crisis. As the Bank of England confirmed last week, the occupants of No.10 and No.11 Downing Street have now led us to the brink of recession. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) has said, the very first line of the Queen's Speech should have been a commitment to bring forward an emergency budget. Where is it? Where is the emergency budget that we need? We need an emergency budget to tackle now the rising cost of energy, fuel and food.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is remarkable that, for a Government who say that they care about the cost of living crisis, there was absolutely nothing new in this Queen's Speech around, for example, a mass home insulation programme? Such a programme would be the cheapest, most effective and fastest way of getting our emissions down, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs, and tackling climate emissions, and yet we have nothing new on that at all in this Queen's Speech.

Ian Blackford: The hon. Lady is right: there is nothing in this Queen's Speech to deal with the cost of living crisis, and nothing to deal with home insulation. In the Scottish Parliament, the collaboration between the SNP and the Greens is an example of two parties coming together to make sure that we prioritise the climate emergency, which is really missing from this Queen's Speech.

Scottish Power has already called for urgent action. It has called for £1,000 bill discounts for 10 million families before energy bills rocket by another £900 this autumn, and yet, once again, there is nothing of that from the Prime Minister and the Chancellor in this Queen's Speech. In fact, the Chancellor has already told us that his strategy to tackle the cost of living crisis is, literally, to sit on his hands, because he thinks it would be silly to act now—silly to act at a time when people are facing tough decisions on whether to turn the heating off, whether they can afford to put food on the table. The Chancellor thinks it is silly to act—that tells us everything that we need to know about the humanity and compassion

of this Conservative Government. Just like the spring statement, nothing has come from this Government. This Queen's Speech represents one more missed opportunity.

I can give the Prime Minister some suggestions. He could have matched the Scottish child payment, which doubled in April and will increase to £25 per week per child by the end of this year. That is positive action to help those most in need. He could have matched the increase in Scottish-issued social security payments by 6%. He could have done what Governments are supposed to do in an emergency: helped people through it. By any measure or meaning, this Government fail on all counts.

Another gaping hole in this programme is when it comes to energy policy, as has already been raised. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) rightly said last month, the Prime Minister's energy strategy is nothing more than a con trick, lacking any substance or ambition. The lack of ambition to drive growth in green investment and forge the path to net zero, not to mention an industrial strategy to back it up, fails this and future generations. That lack of ambition will not help investment in renewables, it will not help a just transition and it certainly will not help consumers now or in the long term. As for us in Scotland—a country so rich in energy potential—it is fleecing us of our green present and future.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The right hon. Gentleman's constituency and mine border the Cromarty Firth, which has the Nigg fabrication yard where many of the mightiest oil production platforms in the North sea were constructed. Would it not be a positive suggestion to Her Majesty's Government to power ahead with building floating offshore wind structures in the highlands of Scotland? That would help the Prime Minister and it would help us in Scotland.

Ian Blackford: I am very grateful for that intervention, and I agree 100% with what the hon. Gentleman has said; he and I have been talking about that over recent months. There is fantastic potential, not just for the highlands but for the whole of Scotland, to benefit from the industrial revolution that will come from the opportunities in green energy. We need to make sure that we learn from the lessons of the past and that we are able to capture that supply chain. If we go back to the 1970s, Nigg was a thriving industrial base, with thousands of jobs in that community supporting the oil industry.

I know the hon. Gentleman, like me, wants to see the highlands and islands being a thriving area with an industrial future, but we need the UK Government to help us on that. I look forward, together with him, to having discussions with the Government on exactly how we take that forward.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack) *indicated assent.*

Ian Blackford: I can see the Secretary of State for Scotland nodding, so perhaps we can discuss that over the coming days.

Since the start of this year alone, we know that the UK Government have profited by at least £1.7 billion from the revenues brought in from North sea oil. All that revenue from Scotland's resources, and still this

[*Ian Blackford*]

UK Government refuse to match the Scottish Government's £500 million just transition fund to help to ease reliance on fossil fuels. Still there is no commitment to carbon capture and storage in Scotland's north-east. Not only are this Westminster Government harming our planet, but they are holding Scotland back.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I am genuinely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, particularly as the Scottish cluster is so important to my constituency. Does he agree that the UK Government have thus far committed £41 million to that project? However, that was not what I wanted to intervene on; I wanted to intervene on his mention of the £500 million just transition fund for the north-east of Scotland. Can he do what his colleagues the hon. Members for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) and for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn) have not been able to do thus far, and describe in detail what that £500 million will be spent on in the north-east of Scotland?

Ian Blackford: We have been short-changed by not getting carbon capture and storage in Scotland. Twice now we have been promised that it is coming, but we all know in Scotland that getting carbon capture and storage in the north-east of Scotland with the Acorn project is instrumental in getting to net zero by 2045. It is instrumental in ensuring that Grangemouth has a green chemical future. There can be no more dithering—there can be no more delay. The Acorn project must be greenlit, and it must be greenlit now.

I say to the hon. Gentleman that yes, we will spell out exactly the plan for that £500 million transition fund. I say to the House now that, together with my hon. Friends the Members for Kilmarnock and Loudoun and for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), we will be speaking more on Scotland's future energy potential. We on these Benches will accept our responsibilities to deliver that energy strategy and the industrial policy that is lacking from those on the Government Front Bench.

I have concentrated on how the proposed legislation in the Queen's Speech fails to tackle the cost of living crisis and our green future, but what it will enact is every bit as harmful. At the heart of this Session's programme there is a twin attack that must be challenged: an attack on devolution and an attack on human rights law.

As the Prime Minister gets increasingly vulnerable and desperate, it is probably no surprise that he has reached back to the policy that got him the job in the first place—Brexit. The Brexit freedoms Bill to repeal EU-retained law and the other Brexit legislation in his Queen's Speech represent a race to the bottom on standards. As for the idea that Westminster will be able to strike down devolved legislatures' retained EU laws, that would be only the latest in a long line of Tory power grabs.

The Prime Minister *indicated dissent.*

Ian Blackford: The Prime Minister shakes his head, but that is the reality—we have seen it over the course of the past few years. The Scottish Parliament has the right to retain EU law because we have the opportunity and the right to find our way back into the European

Union. We will not be denied the right to retain EU law, and we will not be denied the right to an independent future in Europe—and the same applies to our human rights laws. This UK Government propose ripping up the Human Rights Act 1998. That is one more example of a Government who are prepared to force through legislation that is not only immoral but internationally illegal. That attack on human rights legislation is all the more concerning in the context of the continuing failure to respond compassionately and comprehensively to the ongoing Ukrainian refugee crisis, not to mention the anti-refugee Bill that was passed in the previous Session. The agenda of this Westminster Government could not be clearer—a hostile environment for devolution, for human rights law and for refugees—and that agenda continues apace in the Queen's Speech.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Both the Government's independent review of the Human Rights Act and the cross-party Joint Committee on Human Rights have found that there is no case—no evidence base—for replacing the Human Rights Act with a British Bill of rights, so does my right hon. Friend agree that the only reason why the Government are trying to do this is that for as long as the Human Rights Act is on the statute book, it is a serious threat to their project of diminishing the accountability of the Executive?

Ian Blackford: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely correct. The public should be very afraid of what this Government are doing, and the consequences for our hard-fought and hard-won human rights, which have been built up over many decades.

Mr David Davis: I think the right hon. Gentleman would probably accept that I have a lot of credence in the importance of the human rights of British citizens, but the primary argument that I have heard about the modification of the Human Rights Act is that it will give the Government the ability to deport foreign criminals who have been released from prison. That is an important right of the Government, and surely it is worth having, if nothing else.

Ian Blackford: I am afraid that is a fig leaf for what is going on, which is an attack on the rights that have been fought for so hard, and so hard-won, over the past few decades. All this is the cost of living with Westminster, and it is exactly why Scotland wants out.

Mr Perkins *rose—*

Ian Blackford: I have to make progress.

Just as this Queen's Speech seeks to entrench—[*Interruption.*] I hear the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) saying, "Scotland doesn't want out." I hope he rises to speak at some point in the Queen's Speech debate and tries to defend that. I say to him, as I do to the Prime Minister, that we have the mandate for an independence referendum. If he does not think that we will win it, let's bring it on! I tell you what, Mr Speaker: he will soon find that Scotland will vote for independence.

Just as this Queen's Speech seeks to entrench Brexit Britain, our Scottish Parliament will bring forward legislation that offers a very different future to our

people: a positive and progressive future at the heart of Europe. We are not seeking the Prime Minister's permission; the only permission that we need—[*Interruption.*] There we are: we can see that the Prime Minister could not care less; he is talking to his friends on the Government Front Bench. That is the disdain that we see for the people of Scotland from this Government. They simply could not care less. The only permission we will ever need is the democratic permission of the Scottish people.

Let us not forget that it is the people of Scotland who hold sovereignty. Let us not forget—the Prime Minister might want to listen to this—the legal opinion in the case of *MacCormick v. the Crown* at the Court of Session in 1953, when Lord Cooper stated:

“The principle of the unlimited sovereignty of Parliament is a distinctively English principle which has no counterpart in Scottish constitutional law.”

It is unquestionably the right of those in Scotland to determine their own future. Those rights were enshrined in the claim of right that was so instrumental in delivering our devolved Parliament, and that is the case today as we seek to exercise our rights in an independence referendum.

Let me remind the Prime Minister of the words of Parnell, who used to sit on these very Benches. He said:

“No man has a right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation; no man has a right to say to his country—thus far shalt thou go and no further.”

Time and again, the people of Scotland have spoken, and they want us to choose our own future. They spoke at the last Holyrood election, and they spoke again last Thursday. The longer Scottish democracy speaks, the louder it will get. If the Conservatives want to stand in the way—if they want to try to deny democracy—they should be well warned that democracy will sweep them away, just as their party was swept away last week.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House, Sir Peter Bottomley.

4.5 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): May I say to the parliamentary leader of the SNP, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), that it is a delight to follow him? Sometimes it is more of a delight to precede him. Today, I might just remind him that the electorate do not always vote in the same numbers, in the same way. Between 2010 and 2015, the SNP vote went up. It went up after it lost the referendum. By 2017, its vote had gone down by about 26%. It is worth while looking through his notes, some of which he gave us this afternoon, to check how the figures change; they may change again.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Will the Father of the House give way?

Sir Peter Bottomley: I will not at the moment. So far, I have only spoken about the speech of the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber; I have not started giving mine.

Nothing I will say need detain the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition if they want to go off—I know that they have had hard days—but what I want to say is that I am concerned about people's home lives.

Two small changes for owners of park homes would make a great deal of difference. In 2010, the then Housing Minister said that there would be park home reform; we have not had it. We should ensure that pitch fee increases are in line with the consumer prices index, rather than the retail prices index. That change could be incorporated in the next Finance Bill, and I hope that will happen.

The second change is on the question of commissions. Why should park home residents have to lose a significant part of their home's value when they sell it? Those two things can be changed quite simply, the second probably through a handout Bill. There are plenty of MPs who could take that forward if their number came up in the ballot—my number has not come up in the ballot in 46 years—but the Government can make the RPI/CPI change quite easily.

From the notes to the Queen's Speech—I thank the Government for giving us copious notes on the proposals—we learn that the numbers of social tenants, private tenants and leaseholders are each about 4 million to 4.6 million.

The fastest-growing type of home occupation is leasehold. We will not get decent information from the last census, because the only choices that people could put down were whether they owned their home or were a tenant. When I asked what a leaseholder should say, I was not given a clear answer. People think they own their home and might say, “I own it”, but they are wrong. If they put down “tenant”, they might think, “I'm not, actually. I'm a leaseholder.” Why could the people who compiled that census question not wake up to the fact that we are talking about 4.6 million households? Actually, it is probably 6 million, to be complete, but let us take it as 4.6 million. Why did the Office for National Statistics and what is now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities agree a question that does not allow accurate answers and totals to be given?

On leasehold, over the years, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has commissioned the Law Commission to write reports on what would make life easier, fairer and cheaper. We have not had legislation on that put forward. There are words about how something will happen in this Parliament, and we know that uncontroversial legislation often comes in what is expected to be the last year of a Parliament, but that legislation can often be lost if the election comes early. Let us assume that the election comes in May 2024. Will those 4.6 million leaseholders be left hanging if legislation, having been proposed, does not get through both Houses of Parliament?

I ask the Government to try to get that legislation ready for the next Session, and to get it through Parliament early as a priority. I suspect that it could start in the House of Lords and come through to the House of Commons quickly, rather than us having the controversial stuff start here.

I have spent about 15 years—I am following others who have been doing it for longer—trying to get justice for leaseholders. The crooks, exploiters and heartless people in the field—the sort of people on whom one could justifiably use parliamentary privilege—need to be held back, and the ordinary people need to be brought forward.

[*Sir Peter Bottomley*]

In debates on the Building Safety Act 2022, we heard how many people were stuck; the Government eventually came round to making changes, which are welcome. On fire safety defects, we know that we have to find, fix and fund the problems, and then get the money back from those who have not yet coughed up.

Lastly, I turn to planning. Someone has started parliamentary petition 611113 about banning development on farmland. In the last week, it has been signed by more than 700 of my constituents, and many others. The person who wrote to me, who is not a constituent, said that a migrating bird coming to the south coast might think, “I’ve got to the coast, so I can rest,” but if there is a solid wall of housing between the south coast and the South Downs, it will have to go on miles more. That should not be happening.

I put this plea, through the Prime Minister, to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. It is about an appeal against a planning decision. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had an inspector who was about to approve the protection of Chatsmore farm, which is at the Goring gap, between Goring and Ferring, one of which is in Worthing, while the other is under Arun District Council. Much to everyone’s surprise, a second inspector allowed the building of more than 400 homes on one of the few agricultural fields between the South Downs and the coast on the west side of Worthing.

The judicial review of that decision is now to be heard in the High Court. I ask the Government not to oppose the judicial review, and not to oppose the overturning of the decision. I ask them to cancel the decision, or at least let the Court cancel it, and to say that they will never again allow two inspectors to toss a coin to decide on the development of major farmland—on development in one of the few fields in a built-up area.

If we want local democracy, we need to trust local councils. Even if we cannot trust local councils—I frankly do—we cannot trust an inspectorate that allows two inspectors to make decisions that are incompatible with each other’s responsibilities.

I know that the political success of the Labour party in Worthing will lead to a new leader of the council, but I am delighted that the present leader of the Labour group on the council came to the Goring gap at my invitation to make a speech in favour of asking the Government to solve the problem. The Leader of the Opposition has visited a couple of times, once telling people that he was coming, and once not telling them. I do not mind him not telling me, but he did not even tell members of the local Labour party, and they wanted a photograph. Things have changed since then. I hope that he and the Government can see sense and protect the Goring gap, Chatsmore farm and local democracy.

4.13 pm

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): We finally have the Queen’s Speech, 30 Bills and what the Prime Minister calls “fiscal firepower,” but I cannot see that fiscal firepower in what is being done to support our constituents. I fear that many of those 30 Bills are, as many recent Government policies have been, mere headlines—or, worse, dog-whistle headlines

that appeal to a certain section of our electorate but do nothing to solve the real problems that our constituents face.

I declare at the outset that I am a leaseholder of a property that is having cladding removed, and I concur completely with the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) about the challenges for that group of people and for leaseholders more generally. It is disappointing that there is still so much work to be done on leasehold reform.

In Hackney South and Shoreditch, as in many constituencies up and down the country, we need real support for the people who have been left behind. We see a huge challenge; one in two children are living in poverty after housing costs are taken into account. In London, 60% of households in poverty are working households, which is an increase from 44% only a few years ago. That is a reflection of the low pay too many workers are paid and the high housing costs in constituencies such as mine. We all know that employment is a huge opportunity, but it is not a route out of poverty on its own for many people in London because of these high living costs.

The cost of living crisis is not just hitting those in constituencies such as mine with those high prices, but biting everybody. It is now biting those who were just about managing—those who are on good incomes, but are hitting huge increases to their fuel bills. We know that the Government’s response to that, from the Klarna Chancellor, has been to lend the money now and people are going to have to pay it back later, further indebting particularly the poorest households.

We need much better support for those left behind. The Government talk about levelling up, but in Hackney we do not see much of this levelling-up fund. We are the seventh most deprived local authority area in the country, but in the Government’s approach to levelling up Hackney counts as priority 2. Constituencies such as Richmond (Yorks), Derbyshire Dales and High Peak, which are respectively the 256th, the 265th and the 202nd most deprived constituencies in the country, are being prioritised over the children in my constituency living in poverty—living in overcrowded conditions and too often sharing a bed with a parent up to their early teens because there is nowhere else for them to sleep—and over the people struggling because of the challenges of the pandemic.

Those people need support, and we must make sure—the Government need to hear this—that levelling up is not just about levelling up between different regions of the UK, but in parts of our amazing capital city. Of all people, the Prime Minister, who had the honour—the honour—of serving as the elected Mayor of London, should be aware of that, and shame on him that he is not tackling this head-on.

We need much better support for housing generally. I have more private renters in my constituency than I have homeowners and more social housing tenants than both of those combined, and all have real problems. The Government are finally unveiling their renters reform Bill—something we are all keen to see—but just abolishing no-fault evictions is not enough to solve the challenges of where people can live. Those people cannot now live in the private sector and grow a family, because even with no-fault evictions being abolished, if that does eventually happen, that will not make for a stable home, with rents escalating at the whim of the landlord.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does the hon. Member not understand that this Gracious Speech is all about levelling up and giving people more opportunity, and that there needs to be a surge of private investment into these places, with better-paid jobs, better skills training and better education? That is the whole point of it. Will she support that?

Dame Meg Hillier: Well, if that is the whole point of it, forgive me, but I cannot see that. I have the privilege of chairing the Public Accounts Committee, in which we have looked at the towns fund and the levelling-up approach, and it is a chaotic policy. It is a headline without proper detail and analysis of how to deliver it. Outside London, only the Bristol area has seen economic growth. This has been a challenge for every Government over many decades now, but the idea that headlines saying it is going to happen mean it will actually be delivered is just for the birds.

We see the huge increase in private renters, yet there is no real support for them. Where is the security if people cannot afford to buy their own home and cannot qualify for social rented housing? In my constituency, that is in massively short supply in any case, with hundreds—thousands—of families living in massively overcrowded conditions. We have all been on the doorsteps a lot in the last week and it is always a privilege to meet constituents, but when I keep meeting constituents who I knew when their children were toddlers, and whose children, who are now young adults, are still sharing the bedroom—two or three of them—while their parents live in the living room, it is not good enough.

There is no hope for those people, because the Government's proposed Bills will do nothing to enable councils to build that important social rented housing, to give better rights to renters or to provide a proper step ladder for people to purchase their own home. Every policy so far has fuelled the equity of those who already own their home, rather than giving a real leg-up to wannabe first-time buyers in constituencies such as mine, where—I have said this repeatedly in this House, but I repeat it again—a modern two-bedroom flat will be on the market for about £750,000. That is just for a two-bedroom leasehold flat.

As of June last year, the median house price in my constituency was £600,000, but in many parts of it I would struggle to find a property for that price. That is a huge increase—9.1% over the past five years. A house in Hackney costs more than 16 times the average Hackney salary. Hackney has a range of salaries, but there are a lot of people at the poorer end. One in 35 people in my constituency are officially recorded as being homeless or in temporary accommodation. That does not include those who are overcrowded because there is no space for them, or those with no recourse to public funds who cannot possibly afford to rent privately even though they are working. They could certainly never buy a property and, as we know, rents are very high. We need much better support, and there is no real solution in the Queen's Speech.

Crucially, we need real support for a lost generation. Many people have been badly affected by covid, but I worry particularly about our children who have lost out on two years of education. Hats off to the teachers and schools that kept educating them, but for many children, however well the school did, if they did not have the

technology at home and were clustered around one computer and a mobile phone with poor data, that would never be the same as a classroom experience. Schools did the best they could, and many did a very good job, but there is a challenge for children who lost out on education, and who, under the Government's proposals, will go through the system without catching up.

I look forward to seeing what is in the Government's Bill, but I have been talking to schools in my constituency about the cost of their energy bills, which is just one recent crisis. The cost increase on their energy bills means a choice between heating the school and keeping a teacher. It is either having our children freeze in a classroom but being taught by a teacher, or a warm school where children can concentrate on learning but they lose that crucial classroom teacher. That is the stark reality. I am happy to share with anybody in government the figures from schools that have provided them to me, and perhaps we could work together for a solution. It is vital that we pay the cost of catch-up. It is taxpayers' money well spent to invest in the generation that will be the engine and the entrepreneurs of our future. My constituency may be poor, but there is no poverty of aspiration, and unless we give those children a leg-up and catch-up now, they will not get the advantages they should have.

We have seen the complete failure of the tutoring scheme, which the cross-party Public Accounts Committee highlighted as a concern early on. We said, "Where are these tutors who will go in and tutor?", and of course that contract has been axed. We still need a lot of support. According to teachers in my constituency, children in years 7 and 8 are having to be taught how to do decent handwriting because they missed those crucial years at primary school. In some areas, pupils in years 7 and 8 are losing out because the qualified teachers are focused on the exam years. We all want our children to succeed, and the Government need to ensure that school funding is properly resolved. That funding has fallen in real terms per pupil by 1.2% for the most deprived fifth of schools, but has increased by nearly 3% for the least deprived fifth of schools. Is that levelling up? It does not look like it to me. The Prime Minister purports to be an intelligent man, and I am sure he can do the maths and work out that that means an awful lot of children are losing out.

I was pleased that the victims Bill is finally—finally!—perhaps going to appear. It has only been in three manifestos and four Queen's Speeches. This is a crucial problem. My Committee has looked at the backlog in the criminal courts, and there are many factors behind that, some of which cannot be resolved through legislation. The sheer grind of day-to-day delivery and the governance of decent public services seems alien to the Prime Minister and his Front Bench. That aside, we need the victims Bill to support victims better. For example, a woman in my constituency was violently attacked by her partner in front of her seven-year-old daughter. She went to the police. The court case was set for two years after that violent attack, and it is no surprise that her partner has repeatedly broken his non-molestation order because he feels that he can get away with it scot-free. That is happening to victims of domestic abuse up and down the country. She has said to me, "I just want to move. I want shot of this. I don't want to be reliving this, nor do I want my daughter to relive this over the

[*Dame Meg Hillier*]

next two years.” If the victims Bill is to mean anything on domestic violence, it needs decent options on alternative housing for victims, because so often that is the break that those people need, but they cannot get it. In my constituency, with such a shortage of housing, that is a huge and ongoing issue.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The hon. Lady has referred on numerous occasions to the shortage of housing and how we need to get more houses delivered. Will she support the reforms to the planning system incorporated in the Queen’s Speech?

Dame Meg Hillier: I will support anything that delivers that housing. I have not had a chance to look at the detail, and I do not think we yet know all of it. Absolutely, if there is a bit of land where nothing is moving, we will look at that as an option for housing, but we cannot fit everything into an inner-city London borough. We need a better balance of housing, and we definitely need more affordable housing. In constituencies such as mine, we need more socially rented housing, because the other options are not real options.

People housed in temporary accommodation in boroughs outside my constituency often want to move back. I tell those on a five-year lease, “At the moment, thanks to the Government, that is often the best you’ll get.” But when the rent is as high as we see in the private sector, they worry because they cannot survive without some benefit top-up—if that fits in with the housing benefit cap—so they are stuck in a terrible cycle of never being able to have a permanent home.

I want to touch on a couple of other issues that were raised in a lengthy Queen’s Speech. The Prime Minister talks about Brexit being done, but he knows, and I know, that it is not done, is it? It is far from done. There was no planning after the vote in 2016 and there is a very long tail of changes that have been repeatedly delayed. We have seen import controls delayed once again. It is not even clear what will change—businesses and people are confused—and that lack of planning is coming home to roost. He can use the slogans, but we can see through them. He can peruse our Committee’s reports highlighting those concerns on any day he wants.

The Queen’s Speech had a whole chunk on divisive issues. The Prime Minister would love me to engage with them now, but I will not give him that satisfaction, because I want real results for the people in my constituency, not flim-flam and cheap headlines on things that he hopes will start culture wars between Members of the House and our voters. Everybody in the House and all our constituents know that the cost of living must be a priority and that levelling up must be a priority.

I was pleased to see the announcement of a UK Infrastructure Bank, but I am a bit puzzled, because the same Government created the green investment bank and, a few years later, sold it off to the private sector. If the infrastructure bank is to invest in green technologies, that is good—if it works—but why have we had a wasted decade on that opportunity?

The Queen’s Speech is not about bringing our country together and supporting people who need that; it is about division. Our Prime Minister has his head in the sand about real life and the real challenges for so many

of our constituents in the cost of living and finding a home. There is no direction from the Government, who are flailing around, trying to come up with a list of headlines but unable to govern the country competently in the interests of the people I represent.

4.28 pm

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

It is indeed a privilege to speak in the debate on the Humble Address in Her Majesty’s platinum jubilee year. As others have already said, everybody across the House, including me, wishes Her Majesty all the very best and thanks her for her unstinting service and exemplary devotion to duty.

I would also like, as others have, to recognise the passing of three excellent Members of the House: Sir David Amess, James Brokenshire and Jack Dromey. They all came into the House to make a difference and improve people’s lives, and they worked unstintingly to do just that.

I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) and for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) on their excellent speeches in proposing and seconding the Humble Address.

I want to speak about a few of the elements of the Government’s programme that I very much welcome. The modern slavery Bill will cement the Government’s commitment to enhance the provisions on supply chains. I understand that the first element will be an extension of the requirements on supply chains to public procurement, to Government Departments. That is important. In 2019, as Prime Minister, I committed the Government to use our power of public procurement to ensure that we were cleaning up supply chains and cracking down on modern slavery. I genuinely believe that dealing with supply chains is one of the key ways we can ensure that we eradicate modern slavery. Business has a huge role to play here and so do Government. Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 was important, but of course it does not actually require action other than putting something in reporting accounts, which might be to say that nothing has been done about modern slavery. It is therefore excellent that the Government are now moving this forward and will enhance the legislation. I think it could be transformative.

I welcome the social housing regulation Bill. One of the clear messages that came from residents and survivors of the terrible tragedy that was the fire at Grenfell Tower was the concern that for not just months but years the voice of residents in social housing had not been heard and had not been listened to by those in authority who had a responsibility to respond. That, we discovered from consultation across the country, was not unique to Grenfell Tower. Sadly, there were too many occasions where those responsible for social housing were simply not listening to the points their tenants were raising. It is important that we enhance the ability of tenants to have raise their voices and enhance the regulation regime. We must also ensure we do something that is so important: raise the value of social housing for people, so that stigma is not attached to social housing and being in social housing. We are all one community. The type of housing we live in should be irrelevant to how we are treated.

The renters reform Bill is also important. I note that the briefing says it will provide 4.4 million households with more secure and higher quality homes. Renting is the only option for more and more people. For some it is the flexible option that they actively want, but it is not easy if people then live with the feeling that they could be evicted through no fault of their own. Dealing with no-fault evictions is a commitment that has been made previously—I seem to remember my Government made it—and I sincerely hope it will now be enacted through the Bill.

On housing, it is important for the Government to recognise the many concerns that were expressed by the public, and by Members across the House, about elements of the Government's planning White Paper. I understand that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), has heard those messages and is looking carefully at what should be in the planning Bill. We need more homes and we need to ensure that they are in the right place. We also need to ensure that their designs are in keeping with the community and the neighbourhood in which they are set.

I believe that the Housing Secretary is interested in street votes, so that if somebody in a street wants to extend their house by two floors there could be a vote in the street and the street would decide whether that was a sensible thing to do. I simply say to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and others on the Treasury Front Bench that the Government need to be very careful about the potential unintended consequences of such a move. I can well imagine a situation in which somebody persuades their neighbours in a street to agree to the sort of development that might enhance the value of their houses but which actually has a negative impact on the wider community and wider neighbourhood.

On planning—this ties in with issues relating to the energy Bill—I urge the Government to take the opportunity to move ahead on building regulations to ensure that we embrace now the standards that will be required for us to reach net zero. New homes are still being built with gas boilers. They will be retrofitted in a few years' time, so would it not make more sense for the regulations to ensure we make the moves now for net zero? However, I welcome the energy Bill. There is much in there that will help us to move to net zero, and that is excellent.

I also welcome the national security Bill, which I expect will enhance our ability to deal with threats from hostile states. That is very important—it is increasingly necessary—and it is very timely.

On Northern Ireland, there is reference in the Queen's Speech to the legacy Bill. It is important, as I have said in the House, that we reach a point where there is the ability to try to draw a line under the past, but that must be done sensitively, in recognition of the sensitivities of all communities.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs May: I will.

Mr Speaker: I call Jim Shannon—welcome back.

Jim Shannon: I think an explanation is needed: I was at the Nigerian embassy getting my pass so that I can go to Nigeria at the end of May.

It is really important for my constituents, for those who have lost loved ones—I could name the Ballydugan Four, Stuart Montgomery and my cousin—that people were murdered by the IRA but nobody was ever made accountable. I want justice; my relatives want justice; my constituents want justice. Does the right hon. Lady agree?

Mrs May: We welcome the hon. Gentleman back to his place. That is why it is important that these issues are addressed sensitively. They have been looked at consistently by some of my colleagues in relation to veterans who may find themselves being caught before justice, but it is important that people who lost loved ones during the troubles—the majority of those losses will have been at the hands of terrorists—can feel an understanding of, and are able to know, what happened. That is one of the things driving the Government's intentions in relation to that Bill. Such people will want to feel some sense of closure, which they have not been able to have for so many years.

I note that there was no reference to what has been referred to in the papers as a Bill in relation to—I am going to use this phrase—the Northern Ireland protocol and possibly to varying the terms of the treaty unilaterally. I say to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—he will not be surprised to hear this—that I do not feel that that would be the right move for the Government. The Government need to consider not just some immediate issues, but the wider sense of what such a move would say about the United Kingdom and its willingness to abide by treaties that it has signed.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I say to the former Prime Minister, with the great respect in which I hold her, that surely what is more important here is the Good Friday/Belfast agreement and the need to protect the political institutions. I stood in the election last week, and not a single Unionist Member who supports the protocol was returned to the Assembly. There is no consensus for that. It needs to be dealt with: it is harming our economy, driving up the cost of living and undermining political stability in Northern Ireland, and it threatens the Good Friday agreement.

Mrs May: I put a deal before the House that met the requirements of the Good Friday agreement and enabled us not to have a border down the Irish sea or between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Sadly, the Democratic Unionist party and others across the House chose to reject that, but it was an opportunity to have what the right hon. Gentleman wanted.

I say to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that I am deeply disappointed that we see only draft legislation on a new mental health Act. The process for a new mental health Act was started in 2017. I said in the previous Queen's Speech debate that I feared that we might not see a new Act until 2023. I now fear that we might not see a new Act until 2024, and given the proximity of a potential general election, that we may not see a new Act in this Parliament at all. Those suffering from

[Mrs May]

mental health issues deserve better from the Government, and I encourage action on introducing a new mental health Act.

I am also disappointed that we do not have an employment Bill, particularly to put through the policy of ensuring that tips that are left for waiters actually get paid to those individuals. It was a popular policy and I hope that the Government will think again about putting that through.

The final issue about which I am disappointed is that we do not see a commitment to an independent public advocate, which was a 2017 manifesto commitment. I recognise that my right hon. Friend did not put it in the 2019 manifesto, but it was one of the key recommendations in the report that I commissioned from Bishop James Jones. Thirty-three years on from the Hillsborough disaster, it is time that we took action to provide much greater support for families who lose loved ones in public disasters—and there have been other disasters since Hillsborough. It would be a very fitting legacy for those who, sadly, have lost their lives at Hillsborough and in other disasters for that support to be provided through an independent public advocate. May I say to those on the Front Bench that the Government do not need to do any work, because the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) has a Bill that is written, which I am sure she aims to reintroduce to this House and which could be supported?

Underlying the Government's programme is the desire to level up the economy and encourage high-wage, high-skill jobs. Having a country that works for everyone is about levelling up opportunity across the country, but the economic background against which the Government are working does not make delivering those aspirations easy. The cost of living crisis is making life difficult for many across the country; we have rising inflation; we need to restore public finances; the number of people who are economically inactive in this country is rising; we have seen a hit to sterling; and forecast growth is well below trend. All those things make for a very challenging environment.

At a time like this, the Conservative principles of sound public finances and competent economic management are needed more than ever. As we level up across the country, we should ensure that we are not a Government who work just for certain parts of the country, but a Government who truly work for everyone.

4.41 pm

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): It has always been a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), especially since the current Prime Minister entered office. I agree with a lot of what she said, especially about the need to move ahead quickly with new legislation for people with mental health issues, and I thank her for what she said about social housing.

I would like to pay tribute to Her Majesty the Queen. She was missed today very much; on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I would like to send her our very best wishes. We all look forward to celebrating the incredible milestone of the Queen's platinum jubilee next month. As an MP serving the Royal Borough of

Kingston upon Thames, I know that there will be street parties galore across my constituency, demonstrating our patriotic and affectionate support for Her Majesty.

I would also like to pay tribute to three others whose absence we feel very acutely today: James Brokenshire, David Amess and Jack Dromey, parliamentary colleagues who, sadly, have left us in the past 12 months. All three were MPs who commanded respect across the House for their seriousness of purpose and their collegiate way of working. They are all missed in every corner of this House.

I must compliment the hon. Members for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) and for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) on their speeches. The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness was a well-respected Chair of the Select Committee on Education when he described the reforms of the then Education Secretary as "ill-conceived" and "incoherent"; he will be relieved to hear that his speech was neither of those things. In my opinion, he is neither an old duffer nor a young thruster but, far more valuable than either of those, a Member with an independent mind—a Whips Office dream. His mention of a royal commission to deal with political wrongdoing has given me an interesting idea that I think we should take up with Ministers.

We are all servants of the Crown, but the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire has taken that further than most, having worked for the Prince of Wales as a researcher. I am not sure whether she was consulted by His Royal Highness about today's Gracious Speech, but her speech was an interesting insight into the complex relationships between Conservative MPs, and I thank her for it.

This should have been a cost of living Queen's Speech. Families and pensioners across the United Kingdom are facing the biggest squeeze on household budgets and living standards at any time during Her Majesty's whole long reign, going back to the 1950s, yet the Government's programme offered nothing. There was a hint in the Prime Minister's speech—I do not know whether Members caught it. He said that he and the Chancellor would bring forward some measures in the next few days. Yet the press are reporting that the Treasury is saying that it has no idea what the Prime Minister was referring to. It would be wonderful if, at least, a Minister from the Front Bench could enlighten the House because our constituents need some help and there is none in the Queen's Speech.

Inflation is at 7% and rising. It is at its highest rate for 30 years and predicted to enter double digits by the end of this year. We have all heard, from many constituents, heart-rending stories about the sacrifices that they are making just to try to make ends meet because of inflation. We hear of parents going without meals to ensure that there is enough food for their children, and pensioners huddled in only one room to keep their heating bills down. Families who have already seen energy bills soar by £700 are now being told to expect another £800 rise in the autumn. People desperately need more help from the Government, but what have they received instead? Tax rises, broken election promises on pension rises, and wages rising far more slowly than inflation.

The Government's unfair tax rises could not possibly have come at a worse time. The increased national insurance contributions, coupled with the freezing of income tax thresholds—which they would like us to

forget—are hitting the low-paid very hard. What everyone really needs is an emergency tax cut, which is why the Liberal Democrats want an immediate cut in VAT. That would help everyone: it would help small businesses and high streets and it would cut inflation. By failing to cut VAT and by choosing to make the cost of living emergency worse, the Government have confirmed people's deep fear that they are a Government who just do not care.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Given the reported increase in Treasury receipts owing to inflation and to increased VAT receipts, does the right hon. Member think it would be appropriate for the Government to take that action? Does he also recognise that the VAT reduction could not apply in Northern Ireland and people in Northern Ireland could not benefit from that because of the Northern Ireland protocol?

Ed Davey: I hope that the Government will find a way of working with politicians in Northern Ireland to help people who are struggling, but the right hon. Member is absolutely right about the VAT point. The Chancellor is getting £9 billion more in VAT receipts than the Budget prediction of £38 billion, yet the Government say that they cannot afford a VAT cut. That is clearly nonsense.

At the local elections last week, people across the country rose up to say “Enough is enough.” From Stockport to Somerset, Cumbria to Cambridgeshire, Harrogate to Harpenden, voters chose Liberal Democrats to be their local champions and to fight for a fair deal for them and their communities, and for Liberal Democrats, the fair deal must start with real action to tackle soaring energy bills and rising food prices. That does not just mean a VAT cut; we want to increase and extend the warm home discount to help more than 7 million people with their heating bills, and we want to increase the winter fuel payment to help pensioners betrayed by the Conservatives when they broke their election promise on the pensions triple lock.

Liberal Democrats want to help families and pensioners in rural areas who heat their homes with heating oil or liquefied petroleum gas and are not protected by the energy price cap. We would pay for that with a windfall tax on the super-profits of the oil and gas companies. Only last week, we learnt that BP and Shell are now raking in £1 billion in profit between them every single week from the same soaring gas and petrol prices that are making families suffer so much. Surely even this Government can see that, in the present economic crisis, we need to cut taxes for families by asking these corporate giants to pay a bit more.

The Government are failing so many groups. For instance, there is nothing to back British farmers, who are at once some of the hardest-hit victims of the cost of living crisis and crucial to solving the problem of food inflation for the rest of us. Instead of backing our farmers and our rural communities, the Government are adding to their pain. They are selling them down the river with trade deals that allow low-welfare foreign imports to undercut responsible British farmers, and cutting the payments on which they rely, which is costing some of them up to half their entire income. Quite simply, that risks driving many small farmers out of business altogether. In the south-west alone, farmers will lose almost £1 billion by the end of 2027 as a result of these Conservative policies.

This Government's programme fails not only to help people with the cost of living emergency but to address the crisis in our NHS and care services. Take our ambulance services: many are in crisis, resources have been slashed and the paramedics and handlers are not being given support that they need. In the south-west, if you are a stroke victim, you now have to wait almost two hours for an ambulance. That is a terrifying statistic. The average wait for an ambulance is now almost two hours, and not just for stroke victims. In Devon, an 88-year-old man, Derek Painter, lay in “excruciating pain” after he fell on the stairs. He waited seven hours for an ambulance. That is just horrific. Thousands of people are watching loved ones in agony and distress; some have even watched loved ones die. This is heart-breaking and it cannot go on. Can Ministers—and the Prime Minister—look these families in the eye in such distressing circumstances and tell them that they have got a grip on this health crisis?

It does not stop at the ambulance crisis. Over many years now, this Government have allowed our NHS to spiral out of control. Local health services are at breaking point following the Conservative Government's broken promise to recruit more GPs. People are struggling to get appointments and GPs are under more pressure than ever. And then there is the ticking timebomb of NHS dentistry—or lack of it—forcing people to shell out hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds for private work because they cannot get to see an NHS dentist. There was nothing in the Queen's Speech to tackle these health crises and nothing for the social care crisis either. Last year, the Government promised to reform social care but all we got instead was an unfair tax hike. More than 1 million people are missing out on the care they need right now, and still the Government are doing nothing to help.

Nor are the Government doing anything to support the millions of unpaid family carers who are making big sacrifices to look after their families and loved ones. They were already facing serious financial hardship before the cost of living crisis struck; they are now being pushed to breaking point. They were again forgotten in the Queen's Speech. I have told Ministers, including the Prime Minister, on countless occasions about the everyday struggles that carers face. The amazing Kingston Carers Network in my constituency tells me that its members, like carers across the country, are desperate for a rise in the carers allowance and for respite services to give them a break. Even the Government's promise of a week of unpaid leave for carers—surely the very least the Government can do—was missing from the Gracious Speech. It is just not good enough. Without these unpaid carers, these family carers, our health and social care systems would crumble. The Government ignore them at their peril.

Nor can the Government afford to ignore the growing public anger about raw sewage being dumped into our rivers and seas. I see it in the Hogsmill river in my constituency—Kingston's blue jewel and one of only 210 chalk streams in the world. Sewage pollution is killing these rivers and chalk streams. It threatens the habitats of countless wild animals and spoils the beauty of our precious local environment. I know other Members across the country are also seeing sewage being poured into their local rivers and streams, and into the seas along our coasts, whether in Eastbourne or East Devon. Liberal Democrats have proposed tough new laws to

[Ed Davey]

end the dumping of raw sewage and a new sewage tax on water companies. Our constituents will not forget the Government's failure to listen and include such measures in the Queen's Speech today.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of sewage pollution in our rivers. Does he not think the solution is to take all our water companies back into public ownership and stop pouring millions of pounds of our water costs into the profits of the private sector, often in overseas locations?

Ed Davey: I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. I want a sewage tax. I want punitive laws and regulations on these companies, which have been getting away with it. That is how we get much quicker progress. We cannot wait any longer; we need clean rivers and seas.

Finally, this Queen's Speech comes not only at a challenging time for the UK domestically, but at a dark moment for us and our allies as Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine continues. I am proud of how both sides of the House have stood united in our resolve to support President Zelensky and the brave Ukrainians. They are fighting for the same fundamental values that we treasure so deeply: liberty and democracy. But we need to do more and send clear, strong signals. In that regard, one thing was conspicuous by its absence from the Queen's Speech: the decision to reverse this Government's cut to our armed forces. The cut of 10,000 troops is a deeply misguided policy at this perilous moment. Our national security must be a priority. I urge the Government to reverse the decision immediately and demonstrate to our NATO allies Britain's determination to stand up to aggression now and in the future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I now call Anna Firth to make her maiden speech.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

4.56 pm

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey). I hope the eloquence with which he made his speech is infectious. It is also a pleasure and a privilege to speak in the same debate as the Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley). He is sadly not here, but I had hoped to tell him that he sets a fine example and that I am looking forward to addressing this place in 2070.

It is the honour of my life to be the first MP to be elected for the new city of Southend—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Yet I will never forget that the circumstances that brought me here are truly horrific. Sir David was, and remains, a legend across the whole of Essex. An outstanding MP for Basildon for 14 years and for Southend West for a further 24, quite simply, Sir David embodied all that is good about our parliamentary democracy. He had a gift for building bridges across this House, and I think everybody here misses his decency, his kindness, his smile and his wicked sense of humour.

Here in Westminster, it is already obvious to me how easily one could become disconnected from normal life and from the constituents we serve. Yet in nearly 40 years as an MP, that never happened to Sir David. He always remained absolutely dedicated to the people he represented. From his successful private Member's Bill on fuel poverty—still relevant today—to eliminating cruel tethering, Sir David championed causes close to his residents' hearts: animal welfare, the incredible Music Man Project, endometriosis and, of course, making Southend a city.

There are others I would like to mention. The life of an MP is clearly demanding, but there are rewards and recognition that go with that. One group of people, however, share many of the pressures of our journey, but little of the recognition. So I want to pay tribute to Lady Amess and her five children. No one—I repeat, no one—has paid a higher price for our democracy than they have. As we continue on with our lives, theirs have been shattered forever. The dignity, love and spirit of reconciliation that they have shown has been an inspiration to me, and I know the whole House would wish to join me in telling them that their sacrifice and their contribution to our democracy will also never be forgotten. I would also like to pay tribute to the other mainstream parties, which chose not to contest the by-election, proving once again that attacks on our democracy will only ever bring us closer together.

Southend West is a wonderful constituency, containing award-winning beaches, the earliest recorded woodland in Essex, an international airport, nationally important wetlands and the beautiful town of Leigh-on-Sea, where I was born and love living. Arrive from London by road, turn right towards the sea and there spread out before you is, in my opinion, the most captivating view in the south-east. It is the view that Admiral Blake would have seen in 1652 when he bought the crippled English fleet back from the Anglo-Dutch war to Old Leigh for refitting. Spurning instructions to go to Medway, Blake knew then what we all know now: the only way is Essex. Two months later, Blake left Old Leigh with the biggest and best equipped fleet the nation had ever set to sea.

There is much more: delicious shellfish and cockles are still fished daily in my constituency; and our picturesque high streets sport a wealth of independent businesses, including the internationally renowned Rossi's ice cream and the best fried doughnuts in the country. It is no wonder that *The Times* recently announced Leigh-on-Sea as one of the best places to live in the country, proclaiming it: "fresh air and funkiness in buckets and spades".

We also have a very proud tradition of sea bathing in Southend West. Indeed, we have the largest collection of historic swimwear in the country. Changing facilities, however, have always been controversial. Historic reports from the 1900s detail men not queuing for bathing machines, choosing instead to rummage around in Mackintoshes to get changed. Men who performed this "indecent act" were fined five shillings, with the last man prosecuted in the 1950s. In court, he was told, "Surely it is time to give it up". Purportedly, he replied to the judge that if he did not mind, he would, "Stick it out for a little longer."

There is, of course, much more to Southend West than our beautiful seafront. Containing internationally significant heritage sites such as the Saxon "Prittlewell Prince" burial, a stunning medieval monastery, the 17th-century London shipwreck, Chalkwell's famous rose

garden and the Palace theatre, which previews many west end shows, Southend is absolutely worthy of being the UK city of culture in 2029.

Fay Jones: Here we go!

Anna Firth: My hon. Friend may think that calls for Southend to be a city have finished, but I can tell her that they have only just begun.

What makes Southend truly special is its people; they are positive, talented, hard-working and entrepreneurial, and I am so proud to represent them. Give a Southender a lemon and you will not just get lemonade; you will get limoncello, because Southend West is home to Tapp'd, an international cocktail success story, started in the founder's kitchen in the time of lockdown.

As a Conservative, I believe in equality of opportunity. After wartime service, my grandfather worked for Southend general post office for over 25 years. My grandmother was a dinner lady. Above all, they valued education. My mother, Dr Margaret Garrett, went to Westcliff High School for Girls. That was the making of my mother and of my family. I am delighted that they are here today, including my wonderful husband, Edward, and my son, Piers.

That is why championing Southend West's great schools, including our world-beating grammar schools, is so important to me. It is also why I welcome this Queen's Speech, with its commitment to turbo-charging school standards and school attendance, and to a register to ensure that we do not have invisible children in the system and that we have greater safeguarding and fairer funding. Ensuring that every child in our country receives a quality education is the only way to achieve true equality of opportunity for all.

That must apply to healthcare, too, which is why I also welcome this Government's commitment to the NHS. Every 45 minutes a man dies of prostate cancer in this country, including my own father 18 months ago. His treatment by the NHS was exemplary, but there are now new and better ways to treat prostate cancer, particularly earlier screening. That is why I will be a loud voice for the brilliant Southend charity Prost8 and its ground-breaking work in this area.

As Disraeli once said:

"You could not have a softer climate nor sunnier skies"

than at Southend. I cannot hope to replace my predecessor, but I can promise to work hard every day to make the new city of Southend a beacon of enterprise, unity, kindness and opportunity.

5.7 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): It is a delight to follow the hon. Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) making her maiden speech. Like other Members, I strongly empathise with her remarks about David Amess, who was a friend to many of us. He was absolutely somebody who showed the best of this House of Commons of ours. He will be a tough act to follow, but the hon. Lady's speech shows why she is now the Member of Parliament to take on David's many battles. As a northerner I thought for a long time that Leigh-on-Sea was as credible as the Wigan pier, but I empathise with the visions of those mac-wearing people changing on the beach, because that happened in the rather cooler climes of Blackpool and Southport in the north of England. I wish the hon. Lady every success in her role.

For many of us, the Queen's Speech was a tale of two countries. The Prime Minister sought to set out a vision of a country going forward, but the reality for many of our constituents is a country that is frankly in reverse gear. Over the course of the election campaign, many of my constituents and those in other areas where I knocked on doors told me that they are frightened: for example, the constituent whose husband had to wait for seven hours for an ambulance or my constituents who are on waiting lists, which seem to grow, not get shorter. They are frightened about their health and even the possibility of early death while they are on those waiting lists.

My constituents in schools are concerned about their future: the high-quality education that is in the brochure is not delivered on the ground because of underfunding—not lack of good teachers, but not enough teachers and investment in our education.

At the moment, my constituents are particularly frightened about issues such as housing. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) talked about London. The London housing market is unique, but the lack of social housing and affordable housing is felt right across this country. There is a housing crisis in my constituency, but nothing in this Queen's Speech touches on that.

Undoubtedly, the biggest issue in this country is the cost of living crisis. I have not personally had such a large number of emails on an issue. Again, we have a tale of two countries. Companies such as Centrica, BP and Shell are making record profits, much of which goes to their already well-heeled shareholders, and yet my constituents—and those of Members on both sides of this House—have seen a 50% increase in the energy price cap and are likely to see an equivalent increase later this year. Our constituents are frightened about what that will mean. People really are frightened to put on the heating or to use the oven. They simply do not know how they will make it through to the end of the month.

A woman wrote to me. She is a teacher and a single parent. She has been able to buy her own home, but is frightened that she may have to sell it because she cannot afford the upkeep. She is not among what we think of as the worst off. A professional teacher should simply not be in that position, but she is frightened—frightened for her children and frightened for her budget.

A wife has told me that, although she is in work, she is concerned that her husband will lose the car that he gets because he is disabled. This car, which gets him around, gives him his own life support mechanism. She is frightened that that will go, and makes the point that his 3.1% benefit increase for his disability is, de facto, a serious decrease in his income, as inflation is likely to hit 10% later this year.

Pensioners are also concerned about how they will make ends meet. They have seen the Government break their promise on the triple lock. They have seen only a 3.1% increase in their pensions, when they know inflation will hit levels way above that. These people are very concerned about the future of this country and cannot see these glossy brochure visions that the Prime Minister has given us. We must do something about that. We must do something about the fact that it is not just those in the lowest economic groupings in our society who are suffering; people across the piece are worried.

[Tony Lloyd]

There are things that the Government can do. Even increasing the national minimum wage by 50p to £10, for which many on the Opposition Benches argue, would yield in the order of £900 a year. Even after tax, that uplift would go some way to paying the increased energy costs. Why did the Chancellor not do that? These are important issues. We could, even now, take those up. We could see a reversal in some of the tax increases that have been introduced for those on average and lower incomes who have been penalised by the Government. That would be the right thing to do in a responsible society. We should send a message to those who are better off in our society—to people such as me who are over retirement age but who pay no national insurance. That must be wrong in our society. Why should I, who get the benefits of working, not be making my contribution? Why should those on higher incomes not be paying national insurance pro rata? Let the strong look after those who are weaker. We say that to our police officers. We say, “You who are strong look after those who are weak.” We say that to those with the brains to run our hospitals. We say, “Those of you who are strong look after the vulnerable.” Why do we not say to the better off, “You help look after those most in need”? That is the mantra of a fair society.

However, there were other issues that I looked for in the Queen’s Speech. For example, what are we going to do about the climate crisis? This has already been mentioned, but there is nothing in the speech, or even in the Government’s puffing around it, to indicate that there will be investment in home insulation, which is fundamental if we are to tackle the climate crisis. There are many things the Government can do to create jobs and skills. It seems so obvious that a crash emergency programme of home insulation would be part of moving the nation in the right direction, but that is simply not there. It would be good for saving energy costs and great for saving this planet. Let’s do it! But it is not there.

There are many other things I could cover, but I turn to the situation in Northern Ireland. I say this to my friends from Northern Ireland, both here and elsewhere: Northern Ireland is in a political crisis; we know that. When the Stormont Assembly was not meeting, I spent time talking to many people about the need for a constructive and effective Executive in the north of Ireland. The needs of the people of Northern Ireland are very similar to the needs of people in my constituency. They face an underfunded and badly structured health system and the reality that the cost of living crisis is hurting people, and they have real concerns about investment in education in the north of Ireland. Those concerns are felt across the piece; they do not have tribal identities. I say to the hon. Members here that I understand that the debate about the protocol has to go on, and we will agree and disagree on aspects of it, but having an effective Executive matters.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) talks about “permanent political instability”; that is not a message about the constructive process that devolved government should be about. I believe in devolved government, because I believe it is good for the people of Northern Ireland, but as we see at the moment, we will not have that constructive devolution if we once again have a boycott.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): My party believes in devolution very strongly; indeed, it has done a lot of the heavy lifting to make devolution work—more than many others—but I gently tell the hon. Gentleman that the cost of living crisis is accentuated in Northern Ireland by costs that are in the region of 27% to 34% higher because of the border in the Irish sea. The protocol has to be removed, or that crisis will go on and poison all relationships and the economy.

Tony Lloyd: I understand that the hon. Gentleman’s party is committed to devolution and has been part of making that devolution process work over the years. I know that that transformed the situation on the ground in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister’s protocol is something that must be debated in this Chamber. Members of the Democratic Unionist party are here to debate that in this Chamber, and I hope they take that opportunity. However, reform of the health service, things that could be done about the cost of living crisis and education are issues in the here and now, and I implore DUP Members to think seriously about what stopping reform on those issues would do.

One thing that all parties in Northern Ireland can unite on—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made an important comment about this—is the legacy of the troubles. Over time, I have listened to many victims of the troubles and their families, and their common insistence is still that they want justice. I fear that this amnesty proposal, which would block inquests and other processes, will hinder that search for justice. That unites people across the political divide in Northern Ireland.

Sammy Wilson: I know the hon. Gentleman does not want his speech dominated by the Northern Ireland issue, but will he accept that the Northern Ireland protocol is not only adding significantly to the cost of living crisis in Northern Ireland and slowing down the Northern Ireland economy’s recovery from covid, but poisoning the very essence of the Belfast agreement, and therefore stopping the working of the institutions? It removes democracy, because not only Unionist Members, but all Members of the Assembly will have no say on 60% of the laws. It also removes the principle of consent, because although not one Unionist Member supports the protocol, it will be the role of those Members in the Northern Ireland Executive to implement the very protocol that the Unionist population are being damaged by, economically and constitutionally.

Tony Lloyd: We will, no doubt, continue to debate the protocol and its impact. As hon. Members know, there are those in Northern Ireland who say, “Business wants to get on and make the protocol work.” My central point is that delaying reform of education, important investment and the good governance of Northern Ireland is a very high price to pay for bringing the matter of the protocol before this House.

I have probably spoken enough, but I want to say two kind things about the Queen’s Speech. The first is that the potential to do something about victims is a major, important step forward. The second is that we are seeing some progress on the governance of football. That may seem peripheral to many people, but football matters. It is our national game. I look forward to seeing the detail on this, because it is important to get it right.

5.20 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), as I have done many times over the years. While I may not always agree with him, he always speaks with level-headed common sense, and that is a privilege for the House.

The proverb tells us that the good die young, and in this House that could not be more true than it has been this year; three of our most valued Members—David Amess, James Brokenshire and Jack Dromey—left us before their time. David Amess was a particularly close friend of mine, so it is a privilege to speak after his successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Anna Firth), who gave a storming maiden speech. When she was telling her Mackintosh joke, I was reminded of a maiden speech made about 30 years ago by an Opposition Member. A rather striking redheaded Scot Nat made an absolutely stonking maiden speech, and John Smith, I think it was, jumped up and said, “That was no maiden speech; that was a brazen hussy of a speech.” The speech that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend gave was too elegant for that to be said about it, but I will say this, and it is perhaps the greatest compliment I can give her: David would have been proud of her.

There is a great deal to welcome in the 38 Bills in this Queen’s Speech. Those who have been pooh-poohing them perhaps ought to wait until they see the details. There is mention of tackling economic crime; embracing the freedoms that Brexit offers, though that is too late; reforming and securing our energy supply; and resolving the Northern Ireland legacy issues. These are all massively important issues, and there are many others like them that the Government are addressing, and on which they should have our undying support.

There are some issues—those on the Front Bench would be disappointed if I did not say this—that perhaps require more careful handling. For example, the Online Safety Bill is very necessary and well-intentioned, but it is so complex that it will have dozens of unintended consequences, including, possibly, that of curbing free speech. We have to make sure that we give that enough time to be looked at carefully. Similarly, the national security Bill is undoubtedly necessary, but we will have to handle it carefully because it replaces the Official Secrets Act, and while it protects the state from its enemies, we must make sure that it does not curb the rights of honourable whistleblowers.

A Queen’s Speech is built on sand if it is not underpinned by strong economic foundations. Indeed, this Queen’s Speech says that the Government

“will drive economic growth to improve living standards and fund sustainable investment in public services”,

but taxes today are too high, so we need to get some fundamentals right. High taxes do not deliver growth; they stifle it. Low taxes deliver investment and higher productivity, and therefore growth, and they are the pre-emptive answer to stagflation, which is the biggest threat on our horizon in the coming year.

I rather agree with the points from some on the Opposition Benches about the need for an emergency Budget, but I do not agree with the argument for windfall taxes, which would be self-defeating. There is certainly a need to act quickly. The Prime Minister talked about deploying our “fiscal firepower”, but we

need to do that now, when our constituents need it, not after they have suffered the increases in prices that they face, and the further increases that they will face in the latter part of the year. This is a good Queen’s Speech.

Sammy Wilson: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that having lower taxes puts money into people’s pockets—money that they can spend on things that they find it difficult to afford at present. Is he worried that the decision to use this firepower in a couple of years’ time, when we are coming up to an election, rather than using it to deal with the issues that are hurting people badly now, will be seen as cynical?

Mr Davis: The right hon. Gentleman is exactly right. If we increase national insurance for a large part of the population, and so increase their suffering and their inability to eat and to heat their house at the same time, but drop income tax one year before an election, I am afraid that would be seen in the working men’s clubs of Yorkshire as a cynical deployment of state power. I suspect it would be the same in Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland, where, as we have heard already, the problem is even bigger than in the rest of the United Kingdom. He is right, and that is why we should give the people their money back now. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood)—

John Redwood *rose*—

Mr Davis: I was about to quote my right hon. Friend; I give way to him.

John Redwood: Does my right hon. Friend agree that as there will be a big windfall element from extra North sea oil and gas taxation—there is already a double corporation tax windfall element, and there will be a big increase in VAT on domestic heating and a big increase in tax on pump diesel and pump petrol—that money, at least, should be given back through other tax bills?

Mr Davis: My right hon. Friend is right. He has been the icebreaker in this argument, which I refer to as the Redwood argument. We have record tax collections this year because of fiscal drag and for a variety of other reasons, including underestimates by the Treasury. That is money that we should give back to the people. We do not need to balance the budgets twice over. We need to get that right.

There are respects in which we need to reinforce or increase what is in the Queen’s Speech. My favourite line in the Queen’s Speech is the same every year:

“Other measures will be laid before you.”

We are Conservatives. We believe in a property-owning democracy. Governments of all powers and all persuasions for 30 or more years—since Margaret Thatcher, in truth—have failed on that issue. Two thirds of my generation bought their own home; today it is a quarter. That is a scandal. I approve of the Prime Minister talking about the right to buy for housing associations—I should do; I first came up with the policy in 2002 when it was my responsibility, and we still have not implemented that policy. However, it will not solve the problem. We are at least a million houses short, in a period in which the

[Mr David Davis]

population has increased by 7 million. We are about 100,000 houses a year short in what we are constructing, in addition to that million.

We need to find a way of addressing the issue that does not hit what people call the nimby problem, in which people, when objecting to things, talk about protecting their environment. We need to find a way around that, and we need to look very hard at what was done in the 1920s with garden villages and garden towns. We need to use the increased wealth that they create to pay for the community centres, surgeries, schools, roads and wi-fi that are necessary. There would be plenty of added value to make the farmers rich at the same time. Politically, it would not be straightforward, but it would be an easier policy than we might think.

We Conservatives are also believers in social mobility. I think all Members are believers in social mobility. We used to be the best on that in the developed world; now we are among the worst. When inequality is greater, social mobility is more important. Indeed, the only real moral argument for an unequal society is that everybody has an opportunity and a chance to take part. In the last 20 years or so, the top 1% of the population have roughly trebled their income whereas the median has roughly flatlined, so there is a stronger argument for social mobility today than there was before.

The best mechanism for social mobility is the education system, and there are some good proposals in the education Bill in the Queen's Speech. Adding to the academy system will help at the margins, however, and will not solve the problem; it has not solved it for the last 20 years and it will not solve it now.

The great scandal is that half of children from free school meals families are failed by the education system by the time that they are 11. They cannot meet the requirements in English or mathematics to make progress in education, so their lives are effectively over in terms of social mobility at that point. We need to get a grip of that, which means re-engineering our classrooms and helping our brilliant teachers with more artificial intelligence, more software support and more augmentation. The technology is there now—it exists, it is proven and it is available. I hope that the House will not laugh too much when I say that I went to see it demonstrated at Eton of all places, where it was brilliant at bringing on the weakest children.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that if a child is hungry, as many of our children are because they are living in poverty, that will not help their educational attainment?

Mr Davis: I agree entirely; I have arguments that I will not deploy today on universal credit and so on that relate directly to that point. One of the outcomes of having a technologically augmented teaching and assessment system, however, is that the teacher knows within days if a child has a problem that they did not have before and if their educational performance suddenly falls, perhaps because the parents have separated, there is trouble at home, they are going hungry or whatever. The hon. Lady is right and I agree with her basic premise, but technology would help even with that if we did it. I want to see us do that and deal with the scandal.

The last area that I will speak briefly about is the fundamental one of healthcare. We all support the national health service and no doubt applauded the brilliant staff—doctors and nurses—who did a fantastic job. We tell ourselves over and over again that we have the best healthcare system in the world, but that is simply not true. We have those committed doctors and we now spend more than the OECD average on healthcare, but we are not delivering more than the OECD average. Whether it is on survival rates in all the different categories of cancer care, coronaries, strokes, diabetes or whatever, we are not doing as good a job as we should be for the money, work, skill and commitment that go into it.

My argument is that we should look at the other countries that are doing better than us, such as Germany, France, Estonia, Austria, Sweden, Canada or Australia. They all have different systems that are all free at the point of delivery. I was a beneficiary of the Canadian system, which is an insurance-based system that is free at the point of delivery and supported by the state if people cannot afford it—and it works better than our system. We need to look at those other systems and learn from them. We need to stay with the fundamental principles of the health service but learn and improve what we can.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Davis: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I am just about to sit down.

We Conservatives need to rebuild our party as a party of low taxes, a party of and for homeowners, and a party of aspiration, opportunity and security. It is time for a new model conservatism that is fit for a new Britain in a new world.

5.34 pm

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), and I thank him for the support he has given us over the years in the Northern Ireland in particular.

Can I add my voice in paying tribute to Her Majesty the Queen in this her platinum jubilee year, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends and the people of Northern Ireland and in particular on behalf of the residents of Royal Hillsborough in my constituency? We look forward to Her Majesty being able to travel to Northern Ireland again in the near future to stay with us in Hillsborough and meet again the very proud citizens of that village, who have recently been accorded royal status.

Much has been said already, about the focus on the health of our citizens and on the cost of living crisis in particular, which is important for the Government going forward. Recently, in the Assembly elections, the local political parties in Northern Ireland were very much focused on these issues. As I campaigned across Northern Ireland, I met many people who are concerned about their ability to pay their bills or about how long they are going to be waiting on our health waiting lists. Sadly, we have the longest waiting lists in the United Kingdom, even though we pay more per capita into the health service than any other part of the United Kingdom. I think that flags up the need for reform of our healthcare system in Northern Ireland, alongside much-needed investment in that system.

We as a party are committed to that, and we are also committed to ensuring that measures the Government bring forward here at Westminster are applied to all parts of the United Kingdom in supporting hard-pressed families and working families during this cost of living crisis. I hope any measures introduced by the Government, and any spending commitments that apply to them, are applied across the United Kingdom, and of course that the Barnett consequential is made available to the Northern Ireland Executive.

It is a matter of regret that, at this moment in time, we have a political crisis in Northern Ireland. That political crisis is born out of the reality that while the Government talk about taking back control of our borders, our money and our laws through Brexit, in Northern Ireland—our part of the United Kingdom—we have not yet completed that journey. As my right hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) reminded us, I have now been elected to a Northern Ireland Assembly that is the legislature for Northern Ireland dealing with those devolved matters that are not principally a matter for this House. Yet many of the regulations that apply to trade in Northern Ireland and to business in Northern Ireland are enacted by the European Parliament and the European Commission, and not a single citizen of Northern Ireland and not a single elected representative in Northern Ireland has any say in how those regulations are drawn up, so we have not entirely taken back control of our laws.

John Redwood: Is it not a disgrace that we can want to cut VAT in the United Kingdom, but we are not allowed to cut it in Northern Ireland? In what sense is the EU honouring our internal market and our constitutional arrangements?

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: Of course, the right hon. Member is correct: the EU is not doing so. I have listened to some Members of Congress, for example, lecture us on the need to abide by the protocol and to implement the protocol, yet this is a nation founded on a campaign of “No taxation without representation”. What do we have in Northern Ireland? We have tax laws—on VAT, for example—that apply to Northern Ireland, but we have no representation in how those laws are enacted. That is not the essence of democracy.

That is important because, in this Queen’s Speech, the Government state the measures they intend to take—for example, to help small businesses, to reduce regulations and to alter the way business is regulated—and one of the benefits of leaving the European Union is that we have more control over how we regulate our businesses. That will not apply to Northern Ireland, however, because we are regulated by the European Union for the manufacture of goods, for example, and we have to comply with EU standards, which means divergence from our main market—Great Britain.

We purchase four times more goods from Great Britain than we do from the European Union in its entirety, and we sell far more goods to Great Britain than we do to the whole of the European Union as well. Yet we find that the Irish sea border, this trade border within our own country, is harming our economy, damaging the ability of our businesses to expand and invest, and costing them more. I recently heard from one company, a small manufacturing business in Newtownabbey in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for

South Antrim (Paul Girvan). It told me that in the first year of the operation of the Northern Ireland protocol, the additional costs of bringing component parts from Great Britain, transportation costs, delays in getting the goods in, additional paperwork and customs fees amounted to more than £100,000 for that small business alone. That is costing it jobs and means it cannot invest in the expansion of its business. This is harming business in Northern Ireland, and peace and prosperity go hand in hand.

A stable Northern Ireland does not just depend on the absence of violence; it depends on the growth of our economy, on creating jobs for our young people, and on giving them hope for the future. The protocol is harming our ability to do that because it is harming our access to our biggest market, in Great Britain.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I absolutely hear the passion and anger in the right hon. Gentleman’s voice, and it must be so frustrating for the community in Northern Ireland. I was interested to hear Marks and Spencer being quoted about the additional on-costs that it faces when selling its products in Northern Ireland, relative to the mainland. This is not supposed to be a difficult question, but what was it that the Prime Minister promised when he addressed the right hon. Gentleman’s party back in autumn 2019? Did he make clear the reality behind what he would do when negotiating with the EU?

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I can answer the hon. Gentleman clearly: the Prime Minister came to our party conference and told us that there would be an Irish sea border “over his dead body”. That is what he told us, and unfortunately the protocol created an Irish sea border and it is harming our economy. I am only asking the Prime Minister to honour the commitments that he made to us. I am not asking him to do anything more than that.

The hon. Gentleman referred to supermarkets. Let me point out the absurdity of what the protocol means. Sainsbury’s is one of the biggest supermarket chains in Northern Ireland. It has no supermarkets in the Republic of Ireland. Yet when Sainsbury’s moves goods—even its own-brand products—from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, for sale in Sainsbury’s supermarkets in my part of the United Kingdom, it has to complete customs declarations and pay fees. There is a delay in moving those goods which, as Members will know, can be vital for food products, and it costs the supermarket more. That is driving up the cost of food in Northern Ireland. For example, it is estimated that the additional cost of chilled food products is 18% as a result of the protocol, compared with the same products in Great Britain.

As we heard earlier, the Road Haulage Association has said that the cost of bringing goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland went up by 27% as a direct result of the protocol in the first year of its operation. There can be no other impact of that additional cost than driving up the cost for the consumer when purchasing products in our supermarkets and shops. That is the reality, and when people say it is nonsense to link the cost of living to the protocol, the evidence is stark and clear. Yes, there is a cost of living crisis in Great Britain, but it is exacerbated in Northern Ireland and enhanced by the presence of the protocol and the Irish sea border.

[*Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson*]

That is why I have had to take the reluctant decision, as leader of the Democratic Unionist party, not to nominate Ministers to the Executive until this issue has been addressed. We are being asked to implement a protocol. Do not forget that Ministers in Northern Ireland oversee the ports. We are the people who are required to implement and oversee that, and it is simply not fair that as Unionists we are asked to engage in an act of self-harm against our own people in Northern Ireland, with the implementation—the imposition—of a protocol that we do not accept, do not support, and do not believe is necessary to protect the integrity of the UK internal market, or that of the EU single market.

Mr David Davis: The right hon. Gentleman may remember that the reason why I resigned as Brexit Secretary goes back to a previous Prime Minister promising “full alignment”—that was the phrase—between the north and the south. It seemed to me that, as an outcome, Northern Ireland would have no more legislative power than a colony, because it would have no ability to correct the sorts of problems that he is now talking about. Is his argument that, for as long as that stands, that will make Northern Ireland not more but less stable?

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: That is absolutely the case. We were told by the European Union, including the Irish Government—a co-guarantor of the Belfast agreement—that the protocol was necessary to protect the Good Friday agreement and the political institutions created under it. It has had the opposite effect. There is no North South Ministerial Council operating at this time; the Executive are not fully functioning; the Assembly is unable to carry out its full functions; and east-west relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland are at an all-time low since as far back as I can remember. Can we not see the harm that the protocol is doing to the relationships at the heart of the agreement?

It goes further. The Court of Appeal in Belfast has ruled that the protocol changes Northern Ireland’s constitutional status and overrides article 6 of the Acts of Union, which is a fundamental building block of our relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. The Union is not just a political union but an economic union, and article 6 confers on the people of Northern Ireland—as it previously did on the people of the whole of the island when it was all part of the United Kingdom—the right to trade freely with the rest of our own nation. It says that there shall be no barriers to trade within the United Kingdom, and yet we now have an Irish sea border and barriers to trade. Article 6 has been breached and overridden by the protocol without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland to such constitutional change. That is contrary to the commitment in article 1 of the Belfast agreement, which says that there shall be no change to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister is therefore right to have highlighted in the Queen’s Speech the need to prioritise support for the agreement and its institutions, including support through legislation, but the legislation referred to is only to do with the legacy of the past. As the House will

be aware, the Democratic Unionist party has grave concerns about the Government’s initial proposals, because they deny innocent victims the right to justice, and we think that is wrong. I do not believe that peace is built on the basis of injustice. We await with interest the Government’s revised proposals.

Sadly, there is no reference in the Queen’s Speech to legislation on the need to address the very real difficulties created by the protocol. We are looking for that commitment from the Government. The Prime Minister’s first duty as Minister for the Union is to protect the integrity of the United Kingdom. Indeed, the Queen’s Speech states:

“The continued success and integrity of the whole of the United Kingdom is of paramount importance to Her Majesty’s Government, including the internal economic bonds between all of its parts.”

The Prime Minister is the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and those last three words—“and Northern Ireland”—are the most important for me in my constitutional status. We are an integral part of the United Kingdom, and when the Government say that it is of paramount importance to protect the internal economic bonds between all of its parts, that must include Northern Ireland. That means addressing the protocol, because it is incompatible with the two commitments of upholding and protecting the internal economic bonds between all parts of the United Kingdom and prioritising support for the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and the political institutions being undermined by it.

Not a single Unionist elected to the Assembly supports the protocol, and yet the Good Friday agreement is premised on the basis that the institutions will operate through consensus. There is no consensus for the protocol. The Unionist community does not consent to the protocol. I will not allow my Ministers to be put in a position where they have to impose on their own people checks and regulations over which they have no control and no say, and which have been created by a foreign entity, the European Union.

In conclusion—and in response to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd)—I want to be clear that my party is absolutely committed to the future of the political institutions. We want them to work and to deliver for everyone in Northern Ireland. My party is committed to the operation of those institutions. We are committed to our participation in those institutions, but it has to be on the basis of fairness, it has to be on the basis of a consensus, and it has to be on the basis that we address the problems in front of us that have flowed from the imposition of the Northern Ireland protocol.

Last Thursday, I stood for election in my constituency of Lagan Valley. I have had the honour of representing this beautiful constituency in the House for the past 25 years. I believe in Northern Ireland, I believe in the future and I believe I can play a role in strengthening the political institutions. That is why, in response to the points that have been made, I am prepared to commit the remainder of my political career to going back to those institutions and working with my colleagues to make them work. I am prepared to leave this House, which I have been a Member of for 25 years and I would dearly love to continue being a part of, because I want to invest in the future of our people. I want to work for our people. I want to deliver good government. But I have to say to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I

will not leave this House until the protocol issue is resolved. I will not leave this House until I can be sure that our political institutions in Northern Ireland have a stable foundation. In conclusion, I say to the Government that the words in the Queen's Speech are there, but they have to be matched by actions.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): My right hon. Friend says that he will remain in this House. It is right that he does so, particularly at this juncture in Northern Ireland's constitutional and economic place within the United Kingdom.

There are those who feel they can speak for Unionism, but they are not the people who speak for Unionism. You are the leader of Unionism. Therefore, it is vital that you remain in this House until this Government honour their commitment to restoring Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom. In truth, you are only adhering to the mandate that our electorate gave to us last Thursday.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Just before the right hon. Gentleman responds, I did not want to interrupt what the hon. Lady was saying because it was very powerful, but she really must not call the right hon. Gentleman "you" three times in the Chamber. He is "he". Perhaps she would just like to give her last line again, saying "he".

Carla Lockhart: It is absolutely vital that he remains in this place to ensure that Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom is constitutionally and economically restored.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I really appreciate the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann. I congratulate her colleagues in her constituency on their success in the Assembly elections.

The Democratic Unionist party re-entered the Executive at the beginning of 2020 on the basis of an agreement called New Decade, New Approach. At the heart of that agreement for us is the commitment by the UK Government, given by the then Secretary of State, to protect Northern Ireland's place within the UK internal market. Some two and a half years later, that commitment has not been honoured. Yet in the Queen's Speech today, two other elements of the New Decade, New Approach agreement have been referred to by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: the legacy of our past and legislation linked thereto; and we are told by the Secretary of State that he will introduce a Bill on language and culture. Well, I have to say to the Secretary of State that if he proceeds to introduce that legislation without the Government moving to deal with the protocol, they will be in serious breach of their obligations under New Decade, New Approach. They will be moving in a one-sided fashion, in an unbalanced way. That is not the way to build consensus. It is not the way, in the words of the Queen's Speech, to "prioritise support for the Belfast... Agreement and its institutions".

What the Government do must be balanced. It must take account of the concerns of the Unionist community as well as the concerns of others. Currently, the legislation coming forward reflects the concerns of others, but it does not reflect the concerns of the Members in this House who represent the Unionist community or the wider community. I reiterate my commitment to lead

my party into the political institutions. I will do so as soon as the Government take decisive action to deal with the protocol and remove the Irish sea border.

5.54 pm

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson), who spoke very powerfully of his commitment to the Union, which I very much share.

I would like to start by paying huge tribute to Her Majesty the Queen and wishing her a very speedy recovery. I regret very much that she was not able to attend the other place in person. I pay tribute to the speech that was given on her behalf. It was very positive and very optimistic, and I am delighted to support the Government in implementing it. Why is that? We, as the Conservative party and the Government, truly believe in opportunities. Opportunities and a hand up ran through the Queen's Speech today in full measure. I was delighted to see that. There is a lot in it that will enable people right across our country to make their lives better and their opportunities greater. I want to touch on a couple of specific measures announced today, starting with the levelling up Bill.

I want to focus, rather selfishly, on my own wonderful constituency of South Northamptonshire. We are often seen as a lovely midlands area in the middle of England. We are quite mixed. We have the fabulous Silverstone circuit. We have motorsport valley and hi-tech engineering. We have some fabulous rugby, cricket and football teams. It is a wonderful place to work and live. However, we also have quite a few problems. One, which is also one of our assets, is that I am fortunate to represent 92 villages and parishes, but sadly they have very few bus links. In my constituency, wonderful as it is, for many young people levelling up would mean being able to get the bus to work or school. I therefore hope that, in the measures the Government take to level up, many more bus routes will be made available so that young people and, yes, people who do not necessarily reach for a car as their first thought, will be able to get around on the bus. I urge the Government to do everything in that regard.

Secondly, on planning, South Northamptonshire is in the middle of England, between the M1 and the M40. The A43 runs through it. We are the rat run of choice for every HGV, whenever there is congestion on the M1 or the M40. As a result of being logistics central for HGVs passing through, they now want to park themselves in South Northamptonshire. We are under massive threat from huge warehousing applications, which are completely inappropriate for the area. There are plenty of logistics and warehousing dotted around, but I implore the Government to ensure that local communities will be able to resist inappropriate warehousing development that would literally concrete over the beautiful areas of Northampton, Towcester and Brackley. We are very much under threat.

The third plea I would like to make on behalf of my constituency relates to demographic growth. Again, because we are a lovely area, people want to move here. They are most welcome. We are absolutely open for newcomers from all over the place, but with new housing, newcomers, new pupils, new jobs needed and so on, we never, ever receive our fair share of funding for anything, whether for the hospital, GPs or school places. I understand

[*Dame Andrea Leadsom*]

that there is a lag, but I urge the Government to consider places where the population is growing very quickly so that they, too, can get some of the funding that is desperately needed.

I wanted to make those pleas for South Northamptonshire, but, of course, levelling up is about the whole country and there is a huge opportunity right across the United Kingdom. There is the energy security Bill, which is an absolutely brilliant Government initiative to ensure not only that our energy is cleaner and greener in future, but that we can make our fortune in the world, using our strengths in energy and innovation in the renewables space, the nuclear space and the technology space.

Jim Shannon: I agree with the right hon. Lady and reiterate Northern Ireland's position on hydrogen, one of the new energy systems that we can all use to our benefit. I am very pleased to hear her mention the commitment to levelling up all the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland has to be part of that.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: I completely agree and will come to that issue shortly. The hon. Gentleman's comments about the prospects for hydrogen power in Northern Ireland are music to my ears. That is a good example of some of the measures that the Government are putting in place to ensure that we can green up and grow our energy security and energy accessibility, as well as having more green growth and jobs.

I spent 25 years in the financial services sector before coming to Parliament. That sector was always considered the jewel in the crown of the UK economy. Those jobs, however, were specifically in areas such as the City, Edinburgh, Bournemouth and Birmingham. They were not widespread across the country, tended to be a bit specialised and were not for everyone. However, there are jobs for everyone in the green technology sector. There are new apprenticeships for young people in installing electric car infrastructure and solar panels. There are jobs for people coming from the industrial clusters in the north and in Scotland who might want to retrain to work on offshore wind stations or in carbon capture usage and storage. There are lots of opportunities, including for the brilliant scientists and universities across the United Kingdom that are developing new technologies in the green space.

I believe that, for jobs and growth, the green space could be even bigger than financial services in the years to come. If I was a betting person, which I am not, I would bet that by 2030 more people will be employed in the UK across the green technology sector than in financial services today. I hope that the Government remain absolutely committed to that agenda.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): The right hon. Lady mentions the green economy and everything associated with it. I do not necessarily want to green Northern Ireland, by the way; I am talking politically about that agenda. I want to mention the technology relating to passive housing. We should drive that forward and lead the world in developing passive housing, reducing the need for carbon burning in our properties to keep them warm. We have the technology available to do that. Why do we not use building regulations to impose

that on new development? Every year, 100,000 houses have to be built. Let us see whether we can drive that agenda forward and reduce our carbon footprint dramatically.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Legislation is already in place to put new requirements on house builders to reduce the carbon footprint of new homes. Those will tighten up as time goes by. As he and his hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) have pointed out, there are so many different green initiatives. I hope that that becomes the way that we make our living in the world, through jobs at home and exports overseas.

The pledges to the Union are the third area that I will highlight from the Queen's Speech. For me, as a proud Conservative and Unionist party member, keeping the Union together is what it is all about. There is no doubt in my mind that the Union of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is so precious to all of us. It would be a grave mistake—in fact, I simply cannot understand why separatists want to do this—to break apart our Union. It makes no sense to me. This is a fabulous place, where we have centuries of shared history, shared family, shared culture, shared language, a shared currency and shared institutions.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): A whole range of Bills in the Queen's Speech fly in the face of the Standing Orders, including No. 9B, in the Scottish Parliament and the Sewel convention, which requires legislative consent from the Scottish Parliament for this range of Bills. Does the right hon. Lady think that riding roughshod over the Scottish Parliament and imposing these Bills against its wishes will strengthen or weaken the Union?

Dame Andrea Leadsom: I say to the hon. Lady that, as a separatist, she wants nothing more than to see the UK Government setting out any sort of possibility whatever that she can argue against with some sort of fake grievance. I want to appeal to the fabulous people of the United Kingdom: let us stick together.

I have some ideas. I think that we should share rights to one another's health systems because, in Wales, there are serious problems with healthcare. I would like nothing more than to see Welsh citizens able to access the healthcare systems of England, Scotland or Northern Ireland whenever they want to, and vice versa. I would also love to see school exchanges right across the UK so that children, as they are growing up, can develop a better sense of the unity of the United Kingdom. I would love to see consideration given to more freeports around the United Kingdom and, particularly, to a freeport that could encompass the whole of Northern Ireland. It is one part of the UK that really needs and deserves a huge boost to jobs, growth and opportunity, so I would love to see a freeport that gives beneficial tax status and makes sure that Northern Ireland is integrally joined to and feels part of the United Kingdom.

Jim Shannon: The right hon. Lady is most gracious in giving way again. She is putting forward a good argument on behalf of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I agree that we are always better together. To make that happen, however, the Northern Ireland protocol has to be addressed. Will she commit in this Chamber to ensuring that the Northern Ireland

protocol is done away with and that we in Northern Ireland have the same rights as everyone else in this House?

Dame Andrea Leadsom: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the Northern Ireland protocol. I am absolutely determined that there should be no barriers to internal trade or any other form of union between all the component parts of the United Kingdom.

John Redwood: Given how the EU always wants everything in Northern Ireland to be aligned with the Republic of Ireland, does my right hon. Friend think that it might be a good idea to add to that freeport the same corporation tax rate as the Republic has, because that seems to me to be the one thing that it is actually getting right?

Dame Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point, which emphasises my view that Northern Ireland could be considered as a freeport to have a beneficial corporation tax rate and other regimes to encourage more jobs and growth and more spread of business right across the United Kingdom. I agree with him.

I will finish, Madam Deputy Speaker, by—*[Interruption.]* There are two Madam Deputy Speakers here, how wonderful! I will finish by talking about what I think is the greatest levelling-up policy, which is—this will not come as a surprise to anyone in the Chamber—the best start for life. When we human beings are born, we do not have any cognition. We do not know that someone is our mum. We do not know that we are wet, cold, tired, hungry or bored. We do not know anything—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) says, “Of course we know it is our mum”, but we do not actually. A baby does not know that someone is their mum. They know that that person is an important creature to them, but they do not know that that is their mum, and it is very important to make that distinction.

Babies adapt to the environment in which they find themselves, so if we want to level up, it is critical that in everything we do we provide support for families of all shapes and sizes to give their babies the best start for life. There may be those who do not understand about sleeping, crying or weaning, who may have relationship difficulties with their partner because of the stresses of a new baby in the household, or who may not know what a baby's stage of development should be and may therefore miss an important problem with their tiny baby that could be easily resolved if tackled straightaway. I know that there is a shared desire across the House for much, much better support. Nothing could be more important for levelling up than giving every baby the best start for life.

6.10 pm

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): I have been listening carefully to this debate. Speaking from the point of view of one of the villages at the heart of England, in Yorkshire, it is occasionally very difficult to recognise the descriptions of England and Britain that have emerged this afternoon.

Before I develop my argument, I want to refer to the fact that, for medical reasons, it has been more than five months since I have been able to speak in the House.

I had a bad accident in the new year, and two of my closest relations fell seriously and critically ill; one was on life support for nine days. I was able to see at first hand the miracles that are performed hourly, or even minute by minute, by nurses and doctors in the intensive care unit at Pinderfields Hospital in Wakefield. My sense of gratitude will never diminish—what I saw was quite incredible. The same goes for the paediatric unit at Leeds General Infirmary, which has been looking after a young member of our family. I hope that the House will not mind if I mention my own surgeon, Mr Venkatesh at Chapel Allerton Hospital in Leeds, who managed to get me up and walking faster than I imagined possible.

There were times in hospital when it felt as if I were running a casework surgery, because when people discovered that I was a Member of Parliament and I was laid up, they took advantage and formed a queue to lobby me about all kinds of things. What was most frequently raised with me was the state of the NHS; the staff, the clinicians, the orderlies, the cleaners and the patients all came up to me and spoke to me about the NHS.

The Prime Minister was saying earlier that he is putting record amounts of money into the national health service, so I just want to give him this message—not from me, but from the clinicians and all the people who spoke to me in the intense moments when I was trying to recover from the anaesthetic. They said, “The money isn't getting to us. Our incomes are low and are being held back.” They said that the scourge of restructuring was going on all the time, preventing them from getting on with the level of care that they wanted to provide. They also said that they were fed up with outsourcing. They asked me to tell the House of Commons that those are their views; I capture them in all honesty. I happen to agree with them, but that is beside the point.

I move on to the question of levelling up. One might ask why, after 12 years of Tory Government, it is suddenly necessary for the Government to say that we need to level up. In referring to my constituency, I will illustrate a series of national problems. There are two aspects that I want to raise, the first of which is inequality of income. The average income in my constituency is £250 a week less than is earned in wages in the Prime Minister's constituency. That is a staggering difference: £12,500 a year per person working in a full-time occupation. How can that level of inequality be justified? I am sure that many Labour Members and others have similar problems in their constituency. How has that come about after 12 years of a Tory Government? I will suggest later what might be done about that, but first I will mention a second point about my constituency that raises a wider question.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who is no longer in his place, mentioned social mobility. Well, look: the British are told, “If you work hard, play by the rules and have even a minimum of talent, you should be able to get on in life.” That is the promise of social mobility, but the truth is that the Government established a Social Mobility Commission—and what happened? The board members all resigned because they said that social mobility had come to an end in Britain.

There are 533 seats in England, and mine is the 529th least socially mobile constituency in the whole of England. I speak not only for my constituency, but for all the seats across the north of England, the south-west

[Jon Trickett]

and elsewhere where social mobility has come to an end. It breaks my heart to think of a child born today in one of those hospitals in my constituency that I experienced—born into a family in deprivation or poverty and facing not only a shorter life than people in more prosperous areas, but a life in which they will die in poverty. It breaks my heart to think that that is where we are.

“Levelling up” is a spurious rhetorical device that the Government have developed to try to cover up the failures of the past 12 years in office. We have a society that is now profoundly unequal, in which the billionaires are floating on a sea of riches while millions of people are living in poverty, including children and families in work. When inequality and the lack of social mobility are put together, what do we have? We have a class structure, the old British disease: ossified, unchanging and built on a system that enriches a few and leaves so many millions behind.

What does the Government’s programme offer? I say that it offers more of the poison that created the situation that we are now in, but pretends that it is a solution. What created the situation was Tory economic policies, austerity, neoliberal economics and market triumphalism. All those things are at the root of the problems that face communities such as mine and those across the north of England and elsewhere. What the Queen’s Speech pretends is that the state can take an active role in levelling up, offering social mobility and a route out of poverty for people in constituencies such as mine—but that is not what is being offered, is it? What we are being offered is more marketisation, more cuts and more austerity, with planning laws swept away to deliver more marketisation and then deregulation—all the defects that have created the problems that have left so many communities behind. That is what is on offer in this Queen’s Speech.

I am sure that in the quiet of their own homes, Ministers’ consciences may tell them that we have a problem. The key workers in the NHS and elsewhere who kept this country going through the pandemic have been abandoned on low pay, with pay rises that are wholly unacceptable, while price rises are accelerating.

If we calculate how much money we need to level up my constituency with the Prime Minister’s, the amount is astonishing. Paying people in my area the same as people in the Prime Minister’s would require a fifth of £1 billion a year; getting halfway there would cost us a staggering £100 million a year. What do the Government offer? They offer a Chancellor who never hesitates to boast about how he is a “small state” kind of guy, when what is required is active intervention in the market to begin to change the levels of deprivation and poverty and the difficulties that are the source of so many problems such as the breakdown of cohesion and the anger that we see in politics today. It would cost £200 million a year to pay people in my constituency what people earn down in the Prime Minister’s.

There is only one answer to this, and that is a Marshall aid plan on the scale of what was provided after the end of the second world war. That is what is needed if we are to begin to tackle the underlying problem; anything else is merely rhetoric designed to persuade people to give the Tories one more chance. Before anyone jumps up to say that we cannot pay for it—although I see that

no one is doing so—let me point out that this is one of the richest countries in the world. But where is that wealth? It is not in areas across the north, or indeed elsewhere. It is in the hands of a very small group of people and a tiny group of corporations. It is time to introduce a wealth tax.

Why is it, by the way, that money earned from wealth or property is taxed less than money earned from work? Why do we privilege wealth and capital over labour? Why is our fiscal system designed like that? We could raise more money to begin to create that Marshall aid plan. All these things are possible, but first the House must face the truth: this is a profoundly divided society, a restless and angry society which wants change.

In a society where divisions are running so deep, it is not surprising that the levels of consent and consensus which a democratic country requires in order to be governed are breaking down. Dissent is emerging because of the lack of social justice, which I have tried to explain from the viewpoint of my constituents. What is the Government’s response? Is it to try to create a more socially just society? No, it is not; it is to try to crack down on that dissent. In the last parliamentary Session we passed some horrendously authoritarian legislation, and now, in today’s Queen’s Speech, more is being proposed.

Let me end by saying this. Authoritarianism will never resolve the problems of a breakdown in consent in a society about which people feel profoundly uneasy because of the way in which it treats them.

6.21 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I have declared my business interests in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

I welcome much of what is in the Gracious Speech. I welcome the emphasis on growth, because we need growth to deliver on many of the other ambitions for levelling up and for better public services. I think the Government are right about the need to revisit rules and laws to promote better transport, to deal with difficulties in housing and planning, and to pursue a course of greater self-sufficiency in energy. However, I want to concentrate mainly on the economic conditions that they will need over the next two years in order to make a success of this legislative programme.

Legislation takes us only a little way. What we are trying to do through legislation is create conditions in which business can flourish, people can train and acquire better skills so they can secure better-paid jobs, and investments can be made. We will not level up all the mighty cities and towns of this country that are below average with public spending; we need to level them up with ambition and private investment. We need to see people going on their own personal journeys to develop their own businesses, to reach a point at which they can afford their own houses, and to secure enough training and qualifications to be able to obtain decent, high-quality jobs. That is how the successful parts of the country have managed to give many more people higher incomes and better living standards. Those are the parts of the country that worked to attract the people with the energy and the talent, or have given the people who are already there more support. We need to think about how we can provide such support and encouragement more widely around the country.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend is echoing the words of the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, who has said that it cannot be Governments who create wealth; we merely have to provide the opportunity for businesses and individuals to create that wealth.

John Redwood: I am glad that all three of us agree on this matter, and we can proceed on that basis.

So what do the Government need to do? My first recommendation to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is that he needs to have a new framework for the conduct of our economic policy. We are still running on Maastricht-lite. We still think that the way in which to control the economy is to control the debt and the deficit. I have news for the Chancellor: if we get growth and inflation right, the debt and the deficit will come closer to taking care of themselves. If we get the growth right, we will have much less of a problem with the debt and the deficit.

In the last year, when the United Kingdom led the growth tables for the advanced world, an unremarkable thing happened. It seemed very remarkable to the Treasury, but it seemed unremarkable to me. The deficit came tumbling down. According to one set of figures—and they still keep changing—it came in at £90 billion below the Office for Budget Responsibility and Treasury forecast, because with more growth comes more activity, more incomes and more spending, so the Treasury can collect more VAT and income tax. It was mainly extra revenues that came in, because we had that faster growth.

In my view, the debt and the deficit matter but should be subsidiary. The two main aims of economic policy should be a 2% inflation target, embedded as a Government target as well as a control mechanism on the Bank of England, and a complementary 2% growth target—not that exacting in the context of 20th-century experience in the United Kingdom, but fairly challenging in the context of the current century's experience because of the disfiguring effect of the big banking crash and great recession in the middle of its first two decades.

Let me deal first with inflation. Once it gets out of control, it is extremely damaging to everything. It ends up causing shortages on the shelves, lack of supply, businesses crashing, and people being thrown out of jobs. We do not want to get into the accelerating double-figure inflation that some countries have suffered all too much. Anyone who wants to see what happens with the playbook should look at what is happening in Turkey at the moment, and at what has happened, on a grotesque scale, in Venezuela, where the generous state kept printing and kept borrowing and ended up destroying more than half its national income and much of the potential of the oil industry, which used to pay for everything because it was nationalised and incompetently run.

Those extreme versions need to be ruled out, and of course the amount of money created needs to be controlled; you need to keep an eye on when you can afford to borrow in the public sector and how much. However, that is a second-order issue in comparison with promoting growth and inflation targets as the main aims. The inflation target cannot simply be delivered by a central bank. Unfortunately, the Bank of England made a policy error, to which I drew attention beforehand last year. I think that it went on printing money for longer than it should have, and that its policy was too loose for

too long. I was fully behind its huge injection of money and ultra-low interest rates in the previous year because of the huge shock administered to the economy, but it now looks as though it made a mistake, which it has subsequently corrected. It should not overdo it, though. It is no longer printing any money in excess, it has put up interest rates on three separate occasions, and money growth is now much more constrained in our country; but the Government must also put their shoulder to the wheel to curb various types of inflation.

At present one of the inflationary factors hitting, in particular, the budgets of those in the lower income areas is the huge price inflation in energy and food. That is caused by supply shortages. We were already pretty short of energy in western Europe because of the policies being pursued and because of the lack of natural resources on the continent, where there is not any, or much, oil and gas outside the Netherlands. We were already very short of basic energy. Then, of course, the dreadful invasion of Ukraine came along and caused so much damage—most directly to the people there who have such dreadful shocks from it, but there has been a wider economic shock for the rest of us. As a result of policy, Russian oil and gas are being gradually withdrawn from our supply systems, so we have exacerbated the shortage, for understandable and good political reasons, to try to help Ukraine in its battle against the Russian invasion.

As for food, we see a shortage arising as markets are heralding the sad likelihood that there will not be a lot of crop coming out of Ukraine this year and that a big source of edible oils and of grains will not be producing and exporting in the way that the world market needs, so we see great price pressures there.

So there is a need to engage Government, and I am pleased to see that the Government are working towards energy self-sufficiency and more food production. Those are crucial as a response to what has just happened and as security for the future. If we want to keep inflation down in the future, the one thing we can rely on is producing more of our own energy and growing more of our own food, which will give us more control over the pricing, particularly with something like gas, which of course is traded on the world market only to the extent that there is either pipeline capacity or liquefied natural gas capacity, so a lot of the gas cannot be traded internationally. American gas cannot be sent to Europe in huge quantities because there is no pipeline, and there is a limited amount of LNG capacity. America has much lower gas prices—and nothing like the cost of living problem that we have with energy—as a result of producing a lot of its own gas and therefore having a domestic market that clears at a lower price than the current very spiked world gas prices. I trust that the Government will pursue greater national self-sufficiency in key areas, including not only basic energy and food—we can grow a lot more of our temperate food—but crucial technologies, which the Government are becoming increasingly sensitive about.

I trust that when the Government turn their mind to the detail of their energy legislation, they will use it to facilitate the production of more domestic oil and gas. I think there is more general agreement today, after the debates of recent months, on the proposition that we ought to re-enter the North sea and that, instead of overseeing a pretty rapid rundown in its output, we

[John Redwood]

should go through a transitional period, maybe this decade, and get more oil and gas out of the North sea. That surely makes more sense. It makes green sense because the CO₂ output created by burning our own gas is considerably less than that of the elaborate process of carrying it halfway round the world and having it compressed and decompressed so that it can travel as LNG. It is about half the CO₂ generated.

More importantly from the point of view of levelling up and growth in our public finances, we would be paying the tax to ourselves. All gas and oil attracts massive taxation from the countries that have the good fortune to produce it. If we buy gas from Qatar—or when we were buying oil from Russia—we pay them a huge amount of tax, which is revenue that we could pay to ourselves if we developed more of our own production. Our own Treasury could then either spend it or give it back to us in some other form, such as a rebate or grant.

There is a more sensitive issue about onshore gas, and people are often rather opposed to that idea. I suggest that no landowner or council should be made to have onshore gas production if they do not want to. That would be a democratic decision over permissions and it would be a decision of those who have the land or property nearby as a result. I think that some areas would have it—suitably protected and environmentally tailored, as it could be. We already have some onshore oil and gas. Wych Farm, for example, is in a very beautiful part of the world and it produces oil quite happily onshore. The Government need to put into law a framework where landowners and communities that agree to participate in onshore oil and gas development should receive a participation in the royalty of some sorts, or free gas to consumers, or whatever.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am interested in what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. I assume he is talking about fracking when he talks about onshore gas production, and suggesting that we leave it to individual landowners and local authorities, but the polluting effects of fracking do not stop at the borders of somebody's land or at a local authority border. Fracking pollutes the aquifers and it can and does create earth tremors that go well beyond all that. It is surely a matter of national policy that we do not pursue this short-sighted avenue of trying to get gas, and that we look at better methods of conservation and more sustainable methods of generating our energy.

John Redwood: I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman has a gas boiler, but I expect that most people in this House have gas boilers at home, as I and most of my constituents do. That gas needs to come from somewhere. I will not go into the details of the techniques needed for reservoir management, because that obviously depends on the structure, the flow rates and the nature of the stratum in which you find the gas, but a range of techniques can be used if gas or oil is shy in coming out of a reservoir that has been developed over many years.

Of course, like the right hon. Gentleman, I want this to be regulated. There must be no pollution of watercourses. Fortunately gas strata and water are often well divided in the United Kingdom—rather more so than in the US, where there has been a gas revolution onshore

without polluting the water supplies or causing great environmental health problems. Of course that needs to be properly regulated—it is strictly regulated at the moment—and we need to review those regulations to ensure that the No. 1 priority of public safety is guaranteed and that the No. 2 priority, the desired effect of getting some gas out, assuming public safety is guaranteed, is also taken care of. I would have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would like the idea of a big new source of oil or gas tax revenue that stayed in the United Kingdom rather than being paid to Qatar or Saudi Arabia.

Dame Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend and I have talked a lot about community support for onshore projects. Would he agree that another such area could be deep geothermal, which the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee is looking into at the moment? It could offer fantastic potential for sourcing new forms of renewable heating.

John Redwood: I would love to hear about that. Unfortunately I was in this debate so I was unable to get to that particular Committee, but I will catch up with my right hon. Friend elsewhere to discuss that because I know you wish me to move on, Madam Deputy Speaker.

One last point, if I may, is about housing and planning in my own constituency of Wokingham. We are very generous and we accept a large number of new people joining our communities, as they would like to do. We accept well over 1,000 new houses being constructed in the constituency every year, but I do not think we should want to keep all of that to ourselves. The kind of housing that attracts people who can provide leadership and better jobs and who can set up businesses needs to be spread more broadly. The planning rules need to be revised so that we can use the planning system to reinforce the wish to level up, with some of the really important private sector housing investment going to the places that really need it, rather than having an awful lot in places that have done pretty well already and are finding that the pressure on public services, roads, transport, railways and so forth is just too much and that the infrastructure is not catching up.

This was a good Queen's Speech. It needs economic success and a policy based on going for growth. It also needs a policy that deals with supply-side shortages and a policy based around lower taxes, because we need to give something back now to start to lift the cost of living crunch.

6.37 pm

Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): As I rise to contribute to this debate, I want to thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the Speaker's Office for all your kind words of support during my recovery. The same gratitude goes to my colleagues on these Benches and across the House, to my family, friends, staff across the Estate and to my team, and significantly to the medics across NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. This has been a long time coming. Surgeries, tears, struggles and some victories later, I am standing up for the people of East Dunbartonshire when many doubted that I would be able to stand at all.

It is on that theme that I wish to start. Throughout the past two years, across our communities, we have seen the best of people. We have seen individuals and

groups rising to the challenge to support the vulnerable when they needed it the most. These are the triumphs of our communities: when faced with crisis and the toughest of adversity, good people will respond with honesty, integrity and decency. These are the hallmarks of our society and the principles that should uphold our democratic process. We know that, due to the actions of some in this place, those principles have been called into question. I do not wish to expand on that, but I will say that we can never hope to hold power to account or to elect Members from across our communities if the structures that underpin this place are fundamentally broken. We make no secret of desiring a different path for Scotland away from Westminster, but the structures and processes of this place must change. We must have decency in our democracy, integrity in our processes and equality throughout all areas of this Government's legislative programme, but today's Queen's Speech entirely failed to address a cost of living crisis not experienced for generations. We needed bold action from this UK Government. The people of East Dunbartonshire deserve answers and action, not platitudes and politicking.

What we heard today was a lack of willingness from this UK Government to take action to support or even throw an olive branch to some of the 2 million people living in poverty across these four nations, because this Government have made a legislative choice causing them to be in that situation. Poverty is a political choice by this Government. A different legislative programme featuring just some of the progressive policies of my nation's Government—free prescriptions, free university tuition, free personal care for the over-65s, free bus travel for the under-22s, the Scottish child payment, the baby box, or the young carer grant—would have resulted in a far bolder agenda for the year ahead. This is a tale of two Governments: one who help those in need, and one who blame those in need. Again, this speaks to our democracy and our politics.

Devolution was not designed to mitigate. It is there to empower and democratise and to bring power closer to the people of Scotland. It was never intended to be a shield to soften the blows of successive Tory Governments. We do what we can with the powers and resources of our nation, but we will not accept the people of Scotland—the voices of East Dunbartonshire—being abandoned by an out-of-touch, uncaring UK Government. In my constituency alone, the Scottish Government are forced to spend £11.8 million each year to mitigate the worst of what Westminster throws at us. Just think what we could do with that extra money as an independent country.

On that note, I physically returned to this place in February this year specifically to raise the case of a constituent and fellow stroke survivor who had been struggling to get by on the woeful welfare provided by this Government. This is an issue across the board, but disabled people in particular cannot afford to live on the measly welfare that this Government dishes out. I note with sadness that that is unlikely to change in the year ahead. People are being forced into poverty and, as I have already said, that is a political choice, and this Government could have set out progressive plans to rectify that today.

I do want to add a positive note. Like other speakers, I welcome the legislation to ban conversion therapy, but it is unfortunate that this is the second Queen's Speech in a row that we have heard that. I will also add a note

of caution: the Bill should not be exclusionary. Only a fully inclusive ban on conversion therapy for all LGBT people would be welcome. There is no LGB without the T.

I heard nothing today that would make a tangible difference to the lives of people in East Dunbartonshire as they struggle under the weight of the cost of living crisis. Last Thursday, people across these nations went to the polls, and my party enjoyed yet another historic victory—our 11th in a row and the best ever result for pro-independence parties. In contrast, the Conservative party, which once again put its opposition to independence front and centre, had a disastrous campaign and even worse results than Government Members may have feared.

However, that has not stopped the UK Government ploughing forward with their Brexit Bills. The seven Bills will undermine devolution, lower living standards and leave us out in the cold when the world desperately needs all democratic nations to step up. If the UK Government have faith in the programme laid out today, let them put it to the test. Let them surprise me and respect the SNP's democratic mandate to hold an independence referendum, let them make their case in the ensuing debates, and let the people of Scotland decide their own future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. It is good to see the hon. Lady back and on such good form.

As right hon. and hon. Members will know, we have a lot of speakers for this debate, so it would helpful if colleagues could confine their remarks to about 10 minutes.

6.44 pm

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): May I first add my voice to the many who have expressed their good wishes to Her Majesty the Queen? Our monarch is a truly remarkable and great lady, and I hope that she will be back in rude health in time not only to participate in but to enjoy her platinum jubilee celebrations. May I also say how good it is to see the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan) back in her place? I am sure that we all wish her a full recovery as well.

The Queen's Speech contains a long-overdue planning Bill, which, we are told, will allow greater local input into development. It is a sad fact that under previous planning regimes the desire to build houses—I accept, of course, that people need houses to live in—seems to have overridden local planning desires. The speech also contains a Bill to promote sustainable and efficient farming and food production. The two issues must be compatible. It is not possible to have sustainable food and farming if we are going to build all over our grade 1 and grade 2 agricultural land, which is what is happening in Thanet at this very moment. That has to stop. I hope that those on the Front Bench will take account of the fact that that circle must be squared, which is incredibly important.

The speech contains many mentions of the increase in the cost of living, and I have full confidence in our Chancellor's ability to get things right. I understand entirely why he probably wants to wait until the autumn to address fuel price rises, but I say to him that people

[*Sir Roger Gale*]

are hurting now. In constituencies such as North Thanet, families are facing real hardship. These are normal, hard-working families that ordinarily would expect to be able to heat their homes, put food on the table, and maybe have a little bit left over to enjoy themselves. That has practically gone out of the window, so I hope that the Chancellor will take on board the need for urgent action now as well as action at the autumn Budget.

The Queen's Speech also refers to Brexit freedoms and the fact that we should be allowed to control more of our laws. I was under the impression that one of the advantages of Brexit was that we would be able to take control of much more of the legislation that affects, for example, animal welfare. I was saddened to find that the speech contains virtually no reference to animal welfare. However, upon further inquiry, I am pleased to learn that at least the animals abroad Bill, although not mentioned in the speech, will be introduced and that the ban on the import of body parts—otherwise known as trophies—from hunting will be brought in.

It strikes me as strange, however, that we are allowed to ban, for example, the production of foie gras in the United Kingdom and that we can control the import of fur, but there is a reluctance to ban products produced elsewhere in the world under circumstances that we would not permit in the UK. Such issues must be addressed, and I hope that we shall find time to deal with some of them as we move down this line of legislation.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concerns that bear fur from Canada will still be imported for use in ceremonial caps in the Army?

Sir Roger Gale: The hon. Lady may or may not know that I am one of the patrons of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, which is campaigning for the use of faux fur. In this jubilee year, it strikes me as strange that when Her Majesty the Queen has eschewed the use of real fur in favour of faux fur in all her new garments, and when we now use faux fur skins for bandsmen's outfits under the big bass drum, as a replacement for tiger skins and leopard skins, we are still using real fur for guardsmen's caps. I understand the pride with which those caps are worn and the need to make sure that any faux fur replacement is suited to and fit for the purpose, but so far the Ministry of Defence, which has got so many other things right, seems reluctant to go down this road. I hope that if we can demonstrate that there is a viable faux fur alternative, that also will change.

The Queen's Speech makes reference to "our gallant Armed Forces", and by God they are gallant. It is vital that we continue to make the maximum affordable possible contribution to the war effort in Ukraine and to continue to give, across the House, our fullest possible support to those who are fighting so bravely for the freedom of their country.

Finally, I come to the issue of Channel 4 privatisation. As a former broadcaster, television producer and director, I am fiercely committed to free speech. As an aside, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Anna Cookson and the team on BBC Radio Kent's

"The Wake Up Call" on, a week ago, winning an ARIA—Audio and Radio Industry Award—in the teeth of competition from, I believe, the "Today" programme, Radio 5 Live and others. That demonstrates two things: the importance of that free speech; and the value of public service broadcasting. I am not philosophically opposed to the privatisation of Channel 4, but I do believe we are in danger of throwing a baby out with the bathwater. I hope very much that if we are going to continue to go down this road, we take great care to seek to secure the future of the independent production industry that Channel 4 has fostered.

6.53 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): It is an honour to be called in this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, and a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale). Although I disagree with him about much in politics, I am sure his words about animal welfare will be welcomed by many in the House and agreed with wholeheartedly. I also associate myself with all the remarks made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition about the contribution of Her Majesty the Queen and about those colleagues we have lost in the past year. As you said, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is also wonderful to see the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan) back in her place. We are all very glad about that, and she made an excellent speech. Again, although I disagree with many of the things she stands for in politics, we all are glad that she is here to say them.

Sometimes the House of Commons captures so well the emotions, worries and desires of the people we represent, and sometimes it feels as though Parliament is having a day on a whole different planet. Today has been a whole different planet kind of day. The glaring and burning injustice of children growing up in poverty and of far too many families simply not being able to make ends meet seems to have been ignored. Politics is not performance art; all the pomp and ceremony in the world will do no good at all for my constituents in Wirral South unless the laws we put forward and vote for in this place put money in their pockets.

When the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) was Prime Minister, she spoke of "burning injustices", but if anything some of them have got worse since she was Prime Minister, and I want to speak about those today. The debate on the Queen's Speech has many features. We have heard some self-deprecating humour, where we are not taking ourselves too seriously. It is important that in politics we do not take ourselves too seriously, but people do not want crappy jokes from us—they want action, particularly when it comes to making ends meet. So I am at a loss to understand why we are not having an emergency Budget; why there was no employment Bill in the Queen's Speech, despite promise after promise; and why there is simply no credible plan in that Queen's Speech to end the need for food banks in our country. We are letting the country down.

On an emergency Budget, it is universally accepted now, by everyone from the chairman of Tesco to most of this House, with the exception of Ministers, that we need a windfall tax on oil and gas companies, in order to put money into people's pockets to deal with energy bills. On the other side of the equation, on people's incomes, the Prime Minister claims that we are living

through some sort of “jobs miracle”. If he thinks it is miraculous that parents in this country can put food on the table while too many of them are still working on zero-hours contracts that pay the minimum wage and do not know whether they are going to get hours the following week, that women in this country are able to do full-time jobs while relying on the most minimal amount of paid-for childcare, and that families in this country are still able to feed and look after themselves while dealing with loved ones facing a social care system that is failing before our very eyes, I would agree with him. That is truly an employment miracle.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady also agree that the only jobs miracle to be seen here is that the Prime Minister still has his?

Alison McGovern: I was critical about parliamentary humour before, but we can all aspire to that example; it is truly a miracle that the Prime Minister is still in his job. But that is not the jobs miracle that we need. He can say however many times he likes that he wants high-paid jobs, but it will not put money in people’s pockets.

Let me turn to a local issue, as this is not just about the fact that people are finding it far too hard to get by and even people who do what I think of as relatively professional jobs such as nursing or teaching are now turning to the shame of food banks; it is also about the fact that the Government’s promises on every aspect of what they dare to call “levelling up” are meaningless. Whether we are talking about the fact that the money they are doling out does not seem to be reaching any of the right places or that their claims on the high street and regeneration add up to nothing, this Queen’s Speech is simply not good enough for the British people.

I will give an example from my constituency. Madam Deputy Speaker, you will remember that New Ferry, a town in Wirral South, had a terrible gas explosion in 2017, and we were promised help and support to regenerate that area. We got far too little, far too late. One of the major problems has been insufficient power and resources for councils to tackle areas of significant dereliction and deprivation.

The north of England has post-industrial areas that were never really fully regenerated after the 1980s. Those who represent such areas know only too well that the lack of power and resources for our councils has been incredibly detrimental over the past decade to delivering the kind of building on brownfield areas that will help to save green areas for everyone. The suggestions for some changes in planning powers in the Queen’s Speech may do a small amount at the margins, but they give the lie to the promise that has been made to the British public. There is a sense of injustice that this Government will never deliver on the ambition that people have for our country. People are truly angry about that.

The same applies to the issues that people face with the refugee scheme to help Ukrainians—promises made from the Dispatch Box never delivered. People were told to put their hand up and help those who are fleeing the war in Ukraine and that the Government would support them. What have we seen? Applications for visas taking far too long; people left in Poland and other countries without any information; and my constituents continually beating a path to my office to tell me how they have put

a shift in and sorted out the spare room only to get so little action from the Government. People have a sense of injustice that they wanted to help in a time of war and the Government were found wanting.

I put on record my thanks to the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead, for speaking up for the Hillsborough law. She knows the sense of burning injustice that Hillsborough created. She put forward a proposal to change the legal system that would treat every person in this country with decency and respect when the worst happened. If the Government fail on the Hillsborough law, as they are failing on every other aspect of public policy, the lack of justice in Britain will be clear for everyone to see.

7.2 pm

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern). I agree with her last point in that I hope that this Session is the one in which we can finally right that particular wrong and pass a measure to enable victims of great scandals and tragedies to have the legal representation they require. My experiences of working with survivors of the Grenfell tragedy lead me to believe that individuals and their families need all the support possible to help guide them through that difficult period ahead.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan) and welcome her back to the House. We all admire the courage that she has shown in the struggles that she has had in recent months and welcome her back to her place.

Today, the country is in a particularly perilous position. During the debate, we have heard about the constitutional issues that we face. We have heard about the geopolitical issues, with the war not so far away in Europe, and the work we are doing to support our brave allies in Ukraine, and to help them to win and Vladimir Putin to lose. However, here at home, we see a challenging economic situation—perhaps the most challenging in my lifetime.

First, the hit to household incomes this year and next will be the greatest since records began—perhaps the greatest for 100 years. There may be a recession later this year. I do not think that that is certain, but only a fool would bet against it, given the economic indicators. There is a real risk of the start of a new inflationary era, which should concern us all. Of course, it should concern the poorest in society the most.

Secondly, economic growth is stagnant. That should worry us the most in the long term. The economy needs to generate the good jobs and tax receipts to help people into good careers and fulfilling lives and to pay for public services. In an era when public services will only cost more with an ageing population, and given the urgent need to invest in our transition to net zero and the desire shared across the House to invest in levelling up and greater productivity, we will need those tax receipts more than ever. Yet they are not forthcoming. If the Bank of England and the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts are to be believed—they have been wrong in the recent past—we will experience several years of anaemic economic growth. We have to come together to tackle that.

Thirdly, there are a number of major issues on which the House should come together to tackle failure. Energy policy is clearly one. This year, we are reaping the

[Robert Jenrick]

whirlwind of decades of poor energy planning. There has been a failure to invest in renewables as fast as we could have done, and in nuclear power and other conventional sources of energy. That is placing an intolerable burden on individuals and families.

The other issue that comes to my mind is housing and the repeated failure of Governments to build more homes of all types and tenures, from social housing to those homes that aspirational young people want to buy to get on the ladder. We need to do more on those fronts.

In that respect, I welcome the Queen's Speech because on several counts it outlines Bills that may answer the challenges. A series of Bills looks at longer-term economic growth, from online competition to reduce the impact of big tech and its stranglehold on our online platforms, to gene editing to help our farmers and agriculture sector compete, to improvements in financial services, when the City of London's position is by no means secure and needs to improve if we are to continue to hold our strong position in the international community, to transport and to education. However, more needs to happen.

The Queen's Speech is not a fiscal event, as many Members across the House have said in one way or another, but we must recognise that we have to intervene and take further steps, first, to support the poorest and most vulnerable in society. I think it is inevitable that we will uprate universal credit. That will doubtless happen at the next fiscal event as usual, but there is a strong case for doing it on a one-off, exceptional basis as soon as possible to help those poor and vulnerable families get some extra money and to alleviate some of the pain for the months ahead.

Secondly, it is clear that taxes on working people are too high. The tax burden is at its highest level for more than 40 years and we will have to work to bring it down. I appreciate the Chancellor's position that a tax cut will occur in 2023 or 2024, before the end of this Parliament, but that does not seem soon enough to me and my constituents. We need a more competitive tax system. That means work now, when household incomes of any level are under strain, rather than in a year or two, when, potentially, inflation will start to ease and the need for tax cuts will be somewhat diminished. I hope to see those two changes, among others, in the months ahead.

Let me look to the longer term and speak about three Bills in the Queen's Speech of which I have some experience, having been responsible for them until recently. First, I was very pleased to see the Bill to reform the regulation of social housing. It originated under my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) when she was Prime Minister, from the experience of speaking to social housing tenants in the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell tragedy. As she said in her contribution earlier today, it was clear that too many of those individuals feel ignored and disrespected by the providers of their social housing. Some of those providers, particularly the largest housing associations, have a poor record of listening to their tenants and responding with good-quality housing and good-quality consumer service. This Bill will go some way to changing that by

putting in place better regulation and a better, more consumer-focused regulator to respond to those complaints and concerns, and I strongly welcome its inclusion in the Queen's Speech.

Secondly, a Bill will be introduced to complete the journey towards leasehold reform. In the previous Queen's Speech, I started the first half of this two-stage legislation, which I hope will enable any leaseholder in this country to easily enfranchise their property. Leasehold is a product of our history. It is a feudal system that has little place in today's society. We are the only major developed economy in the world to continue with that system and it does now need to come to an end. I hope that this will be an ambitious Bill that not only enables people to enfranchise their property and to purchase a share of freehold, if that is what they want, but leads to the end of leasehold. I hope that we as a House can set an end date for that system, from which point we can move wholeheartedly towards commonhold, a better system that is used and enjoyed by citizens and homeowners in every other major developed country.

Thirdly, I am pleased to see the levelling up and regeneration Bill included in the Queen's Speech. There are two elements of this that matter to me. The first is devolution: enabling more devolution deals to be done with cities and counties across the country, those deals to be done faster, and greater power and responsibility to be handed to local communities.

Reflecting on my period as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government during the pandemic, I am very clear that the one area of our state that performed consistently well during that crisis was local government. Almost every other Government Department or area of state has, at best, a mixed record; there are triumphs and failures. Within local government, it is mostly a story of success. It is also a story of thrift and value for money.

As Secretary of State, I gave £9 billion to all the local councils in England to help to get them through that period—to look after the homeless, to dispense grants to our local businesses, to look after the most vulnerable, to do local contact tracing and many other responsibilities. That is a fraction of the funding that we gave to other areas of the state. If I have one regret it is that I did not win the battle within Government for contact tracing to be done exclusively by local government rather than the expensive system that was ultimately created of track and trace. The record of local government is good and we should build on it with further devolution.

Matt Western *rose*—

Robert Jenrick: I am conscious of time, but I will give way briefly to the hon. Gentleman.

Matt Western: I just want to applaud the right hon. Gentleman for what he said about the terrific work of local government throughout the pandemic and about the action that it took. However, the Government did promise to do everything necessary to support local authorities financially through that time, "whatever it takes". Unfortunately, local authorities such as Warwick District Council and Warwickshire County Council, in my area, are really struggling now because they did not receive that support.

Robert Jenrick: I hear the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. I would dispute that. Today is probably not the right moment to do so because time does not allow. The point I was making is that, whereas there is waste in the record of most other areas of government in their response to covid, I do not think that that is the case with local government. Local government carried out those crucial services quickly, in a way that worked for local communities, providing good value for money. That should lead us to do more devolution wherever we can.

The second half of that Bill will be about housing and planning, a subject which I know well, and I have scars on my back to prove it. As there is limited time today, I simply say that it is a matter of the greatest importance to this country that we build more homes. Successive Governments have failed to do that. There is always an excuse: we do not want to build on green fields; we do not want to spoil the look and feel of a local community; we do not want to over-develop an area. We have to get those homes built because we are letting down hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens. People are homeless today because we are failing to build those houses.

Young people's rightful aspiration to get on the housing ladder is being neglected because we are not building those homes. If I had to guess, I would say that the number of homes that we built in the first year of this Administration under the Prime Minister and myself—almost 250,000—will be the high watermark of the number of homes built in this country for several years to come, and that the Government will miss their 300,000 homes a year manifesto pledge by a country mile. The only way in which we will get back to 250,000 homes a year and exceed it is if we together, on a cross-party basis, agree that that is not good enough and that we need to build more and find ways of doing so. Otherwise, we will consign hundreds of thousands of our constituents to a life, at best, in secure rented accommodation and, at worst, in very insecure rented accommodation or life on the streets. That is not good enough. That is not the society in which I want to live. I hope that Members on both sides of the House, of all political persuasions, will approach that planning Bill with that frame of mind.

7.15 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I will try to keep within the 10-minute limit that you have requested, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The day of the state opening of Parliament is quite surreal. We have all the pomp, the gold coaches and the ancient Rolls-Royces out on the streets, and a Prime Minister who comes into the Chamber and tells us that he has got right all the big calls on covid and all the big calls on finance and then disappears. The reality is that we as a country have 4.2 million children living in poverty. Some 1.3 million babies—very, very small children—are being brought up in households in desperate poverty, often with not enough to eat and a heavy reliance on food banks and food co-ops merely to survive.

Dealing with poverty and related issues requires wage rises, and, as the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) pointed out, a rapid increase in universal credit. It requires recognising the desperate state of poverty within Britain. It became very obvious during

the covid pandemic that there is a whole generation of people who came together in mutual aid groups that now recognise that poverty and food hunger are unacceptable in our society and that the work that has been done on the right to food and so much else must be acknowledged and taken up. There is nothing in the speech that says anything that gives hope to those people living in desperate poverty at the present time.

Many Members have spoken about the problems of energy costs. Some 6.3 million people in this country are living in fuel poverty, which is a nice sociological term, but what it really means is that those people cannot afford to put on the electricity, cannot afford to buy the gas, and cannot afford to heat their homes. If they are lucky, they can heat one room of that home, or they just go cold.

I would have thought that quite a few Members who campaigned in the local elections last week came across houses with no lights on, even when it was getting dark. There was a reason for that: people in those houses could not afford to charge the key meter or to put the lights on in their homes. That is the reality of poverty in this country. That poverty, again, leads not just to unpleasant living, but to hypothermia and really serious problems for people just trying to survive. Why have this Government not done what the French have done and introduced an energy price cap? Why have they not taken the hit of the increased energy prices as a public good in order to protect people? Why are they not promoting public ownership of energy, rather than having the energy companies making massive profits during this period of crisis? We must look at all of those issues.

Some 83% of adults say that they are noticing, or suffering from, a considerable increase in the cost of living, which means not just food poverty, but an inability to buy clothes and so much else as well. Those issues were not addressed in the speech.

I was interested in the very thoughtful speech made by the right hon. Member for Newark just now, which addressed many of the housing issues we face in this country. The homeless people who were very obviously on the streets of this country when the covid pandemic started were housed, because there was Government intervention and sufficient funding given to local authorities to ensure that they were housed.

Some local authorities leased hotels, some bought new places and a large number—I do not think all, but a large number—of rough-sleeping homeless people were housed during the pandemic. If we can do it during a pandemic, we can do it at any time. We can carry on doing it. It is simply immoral that anyone should be forced to sleep on the streets of this country at any time. However, that means addressing the issues of housing costs and housing stress.

I represent an inner-city constituency with a large number of council properties, a considerable number of housing association places, a small and declining number of owner-occupiers and a fast-growing private rented sector. By and large, the council properties are well managed and well run and have reasonable rents, and to live in a council property gives people a considerable sense of security.

I do not think housing associations are particularly well managed. I do not think by and large that they are good at doing repairs or good at management, and they

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are profoundly undemocratic in their behaviour and their frequent refusals to listen to tenants or allow what tenants want to have any bearing. We must hardwire into any housing legislation a sense of democracy in how housing associations manage their properties, and force them to listen to their tenants.

It is in the private rented sector, however, that the worst problems occur. About 30% to 33% of my constituents live in the private rented sector, and the rent levels are horrendous. They are more than three times the level of council rents, and the local housing allowance is insufficient to help people who are mostly moving into the private rented sector. Those on universal credit moving into the private rented sector because of the insufficiency of council housing must either supplement the rent themselves or move away from their community, their schools, their families, their support networks and all the rest.

We must understand that if we are going to have such a huge proportion of our population living in the private rented sector, they need certainty of an affordable rent, certainty of long-term tenancies, certainty that they will not be peremptorily evicted from that property and certainty that repairs will be done when they need them. Many local authorities, my own included, are innovative and creative in building some degree of protection and regulation in their communities, but it is this House that should build those protections and regulations within the private rented sector.

There are a whole lot of things that ought to be in the Queen's Speech. If the Government are proposing deregulation of the economy at the very time when we need an investment in the economy, if they are not doing anything about job protection, fire and rehire or the insufficiency of wages for many people, the gaping chasm of inequality in Britain will get worse. There is regional inequality, there is national inequality, there is social inequality and there is class inequality, and it is getting worse. This Parliament must address those issues.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) said, social inequality is dealt with either by raising wages, raising public expenditure and so on, or by repressing the protests and the anger and trying to control people who want to demonstrate against it. The whole agenda of a law and order society, rather than dealing with the social divisions in society, is not an appealing prospect.

The world is in an environmental crisis. COP25 said so, COP26 said so—although there was a lot of greenwash surrounding it—and there is a massive environmental disaster around the corner. The global refugee crisis of 70 million people around the world comes from wars, human rights abuses and oppressive societies, but it also comes from the environmental disaster we face. We cannot just close our doors on refugees.

I absolutely and totally condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine and I hold out my heart and my hand to the Ukrainian refugees who have come to this country, albeit with great difficulty and no thanks to Home Office processes and procedures. We should hold out the same hand and the same welcome to refugees from other conflicts and wars in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Palestine,

Ethiopia, Eritrea and other places, and recognise that if we want good human rights for ourselves, those human rights should apply to others.

That should also apply to people's human right to express dissent around the world. The number of real journalists, very brave people, who have stood up against oligarchs and dictators and have paid the ultimate price as a result by being murdered should be recognised. Our Home Secretary should think carefully of the responsibility on her shoulders to decide whether somebody who has bravely reported on human rights abuses and military activities around the world, Julian Assange, should be removed from this country. I think he is a whistleblower and journalist who should be protected, not removed.

My last point is that we should be building a world fit for the next generation. We are bringing up a generation of children in this country who are overstressed and over-tested in school; who are streamed almost out of sight in secondary school and are victims of the competitive culture between secondary schools; who are charged in college and heavily indebted in university; and who then, because their wage levels are so low, cannot afford any decent or permanent place to live.

What message are we giving to the next generation? They will not have it as good as the current generation; they will have to pay the debts for the future. We should be investing, nurturing, cultivating and including all those young people. We should joy in their creativity, their art, their music, their science, their learning. They are the future. But what are we doing? Consigning them to stress and, in many cases, so much poverty. We can do things differently and very much better than we are. Sadly, the speech given today offers no hope whatsoever for any of the issues I have drawn attention to.

7.27 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in today's debate on the Queen's Speech. There is a lot to welcome in the conversation and in the announcements we have heard today. The right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) very nearly said something I agreed with about schools at one stage in his speech, and I was about to stand up and say how I agreed with him, but as the sentence went on he ruined it and I did not agree any more. However, I did enjoy and agree with part of it, which I will come back to.

I would like to welcome some elements in the Queen's Speech. It is worth first identifying what the Queen's Speech is, because we have talked a lot in the Chamber today about the need for short-term intervention, but the Queen's Speech lays out the legislative agenda, which by its very nature is not short term. Legislation inevitably takes time: in this place, it takes a year or more to get any serious piece of legislation done. We all recognise and accept the need for short-term support and help for the most vulnerable. We all see it in our own constituencies—my own is one of the poorest and most disadvantaged in the country on many indicators.

We all see the hardship and we all recognise the need for support. The Chancellor has said so overtly, and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has been on the media round today making clear that that will happen and that more support will come. The Queen's Speech, however, is about the long term and the legislative

agenda, and as I said there is a lot to welcome, not least on the economy and levelling up, which I will focus on in more detail later in my speech.

Starting with something that is perhaps relatively small in the grand scheme of levelling up and cost of living, I am pleased to see football governance included. Our clubs are not just businesses but the heart of our communities in many places, and I welcome the opportunity to look in more detail at sustainable support for them. I also welcome the opportunity to crack down further on the mass disruption and criminal damage that has often been allowed to masquerade as legitimate protest in recent years. That is not right or acceptable.

I hugely welcome the schools Bill and the opportunity to do more on school standards. This is where I nearly agreed with the right hon. Member for Islington North, who has gone now. He obviously did not want to hear how we agreed, because that would only be damaging to his reputation, I am sure, or to mine—one way or the other. He talked about the need for more autonomy within schools, for a broader curriculum, and for the opportunity to prioritise and promote cultural capital as opposed to just exams in our schools system. On that, I totally agree with him. I would like Nottinghamshire County Council, which I lead, to take forward the schools White Paper as an early adopter. That would be an opportunity to drive the move to give our schools more autonomy, a clearer structure of accountability and more empowerment of teachers, schools and trusts to be able to do their own thing—what they think is best for their children. We would retain more teachers if we empowered them to do that. There is opportunity for that in the schools Bill, and I hope that Nottinghamshire will be an early adopter of some of the new provisions.

I want to urge caution on a couple of things, not least the Online Safety Bill. The Bill is well-intentioned, in that we all understand why we want to seek to protect people online and why things that are illegal in the real world should also be illegal online. However, I am also concerned about the risk of allowing big tech companies to police our language and our speech. We see the debate and controversies that rage about Twitter and Elon Musk. It is a really difficult topic and a really difficult thing to get right. I urge the Government not to go too far in restrictions or in allowing anybody, frankly, to choose to police the language that we are allowed to use, because that can only end badly.

Earlier in the year I welcomed the Chancellor's commitment to move towards a lower-tax, small-state kind of economy where we can promote growth and allow the private sector to flourish and create jobs to support our constituents. He talked about a small state, and I would like the Government to consider putting that into practice in other legislation too. Not least, there are things like the obesity strategy where we are starting to talk about which adverts can be placed where, in which shops. That is madness and not something that the Government should be involved in. I hope that they might reconsider some of these things.

I want to focus the majority of my comments on the economy and on levelling up. I was pleased to see the phrase "economic growth" repeated over and over again. One of the most successful political campaigns of my brief career has been the long-term economic plan that we all remember and all heard about over and over again. We used the same kind of language in those days and it

proved to be very popular. My right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) talked about the importance of growth in being able to fund our public services so as to give residents in our communities better life chances. Some of the Bills that will be brought forward in this Session are absolutely vital to that, not least the levelling-up Bill, which will be a key driver of that growth.

Private sector growth, not Government spending, is at the heart of better opportunities for areas like the east midlands, where I come from, which have historically been at the bottom of all the charts for both public and private sector growth but where we have huge opportunities to get more of both. We already have projects in train that will allow us to free up the private sector to invest in our region to create the better-paid, better-quality jobs that are in short supply there. That is not about high spending; it is about promoting and creating an environment for business to flourish in our region. It is about delivery. We have talked for a long time about the funding that is going into the most disadvantaged areas. As I said, the east midlands is lowest on all the charts of what money, private and public, goes into these places. My own constituency of Mansfield is at the bottom end of that regional scale.

However, we have really positive things in the pipeline that will come forward in future. We have seen capital investment such as the towns fund and the levelling-up fund. We have seen huge funding announcements. A few weeks ago, at Prime Minister's questions, I asked the Prime Minister about delivery and outcomes, because we can only talk for so long about how much money we have secured for an area without residents being able to point to a thing that is new. A lot of what we will achieve, and a lot of what is most important in levelling up, is not visible. It is long-term things like skills, education and schools, where we will not be able to point to a shiny achievement within the life of one Parliament. But some of it is short-term: buildings and regeneration of town centres. Some of it is things that we have announced hundreds of millions of pounds for, getting on for two years ago now, that are bogged down in process, and often bogged down in Whitehall.

If we are going to get to a position where residents believe us when we talk about the big things that we are doing around skills and education, and how that is going to benefit them in future, we need to show them the delivery of those short-term things about high-street regeneration—the towns fund and the money that we have promised. It is all in the pipeline.

Karin Smyth: I feel slightly disappointed for the hon. Gentleman's constituents. I can point to things in my Bristol South constituency that were delivered by the last Labour Government—every single school rebuilt, a brand new hospital, and the investment that came there that those people deserved after the years under the previous Tory Government. That is what we delivered for them on the ground. His Government have had 12 years and he still cannot point to anything in his constituency.

Ben Bradley: I understand the point the hon. Lady is making, but she is not quite right given that the Labour Government had 13 years and there was a great amount of time for the delivery of a number of those projects.

[Ben Bradley]

I was eight years old when the '97 Labour Government came to power. Labour had a fair old while to deliver on some of those things. My constituency has been represented by the Conservatives for only five years in its entire history, and that has always been me. We have been working on a number of projects. This Government, this Prime Minister and this levelling-up agenda have been around for a very brief period of time.

We have already talked about the hundreds of millions of pounds of investment that have been secured for my own constituency. We can talk about the towns fund, additional support and investment in skills, capital investment for our college that we have not seen before, and new capital investment in our hospitals. All that is in train. Some of it is visible; some of it is not yet visible. We need to be able to point to those things not just in my constituency but across the country in some of the seats that we won only a matter of two years ago where new, talented Conservative MPs are making the case for that investment. We need to see outcomes across the board. It is no good standing up and saying that we have made promises of money because at some stage residents will say, "Where is that new town centre building, where is that new project, where is my shiny new town centre?"

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I well understand the concerns of people in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, as the hon. Gentleman does, but are not many of those people saying to him, right now, "Why aren't the Government doing something to put more money in my pocket?" I am sure he is hearing from his constituents, as I am from mine, that they are worried sick about paying their bills. At the moment, when they are really struggling, what he is talking about is not doing anything to help those families, or anything to help our high streets in Nottinghamshire either.

Ben Bradley: The hon. Lady is right that constituents are worried—they are in my constituency and I am sure they are in hers. They also recognise that the Government cannot flick a switch and fix everything, nor should anybody suggest that they can. We have the £22 billion package of intervention that we have already brought forward and a commitment to more in the pipeline and coming over the course of summer and into the autumn. The Chancellor has already made that commitment. Very few residents in my constituency come to me expecting the Government to have a magic bullet, and it is slightly false that so many Opposition Members seem to suggest that there is one when there is not.

The levelling-up Bill is hugely important for our region—more so, perhaps, than for many—because it contains the mechanism for us to bring forward a devolution deal for the east midlands, Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, Derbyshire and Derby. That is the delivery mechanism for many of the things that we have talked about. The hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), who is no longer in her place, talked about brownfield funding—the ability to bring forward sites and to have more clout over what we do with that funding. That is part of our devolution negotiations. She raised other examples, and I sat here thinking that we can do that if we bring forward this devolution arrangement and track on with the negotiation.

The only thing that will slow down the course of that negotiation, which should be done by the end of the year, is the legislation, which will take longer. I call on the Government to prioritise that and bring it forward to let us get those levers and that additional funding. The west midlands, our partner that we often look to enviously, has had billions and billions of pounds of additional investment since it got its deal just six or seven years ago. We want that, and we can bring it forward quickly if the Government commit to bringing forward the legislation in a timely way in the spring. If it is May rather than March, we will probably have to wait 12 months before we can actually deliver on the outcomes that we want to see.

I urge the Government to crack on and prioritise the devolution element of the levelling-up Bill and agenda, which is massively important to get these outcomes for my constituents. We need not just promises but outcomes to show residents who, in many cases, are in seats that used to be represented by Labour and who voted for this Prime Minister and this Conservative Government to deliver for them. They will need to see those outcomes. The mechanisms to deliver that are in today's Queen's Speech, so I urge the Government to bring them forward as quickly as possible.

7.39 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): This Queen's Speech confirms what we already know: this Government lack the vision and the ability to tackle the main challenges of the day. Last week, we saw voters in Wales deliver their message to this Prime Minister loud and clear at the local elections, and it was a very good Friday indeed for the Labour party in Wales. I congratulate all the successful Welsh Labour candidates in Newport East, in Newport and in Monmouthshire on the mandates they secured. I particularly congratulate colleagues in Monmouthshire, whose work has resulted in the Conservative party losing its only council in Wales. Ambitious Labour-led councils, such as Newport, have shown and will continue to show that there is a kinder, more positive and more proactive alternative to the Tory way of doing things.

Given the message that was sent last week, I am deeply frustrated on behalf of constituents in Newport East that this Queen's Speech has failed to deliver anything meaningful to help people cope with the cost of living crisis now. In fairness, expectations were low. We only have to watch the Prime Minister's disastrous interview with Susanna Reid last week to see that those in power have such little understanding of the sacrifices people are having to make. In the past few days, we have been bombarded with news of how household energy bills could hit £3,000 a year by October, how fire services across the country are reporting that they are dealing with blazes caused by people burning scraps of wood to keep warm, and, as was widely reported, how more than 2 million people are not eating every day because they just cannot afford it.

How, in the fifth largest economy in the world, are we in a position where our people are resorting to skipping meals and burning offcuts of wood to keep their heads above water? With food prices continuing to increase, the situation will only get worse, not better. That is why we should have seen more action in this Queen's Speech to tackle that and to support households.

This Government continue to hit people on modest incomes disproportionately, but there is no hope today for those families, just an energy Bill that will eventually make energy cheaper and a nod to working to ease inflation. Like other Members, I see messages and emails daily from people who have nowhere to turn, who just do not want to live a life where they are worrying about whether they can heat or eat. There was little today to help them now, or even in the short term. There is no emergency Budget and no extra help. Given that the things announced today are essentially the Government's programme for the next two years, I worry about all those families who are already out of options.

If the Government have run out of ideas of their own, it is still not too late for them to adopt our proposal to keep energy bills lower through a one-off windfall tax on oil and gas profits. That move was referred to by the CEO of Tesco on Radio 4 today, and it would save every household hundreds of pounds a year on their fuel bills and provide much-needed additional support to the lowest-income households. That is the right and fair thing to do, but the Government continue to side with major firms, such as Centrica, which today announced that it expects its profits to hit the top of their expected range, and oil and gas companies that describe their situation as having more money than they know what to do with, rather than those ordinary families. That speaks volumes.

While the UK Government clearly do not get the scale of the problem, I am pleased that the Welsh Labour Government do, and it is worth sharing a contrast with the Welsh Labour Government. The extra support in Wales includes a £150 cost of living payment to all households in properties in council tax bands A to D and to all those in receipt of any council tax benefit. That goes further than the UK Government's equivalent announcement for England. There will be an extension to the Welsh winter fuel support scheme, which will provide people on low incomes and others with a non-repayable £200 cash payment—"non-repayable" being the key word—to help with their energy bills later this year, which they will receive on top of the £200 loan from the Government.

Unlike the Government, I also want to talk about steel, which is another important issue for Newport East and, indeed, the whole UK, if the Government are actually serious about levelling up. There has been no reference to steel or the industrial strategy in any Queen's Speech since 2019, and this one was no exception. I declare an interest as a Community union member. It has highlighted that the world cannot decarbonise without steel, whether it is to build wind turbines, electric vehicles, energy-efficient buildings or anything else. It is a foundation industry that we need for our defence and national security, which is particularly important at the moment.

Sadly, we have a Government who are willing only to do the bare minimum at moments of crisis for the industry and are otherwise more than prepared to leave the sector hanging without support. Steel workers in my constituency at Tata Llanwern and Liberty feel that acutely. They want a Government who will give them the vote of confidence they deserve. A pressing priority is steel safeguards and tariff rate quotas, which I hoped would be addressed in the Brexit measures in the Queen's Speech. Ministers should also move forward on previous

commitments to a thorough review of the trade remedies system to ensure that we have a trade defence system fit for the 21st century. UK Steel and the all-party parliamentary group for steel and metal related industries have been calling for that for some time, and swift action is needed. We also need action on high industrial energy prices. Other countries in Europe can step in and help their steel industry, so why can't we?

While, on the surface, promises of more policing powers to make our streets safer sound welcome, there is no detail on how those additional powers will be resourced. The new recruits we have seen over the past year are of course welcome, but the Government need to stop claiming that they are employing extra police officers. They are not extra officers, but partial replacements for those they have cut since 2010. Today, we have 11,000 fewer police officers, 7,000 fewer police community support officers and 8,000 fewer police staff in work than we did when Labour left office in 2010. We need new police hubs in every community and more protection for victims of antisocial behaviour.

I cannot help but wonder whether the failure to mention Wales today is simply because the Government know how badly their announcement on the shared prosperity fund was received last month. With Wales facing a loss of more than £1 billion in unreplaced funding over the next three years, it begs the question as to whether the Prime Minister seriously thinks that the people of Wales have forgotten his Government's "not a penny less" promise to at least match, post-Brexit, the size of the EU structural funds that Wales would have received.

Moving on to rail, I welcome work to modernise and improve rail services, but what plans are there in this Queen's Speech for the Government to address the appalling rail infrastructure underfunding in Wales? Wales accounts for 11% of the UK rail network, but still receives only 2% of rail enhancement funding from the UK Government. Wales's rail networks are underfunded by billions of pounds, and that needs addressing today. I urge the Government to take a strategic look at what they can do to improve cross-border transport between south-east Wales and the south-west of England. A new station for Magor would help, and I pay tribute to the volunteers at the Magor Action Group on Rail, who continue to campaign so hard for that. Action on the group's plan would be a positive step in the right direction.

To finish on a slightly more positive note, there were rays of hope in the Government's response to the Crouch review on football governance recently, which was referred to in the Queen's Speech today. I hope we will soon see the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport make good on the pledge to introduce an independent football regulator. A timetable would be good, as would an assurance that Ministers will not cede to the demands of vested interests and delay or water down their plans on regulation. As Fair Game has highlighted, we also need an overhaul of the outdated parachute payments system and its replacement with a sustainability index that rewards conscientiously run clubs, such as Newport County AFC in my constituency, that prioritise good governance and strong relationships within the community. I hope that the Government will engage with Fair Game and other stakeholders over the coming months to

[Jessica Morden]

ensure that momentum on these important changes is not lost, and that they will look at the Newport County model.

In short, what we have seen today is a Queen's Speech that was written to shore up a listing PM, not a Queen's Speech for families and workers who are looking for support right now. Deeply disappointing? Yes. Surprising? No.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We have about a dozen Members left who want to speak, and even without being told to keep her speech to roughly 10 minutes, Jessica Morden spoke for nine minutes, so everybody will get equal dibs if we can keep to time. I call Peter Aldous.

7.49 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I will try my best, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) on her maiden speech and the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan).

I also pay tribute to my predecessor as MP for Waveney, Bob Blizzard, who sadly passed away at the end of last week. He was a formidable political opponent, he held passionate beliefs and he was a staunch advocate for Waveney. My condolences are with his family and friends at this sad time.

This Queen's Speech was delivered against one of the most challenging backdrops in the past century: the war in Europe, following quickly on from the covid-19 pandemic, has exacerbated the challenges that people and businesses were already facing. Soaring energy and food prices, rising interest rates, and slowing economic growth are putting enormous pressure on budgets for families and businesses. The programme for government for the next Session cannot, on its own, address all the challenges that we will face over the next two years, but there must be a clear statement of intent and a decisive direction of travel.

There is a need to focus on the issues that matter to people on a daily basis, such as the cost of living, the ability to pay one's bills without spiralling into debt, and the opportunity to have a well-paid and secure job with good prospects of career progression. We do not know what lies ahead in these increasingly uncertain times, so it is important that the Government are flexible. Where there is a need to bring in measures to address a particular pressing need, they must do so without delay.

I shall briefly highlight four issues, two of which are specifically covered in proposed Bills and two of which are not. First and foremost, on the need to address the cost of living crisis, the Government have brought in some measures to help to support families and businesses, but more targeted assistance is required to enable people to get through the coming year, which many are facing with fear and trepidation with the expectation of inflation at 10% and Ofgem's increase in the energy cap looming in the autumn.

In Suffolk, 135,000 people already live in poverty. A survey in the *Lowestoft Journal* showed that 41% of people are in debt, and Citizens Advice, local councils

and local charities are already working in overdrive to assist, advise and support people. Poverty among pensioners needs a particular focus due to prevailing high inflation, with the state pension and defined benefit and defined contribution private pensions all exposed. There may well be a need for review and reform, and I urge the Government not to hold back in introducing such measures.

Secondly, it is vital that people around the UK have the opportunity to secure a good job with good prospects for career advancement and the opportunity to realise their full potential. The schools Bill and the levelling up and regeneration Bill should help to secure that ambition. For a long time, Suffolk has received a poor education funding settlement and we must use this opportunity to address that inequality.

There must also be a focus on improving early years and special educational needs education. Although the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, which was passed in the last Session, provides the framework for improving the further education sector, that sector remains poorly funded given the vital role that it plays in preparing people for the workplace, helping to improve the UK's overall economic performance and eliminating the productivity gap. There may well be a need for fiscal support to encourage businesses to invest in people and skills. Last week, the Learning and Work Institute recommended that smaller businesses should be able to deduct 230% of the cost of accredited training from their tax liability.

Turning to the long-awaited levelling up and regeneration Bill, I acknowledge the enormous amount of work that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), have carried out in the relatively short period since their appointment in September to lay the groundwork in the White Paper that was published at the beginning of February. I urge them not to forget coastal communities. All around the UK, including in Waveney and Lowestoft, they are in many respects the forgotten powerhouse of the UK economy. They have a vital role to play in powering the nation as we embrace renewable energy; feeding the nation through sustainable and responsible stewardship of our fisheries; promoting global trade through our network of ports, large and small; and providing holidays at home rather than abroad.

Thirdly, on energy, the Energy Act 2013 was good legislation that played an important role in promoting renewable energy, particularly offshore wind, in which the UK is now a world leader. There is a temptation to leave well alone a regulatory framework that has worked well, but we have new challenges that must be tackled, particularly if we are to meet the 2050 net zero target. It is therefore right to build on the foundations that were laid nine years ago.

I briefly highlight some of the challenges that we need to address. We must promote and incentivise further investment on the UK continental shelf to add to last year's North sea transition deal so as to ensure that that unique UK asset continues to play a lead role in powering the nation, generating rewarding and well-paid jobs, and ensuring a smooth transition to a net zero energy supply. A windfall tax would jeopardise that work, but there is a need for the major oil and gas companies to do more, following the good work of many innovative

and smaller businesses. With regard to offshore wind, we need a framework that builds on the success of the last decade and that promotes investment in interconnectors and battery storage to absorb surplus wind, as well as facilitating the development of a modern onshore transmission network.

Nuclear power is very much part of the Government's energy strategy. The Nuclear Energy (Financing) Act 2022, which was passed in the last Session, provides the framework for Sizewell C to proceed if the development consent order is issued. That enormous national infrastructure project, located close to my constituency, can play a vital role in levelling up and regenerating local economies; providing jobs during construction; and leaving a legacy of skills that bring lasting benefits to places such as Lowestoft and Waveney. EDF is committed to that strategy, but it is vital that the national Government provide the framework to ensure that it delivers those benefits by working with local businesses, colleges, charities and councils.

Hydrogen is the new kid on the block that presents boundless opportunities. Even at this stage, however, we do not quite know what precise direction it will take or the full scale of what it can deliver. Although the UK hydrogen strategy was published only last August, there is an urgent need for a route map if it is to realise its full potential. Community energy has an important role to play and we must remove the regulatory obstacles that prevent local communities from promoting their own projects.

An area of energy policy where we have not succeeded in recent years is the promotion of energy saving by retrofitting our homes and business premises. The green deal did not work and the green homes grant scheme was too low in ambition and lacked the capacity to have a significant impact. In the short term, to address the challenge of fuel poverty, we should look at extending the warm home discount, the home upgrade grant and the energy company obligation.

The Government must also produce a scheme that will deliver meaningful and significant enhancement of our whole building stock. That will probably require fiscal incentives, and local government will have an important role to play in overseeing and ensuring workforce planning, training and delivery. We need to revamp the strategy for the roll out of smart meters, which, I am afraid, has stalled.

The fourth and final issue that I will raise is the NHS. Although no Bill directly addresses our health service, and one might argue that there is no need for one as we only recently finished debating the Health and Care Act 2022, which has just received Royal Assent, this subject is of critical importance and concern to our constituents. People are worried that they cannot see their doctor; the Government need to work with GPs to address that concern.

NHS dentistry is the No. 1 item in my inbox. There are dental deserts all around the country, and urgent attention is required if these are not to merge into one area of Sahara proportions. There is a backlog of operations, many of them time-critical, that needs to be significantly and immediately reduced. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is very much aware of these challenges, and regardless of whether or not there is specific legislation, they must be given the highest priority and attention.

In conclusion, there is a great deal to do and there are a great many challenges to confront, the like of which we have not seen during our lifetimes. We can get through this crisis, and the Government do need to have in mind the need to bring together a nation that has been divided first by Brexit and then by covid.

8 pm

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I very much welcome the remarks of the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) about Bob Blizzard. I had the great privilege of being elected at the same time as him, and as we learned together and with others how this place works—and, indeed, how it perhaps does not work quite so well—I had many conversations with him. I heard of his passing last week from a friend of his in my constituency, and I feel very sad that such a good man and such a great figure in the Labour party has been lost to us.

What stands out from the Prime Minister's speech this afternoon is a complete failure to understand just how poor his Government's response has been to date to the desperate circumstances of too many of my constituents because of the cost of living crisis, and particularly because of the huge hike in energy bills, which have gone up by at least 70% since 2010. Ministers have been complacent and too slow to act. The average household bill is now about £2,000 a year, and in October it could rise to almost £3,000. Everyone in the country is affected, but for many the huge rise in bills means some devastating and very difficult choices. For those who are the most vulnerable in our country, the choice is: do they feed themselves or do they put the heating on? Similarly, one small business owner explained to me recently how his energy bill is going up from £1,200 a month now to £2,400 in June.

More than 2 million adults have gone without food for a whole day in the past month and 2.5 million children now regularly miss meals or have to have smaller meals. In the 21st century, in one of the richest countries in the world, that is a truly shocking indication of the Government's failure. A sustained and meaningful plan to tackle immediately the cost of living and food security crises is needed. We should have been told today when an emergency Budget was going to be brought forward to tackle those issues. My right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition's suggestion of a cut in energy bills funded by a windfall tax to help everyone is entirely sensible, and further help for those on average or very low incomes will be critical, too. An increase in social security payments, with an uplift in universal credit, is the obvious way to do that.

One particular, but unsurprising disappointment about the Gracious Speech was the absence again of the much-promised employment Bill, leaving far too many vulnerable to bad employers. Making sure those in work are treated fairly, with respect, and have decent incomes is fundamental to the even greater country that Britain can be. It is why all public services should be supported to pay a genuine living wage, why sick pay should be extended too and why an employment Bill is needed to rein in the worst employers—for example, to outlaw fire and rehire and to increase the penalties for discrimination against women having a baby. It should have been in the Queen's Speech.

[Gareth Thomas]

On the economy more generally, energy price hikes, widespread inflation, interest rate rises and growing concerns that the economy is going into recession only underline how badly the economy has been run for the past decade. Indeed, over the last 10 years, Britain's growth in exports has lagged significantly behind the rest of the G7, yet there is little recognition or action by the Treasury or other key Departments. Between 2010 and 2020, American exports of goods and services to the rest of the world rose by over 14%. Germany saw growth over the same period of over 13% in its exports. Across the G7, average growth in exports was 10%, yet Britain, under the Conservative party over the same decade, managed growth of just 4%. Even Italy saw faster export growth.

Indeed, we saw a decline in exports to the world's fastest growing economies in the G20 over that period: since 2010, goods exports to G20 countries have gone down 10%. We lost our position as the world's biggest centre for financial services in 2018 to New York. We missed—even allowing for covid—by a huge margin, George Osborne's target to treble exports. Exports matter: they are crucial to business growth and to generating tax receipts; they are a factor in our soft power; and they are fundamental for job creation. Indeed, jobs linked to exports pay higher than average wages, so not properly supporting exporters is only going to prolong the cost of living crisis and hold back economic growth.

The Conservative party's failure to take serious steps to address the problems businesses are facing trying to get into European markets will only exacerbate that problem. The Prime Minister thinks it is down to a lack of ambition by exporters. We need as a country to make Brexit work better. We are not going to be rejoining the European Union, but we do need to sort out the problems in the deal that the Prime Minister negotiated with Brussels. We should be negotiating a veterinary agreement, and sorting out mutual recognition for the qualifications of our professionals so they can travel and trade with ease across Europe. We should be tackling visa problems for our creative industries, accelerating investment in digital borders and trying to build more productive relationships with our key allies.

I wish I was surprised that the Gracious Speech did not give consumers significant new powers to hold the businesses that aspire to serve them to account. Water bills have rocketed since privatisation. Sewage spills, deliberate or not, are at shocking levels, underlining the insufficient levels of investment, while executive pay and profits for the often overseas owners of water companies continue to be too high, and clearly at the expense of treating water users—consumers—properly. Why do water companies not have to answer properly to their customers? Complaints are at record levels, yet Ministers continue to give the boards of water companies the benefit of the doubt. Why do not Ministers support the consumers of water companies to co-ordinate properly at each English water company, to elect a representative to the board and to have the right to sign off the board's accounts, executive remuneration and its investment plans? Why is there not action to stop excessive profits and to stop the diversion of funds that could support investment to pay dividends to shareholders?

Similarly, the shocking level of energy bills only underlines the lack of agency that consumers have in energy markets. Even before the current crisis, it was clear big companies dominated the market too much, so new thinking on how to give consumers more agency in energy markets in the long term is essential to shape energy security, shift patterns of ownership and accelerate that switch to lower-carbon, renewable systems. Indeed, where is the serious plan to tackle the climate crisis? If the Government had backed the Opposition's plans, we could double our onshore wind capacity to power an extra 10 million homes, back tidal power, triple solar power by 2030 and accelerate energy insulation to reduce the bills of working families and pensioners.

On financial services, it is there that, in the last 12 months, it is most apparent that Ministers have not shown enough interest in consumers. British banking is dominated by four large banks, which provide 70% of current accounts. Even the most generous think that recent measures to boost competition are having only limited impact. Banks are closing branches fast. Increasingly, it is mutual and co-operative financial services that are having to step in to maintain branches and support the high street. Building societies, credit unions and mutual financial insurers need legislative reform to enable them to get the capital they need to invest in new products, new IT and new markets. One boss of a mutual insurer with experience in other countries described the UK at the moment as a uniquely difficult regulatory environment for that insurer.

The shocking attempt last year to demutualise Liverpool Victoria demonstrated the need for legislative change to strip out the remaining incentives for boards to try to demutualise and to give the consumer-owners of those mutuals more powers, as well as the need to address the capital-raising difficulties that many mutuals have, and which have already been resolved in other countries, such as Australia.

In theory, the Financial Conduct Authority is supposed to stand up for consumers. It did not do so during the LV debacle and almost £35 million of owners' money was wasted as a result. The FCA did not stand up for British Steel pensioners either and it certainly did not during the mutual minibonds scandal. It does not have the resources, and it does not have the appetite clearly, to really stand up for consumers. It has too many other things to do, so I wonder whether a separate consumer ombudsman is now needed, with the sole objective of standing up for consumers, with significant information gathering and class action powers.

Voters in Harrow decided, sadly, to end my local party's leadership of Harrow Council. We have some work to do as a local party to understand and, crucially, to face up to why voters collectively made that decision. In time, there will, I am sure, be much for us to be proud of about the council's actions under Labour control, particularly the response to covid, but we have to confront now the question of whether, despite cuts in Government funding to Harrow Council of more than 90%, better council services could have been provided.

One particular concern locally was recent revelations that the council had been hit by fraud, with media reports suggesting that up to £2 million that could have been spent on repairing pavements and roads had disappeared. That is money that local people paid out through their council tax and other tax bills and they have every

reason to be angry about such behaviour. To be fair, the previous council leadership acted immediately. It investigated and those responsible have been sacked. The police were called in, and supported as they investigated, too. That money taken wrongly needs to be reclaimed and, if prosecutions are appropriate—and why wouldn't they be?—they need to happen. I expect the new council leadership to lead that charge.

8.11 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas). He always speaks with great insight and I always find him worth listening to. I am sure he would agree that, after local elections, whichever party is represented, when a councillor loses their seat, we should have some sympathy. Whether in Harrow, or anywhere else in the country, those councillors were all engaged in public service, just as we are, and they will be disappointed that they have ceased to serve the public. Whether in Harrow, where Labour lost seats, or in other parts of the country where the Conservative party lost seats, we should think of those diligent public servants who have lost their chance to serve.

It is also a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), a fellow coastal MP. There is nothing he said in his analysis of the needs of his constituents with which I would disagree one scintilla, and he has saved me from making many points.

It has taken me 12 years to work out that the best time to speak in a debate on the Queen's Speech is on the day of the speech itself. I get 10 minutes, not just the three we normally get on the day after the speech, or the day after that, so I will make the most of them. I normally do not like the day of the Queen's Speech debate. For me it is a matinee pantomime of "yah boo sucks" and, in my view, often, those early debates, when we are all crammed in the Chamber, show the House at its worst. Today, it seems a little different. It might have been the slightly low-wattage contribution from the Leader of the Opposition. Perhaps it is more likely to be down to the seriousness of the times with which we are confronted, whether in Ukraine or domestically in our constituencies, as the people we represent face a cost of living crisis and a challenge to their financial security day in, day out, at every moment.

I often hear a cry from politicians, the media and constituents that what the Government are doing is not enough. At the moment I am not quite sure what "enough" would look like. The Government cannot craft a solution whereby global costs rise but no one feels the consequences in the UK. But that does not mean that nothing can or should be done. The inflationary pressures that we currently face are largely external: the rising cost of foreign oil and gas; the disruption to global supply chains caused by covid, which lingers on and reoccurs in China thanks to its zero-covid strategy. We cannot change China's approach to covid—only harsh economic reality will do that. What does matter, however, is the speed and agility of our domestic response here in the UK, and I say candidly to all Conservative MPs gathered here this evening—all one of them—*[Interruption.]* I mean the Back Benchers, not those on the Front Bench. I say to them that we have to stop campaigning like it is 2016, and start governing like it

is 2022. None of my constituents who live in eight of the 10 poorest neighbourhoods in the country give one fig about what box I crossed in a referendum six years ago. They want to know what I, and the Government I am supporting, are doing to tackle the cost of living crisis at the moment.

Some argue that the answer is to increase public spending left, right and centre, and to put more money into the economy, but in my view that would have an inflationary impact. At the risk of sounding unfashionably Thatcherite to what is at times rather a left-ish Government, I argue that we have to drive inflation out by controlling the money supply, not fuel it by responding to the front pages of tabloid newspapers. That is not inconsistent with protecting the most vulnerable in our society. Nothing will have a worse impact on my constituents than rampaging inflation. It harms the most vulnerable in society; it harms the poorest the most. That is why inflation is our biggest enemy, as many have said today.

I therefore welcome a number of the proposed Bills, particularly the financial services Bill, which is a chance to tackle some of the small print of the cost of living crisis. In particular, I welcome the provisions on access to cash—an issue that I have not shut up about in this place for the past two years. I will scrutinise the detail, and if I am not satisfied, amendments will be tabled. I also want much faster action on the regulation of buy now, pay later products—an issue on which I and the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) have campaigned for many years. I know the Government's consultation closed on 6 January, and they are cogitating and contemplating what to do next, but things are changing rapidly in that sector and we hear ever more common stories of people using buy now, pay later products to pay for groceries. This is no longer about buying discretionary items or clothing during lockdown; this is about people using buy now, pay later products for the essentials—for energy or for food. The importance of getting regulation in place is massive, and it must happen now.

I very much welcome the pilots that the Government are introducing for no-interest loans, which are being undertaken on behalf of the Government by Fair4All and Toynbee Hall. That must move so much more urgently. The idea has been floating around the Government for years, and it cannot be just a curiosity for policy wonks. It has to be an urgent priority for the Government to help move people away from loan sharks who charge extortionate interest rates. No-interest loans must be the way forward. I also hope to see interim provisions in the financial services Bill to improve the regulation of funeral plan providers. We have seen the collapse of Safe Hands, and I am sure many hon. Members have been contacted by constituents who now face great uncertainty over how the funerals of their loved ones will be paid for. The Government have to step in, but I am not hearing much from them.

Having learned the delights of amending legislation for the first time in the previous parliamentary Session, by trying to amend the Building Safety Bill, I now have a taste for it. I am looking forward to having a go with the financial services Bill, as well as the Online Safety Bill, which I am getting a bit nervous about because no one seems able to define "harm". Let me help them by offering one definition of harm, which is physical harm.

[Paul Maynard]

In the few minutes I have left I want to speak about a campaign by a young man called Zach Eagling, who has epilepsy, as do I. At times, rather unpleasant and cruel people seem to think it is a good idea to send over social media flashing images that are designed to trigger epileptic fits in those with epilepsy. To me, that is a form of online harm—who could disagree? The Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill agreed and argued that such a clause should go in, as did the Law Commission, but as of yet there is no such a clause. If we are struggling to define “harm”, let us start with physical harm, because that can be quantified. It could be fatal to force an epileptic fit, which could occur in any circumstance, and the outcome cannot be guaranteed.

I would have loved to have seen other Bills in the Queen’s Speech, including private Members’ Bills that I have promoted in recent years. Why was abolition of the House of Lords not in the Queen’s speech, for heaven’s sake? The compulsory introduction of the optional preferential vote—a tentative step towards proportional representation—was also not in the Queen’s speech. Whatever came over the Government? My favourite—once again, this is aimed at the Front-Bench—is an annual review of ministerial competence undertaken by an outside body to assist the Prime Minister in making decisions on who should be appointed to Government. I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), who is on the Front Bench, would pass with flying colours, but it is incumbent on the Government in a cost of living crisis, when our constituents are under such immense pressure, to do their best to have the very best people working on these intractable and difficult problems.

It is not simply a matter of finding a switch, as I think the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) mentioned. We can pull all the switches we like, but there are some fundamentals in our society that must also change. That is what the Conservative party should be doing: not looking back to 2016 but looking forward to a brighter Conservative future.

8.21 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): It is interesting to follow the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Clevellys (Paul Maynard) and, in particular, his really well made comments about epilepsy.

We heard in the Queen’s speech that the Government’s priority is to grow and strengthen the economy. For me, that only highlights the question: what on earth have they been doing for the last 12 years? Why are we looking at negative growth? Why are we looking at a projection of 10% inflation? Why are we not—and why were we not before—more resilient and able to cope with the pandemic that hit us? Why are my constituents’ wages stagnating? Why are they not any better off? The paucity of speakers remaining says an awful lot, too. Tonight, there no more Government Members to come to defend the Queen’s speech.

As a new MP seven years ago, my early speeches in this place were all about apprenticeships, devolution and the need for us to work together locally with businesses, educationists, trade unions and politicians to grow our local economy and share in the prosperity

of what in Bristol is a good, strong economy. That has always been my politics. In 2015, apprenticeships were a Tory flagship policy. However, we now know that apprenticeship starts have declined since 2010 by nearly 200,000, or 41%. Apprenticeships are so important in Bristol South because of the poor attainment of people in getting to university. Apprenticeships are also crucial for the small businesses that dominate Bristol South, which are desperately short of skills, and for my constituents, who are desperately short of well-paid, secure work. As we have heard, apprenticeships are crucial to building the green jobs of the future to help us tackle the climate crisis head on. Why not insulate our homes? Why not support those jobs? Why not save energy on the demand side as we face this terrible supply-side crisis? It should not be so hard in a prosperous city such as Bristol to match the desire and needs of business with the ambition of local people.

On Thursday, I will welcome more than 50 employers to my sixth jobs and apprenticeships fair in the heart of south Bristol at the Skills Academy. I have led work locally to bring together a partnership of the college, Bristol City Council and the Department for Work and Pensions, who are all dedicated to offering better opportunities for people in south Bristol. That did not previously happen, but bringing them all together has been really successful. Employers such as Windmill Hill City Farm, Agincare and Professional Apprenticeships, who are all based in south Bristol, as well as First Bus, St Monica’s trust and the University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust will all be there—as will be One Front Door and the National Careers Service—to work directly with the people of south Bristol to match their ambitions with business needs. I wish that the Government were doing more to support that, because I have supported the Government’s ambition on apprenticeships

As a representative of Bristol South, I have seen the how the apprenticeships route offers a way for our young people to get a chance at those high-skilled jobs and for those who for whatever reason lost out at school to gain entry-level qualifications. That is also particularly helpful to the health and care sectors and to ensuring that we tackle the climate crisis through the skilled green jobs that are out there. The Government’s failure to address apprenticeships in the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 demonstrates not only their lack of ambition but a sad lack of ambition for our children and young people.

The Queen’s Speech is a missed opportunity from a Government who have consistently treated our children and young people as an afterthought, which is even more shocking given what they have experienced in the pandemic. Too few apprenticeships are available because the levy is not working, with too many small businesses not participating and fewer level 2 and 3 apprenticeships available. I and the Labour party believe that we should have a stronger role for colleges, providers and local and regional authorities such as combined authorities to help with the development of local skills improvement. We must have much better face-to-face careers guidance and meaningful work experience, but none of that is in the Queen’s Speech.

On devolution, of which I am a strong supporter, the Government have failed to support our ambition for Bristol and the west country. Once again, it looks like

there will not be the real devolution of finance or power that we want in the west country. We continue to have to bid for small pots of money in competition with each other. The recent deferment of the Portishead line extension by the Government—again, I have supported the Tory party locally on that—and the way in which the decision is being taken in Whitehall starkly exposes the fallacy that the Government support Bristol and the west of England.

At the other end of the education spectrum, last week I was talking to people in Bristol South about the crisis in early years. The lack of support for parents and providers is deepening the cost of living crisis, particularly for families with childcare needs. Four out of 10 parents say that they had to change their working hours or leave their jobs due to childcare pressures. Conservatives are underfunding the so-called free childcare hours, which are mostly for three and four-year-olds, by more than £2 an hour, and parents are paying for the shortfall. Again, we have heard nothing from the Government on how they intend to help families with those rising costs and help people back into the crucial jobs that we need them to do.

The Government have hinted at changes to multi-academy trusts—there may be a review. There are real, obvious problems with the MATs: they are hugely powerful and can move resources within themselves with no accountability locally to parents and no responsibility locally for the outcomes for those children. Again, I have been working with Ministers and the regional schools commissioner to try to get a focus on the geographical problems that children in south Bristol face, as has been achieved in Plymouth—I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) is in the Chamber—and to share that knowledge. However, the vertical organisation of MATs precludes that from happening. That really must be addressed.

I would have liked to have seen more about my constituents living in Lakeshore. The Government are hinting at leasehold reform, but I want to know what they will do to improve leaseholders' rights and make it easier for leaseholders to change the managing agents of properties.

In this Parliament, we have heard a lot about the Government having fixed social care. In the next two years, that fallacy will be exposed. The tax rise has hit with no link to any service improvements and no help for people facing collapsing care packages. The silent misery of millions of women in particular who are giving and receiving care will not be helped.

The test of the Queen's Speech for my constituents in Bristol South will be: are they better off in the cost of living crisis? Will they have more money in their pockets? After what we have been through, there should have been more hope and more ambition to fix our country after the pandemic so that we never have to go into another such situation as unprepared as we were the last time. Today, we have received no such assurance.

8.28 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The Queen's Speech, setting out the UK's programme for government, offers little comfort to my constituents in North Ayrshire and Arran. It comes in a context where we have seen the Tory vote across Scotland

collapse, with the Labour revival amounting nationally to no more than a lacklustre 1.6% increase in first preference votes on the council elections in 2017 and its second-worst local government performance since devolution in 1999. I find myself in the odd and strangely surprising position of agreeing with the leader of the Tories in Scotland, the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross)—a rare event, I am sure he would agree—when he said that the Prime Minister must “reflect” on a series of disappointing results for the Conservatives across the UK. The reality is that there is a leadership crisis for the Tories in both London and Edinburgh. I will say no more on that for fear of intruding on private grief.

The Prime Minister and his Cabinet would also do well to reflect on their deafening silence over the cost of living crisis, which is hammering households across my constituency and across the whole of the UK. The Queen's Speech, as others have said before me, has indeed been a missed opportunity. The Prime Minister should have used the speech to urgently deliver desperately needed support, but it seems that standing back and consigning more people to poverty and hardship is the plan, which is disgraceful.

I welcome proposals to bring forward measures in the financial services and markets Bill to protect access to cash, following huge pressure from me and my SNP colleagues, as well as the consumer organisation Which? and a range of other stakeholders. However, the measures must be meaningful and they must be fit for purpose. I look forward to scrutinising the detail of the proposals.

Households are suffering rising food, energy and goods prices, and record levels of inflation, with Brexit playing a central part in this crisis, but the Government continue to downplay the impact Brexit is playing in those challenges. We in the SNP have consistently called for a meaningful package of measures to help tackle the cost of living crisis and put money back into people's pockets. However, the Tory Government have ignored those calls, with the Chancellor apparently holding off on addressing the crisis until the Budget in autumn. Struggling households simply cannot wait until autumn as they struggle under the weight of increasing hardship.

We in the SNP again call for the UK Government to at the very least convert the £200 energy loan into a more generous and substantial grant, scrap the regressive national insurance tax hike, reverse the £1,040 cut to universal credit, match the Scottish child payment UK-wide, introduce a real living wage to boost incomes, reduce or remove VAT on household energy bills, and follow the Scottish Government's 6% uprating of benefits. This Prime Minister, his Chancellor and the Cabinet hand-wringing or sitting on their hands while households struggle with the soaring cost of living is unforgivable. There is no end in sight to this crisis so we need action now, yet there is nothing in the Queen's Speech to suggest that such action will be taken.

As the Bank of England predicts that inflation is likely to rise to an eye-watering 10% later this year, food and energy price rises are placing a particularly high burden on households. Despite the fact that the UK has the highest poverty rates in north-west Europe, with 11.7% living below the poverty line, sadly things look as though they are set to get even worse. People are told that work is the best route out of poverty, but the reality is that in-work poverty is rising. The phenomenon of

[Patricia Gibson]

in-work poverty should be a contradiction in terms. It should not exist, and the fact that it does is utterly disgraceful. Instead of a plan to support households through this crisis, we have a Chancellor telling those who are suffering because of the crisis that it would be “silly” to introduce measures now to help people. No wonder people are angry, and so much for levelling up.

Alongside that, the Tory strategy to undermine devolution continues. Scots are to be punished for not voting Tory by having their Parliament undermined via the Orwellian tactic of introducing the ironically named Brexit freedoms Bill. Much retained EU law is incorporated in Acts passed democratically in the Scottish Parliament, and those must be respected. Instead, Brexit Bills will deliver nothing but a race to the bottom on so many issues.

I would remind Government Members, but sadly the Benches opposite are empty, that under rule 9B of the Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament and in accordance with the Sewel convention, the UK Parliament should not legislate on devolved matters without the consent of the Scottish Parliament. This means that under our constitutional arrangements, the procurement Bill, the trade Bill, the Bill of Rights, the levelling-up and regeneration Bill, the energy security Bill, the economic crime and corporate transparency Bill, the Brexit freedoms Bill, the Northern Ireland troubles Bill, the social security Bill, the transport Bill, the modern slavery Bill and the data reform Bill will all require the legislative consent of the democratically elected Scottish Parliament. Indeed, there may be more to add to that substantial list. That shows that the Government’s intention is to trample all over devolution. I remind them that riding roughshod over Scotland’s Parliament will simply not be tolerated and it will not serve them well.

Alongside that, we have an absence in the Queen’s Speech of an employment Bill, which was first promised in 2019, and there is no animal welfare abroad Bill, which would have banned fur imports and foie gras. Those measures have been quietly dropped.

This Queen’s Speech has been defined not by action, but by complacency and short-sightedness. Scotland needs no more of this. As well as the attacks on Scotland’s democratically elected Parliament, which are set to continue, our resource budget allocation has been cut by Westminster by 5.2% and the capital budget allocation has been cut by 9.7% in real terms.

The SNP Government are doing what they can to support households during these difficult times. I could talk about the bedroom tax being fully mitigated, the council tax mitigation, the Scottish child payment being doubled, free tuition, free prescriptions and free school meals for all primary schoolchildren, but as Scotland tries to mitigate the worst excesses of this Tory Government, the Scottish Government are hemmed in by Tory cuts to Scotland’s budget and the lack of power over the full fiscal levers needed to tackle the fundamentals of poverty and want in Scotland. A lack of powers for the Scottish Government means that we can really deal only with the symptoms of poverty inflicted by this Tory Government, not the deep-rooted causes of the inequality in our society that delivers child poverty and pensioner poverty and leaves many households struggling to make ends meet.

The people of Scotland understand that the Westminster system is broken. It does not serve Scotland’s needs, and it does not serve the people of Scotland and their families’ interests. Today, the First Minister of Scotland confirmed that a Bill for a referendum on Scotland’s future will be brought forward, with White Papers to be published in the near future. For an increasing number of people in Scotland, this cannot come soon enough, because they agree that Scotland deserves better than this. Scotland deserves to have its own future in its own hands. Scotland deserves independence.

8.38 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): This really does feel like a Queen’s Speech from a Government who have run out of ideas and are not capable of dealing with the very serious times in which they find themselves. It is an awful lot of press releases and no plan. We desperately need a plan.

I heard reference in the Queen’s Speech to Bills that might be introduced to deal with the cost of living crisis. We do not need parliamentary Bills to drive down people’s household bills. We need action that could be taken today. The Government could decide to use one of the rare Brexit benefits and reduce VAT today. They could decide in the next day or three to do what we have been calling on them to do for some time—bring about the windfall tax on the energy companies that have made profits that are unearned, unnecessary and unexpected, and give that money to people who desperately need it. They could give it to people across my constituency in Cumbria and across the rest of the country who literally cannot afford to put food on the table and pay their rent, their mortgage and their bills. No amount of smart-alec culture war ruses will pay anybody’s children’s food bills. This is what we are seeing from a Government who have lost touch with any idea they ever had of what it is to be serious about governing at a serious time.

As you might imagine, Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to talk specifically about rural communities and particularly issues of agriculture and housing. There is nothing for us in this Queen’s Speech—nothing that remembers the rural communities of this country, particularly in England, which have so very obviously been neglected and taken for granted by this Government.

Let us look at farming. I make a plea to all hon. Members in the House who do not represent rural constituencies that rural communities should matter to them, for two principal reasons. First, if they eat, they should be grateful to the farmers who live in my constituency—and indeed yours, Mr Deputy Speaker—and who put the food on our table. No country serious about its own security would be in any way reckless about its lack of food security.

We should also care because our farmers are on the frontline of tackling climate change and providing environmental restoration. Some 70% of England’s land mass is farmed, so if we care about tackling climate change and the biodiversity crisis, the reality is that the greenest thing that any Government can do is keep Britain’s farmers farming. They are the only people who will make even the greatest plans come to fruition, because the greatest plans in the world will remain just plans in a drawer without farmers to introduce them.

The Government are making a disastrous mess of the transition from the old farm payment system to the new system. If I had been asked a few years ago to list potential advantages of the UK leaving the European Union, I would have given a very small list, but being outside the common agricultural policy would have been on that list. Yet again, here is a potential benefit that the Government have grasped and are miserably failing on, as they botch the transition from the old basic payment scheme to the new environmental land management schemes.

In my constituency, every single farmer has lost at least 5% of their basic payments and will lose at least 20% this year. All of the hundreds of farms that I represent are in that position. This year, 13 of the farms that I represent—a tiny proportion, little more than 1%—will be getting anything from the new sustainable farming incentive. The Government's botched transition to the new scheme is costing farmers thousands of pounds a year, with nothing to replace it. So what will happen? Farmers will either go bust or go backwards. We will lose hundreds and hundreds of small to medium-sized family farms right across our country, many of them tenanted, costing us in biodiversity and food production. If they do not go bust, they will go backwards and give up on doing any environmental work whatever; they will just get more stock, because that is the only way that they can keep food on their own table.

The Government are making not just accidental mistakes with farm transition, but deliberate ones. Parts of the landscape recovery and local nature recovery schemes give a clear incentive for landowners—and, indeed, investment companies that want to become landowners—to get huge tracts of land, evict tenant farmers and get massive cheques from the Government for doing nothing and letting the valleys go to seed. These are outrageous, state-sponsored lakeland clearances; we must not stand for them. There is nothing in this Queen's Speech that gives any clue that the Government understand the damage that they are about to do.

There is nothing for the uplands. Our upland communities in the Lake district, in the dales and in places such as Cornwall and Devon, Northumberland and North Yorkshire have enormous cultural significance, yet nothing in the farm payment scheme recognises that. The tourism economy of the Lake district and Cumbria is worth £3.5 billion a year under normal circumstances, yet there is nothing to compensate the people who create the backdrop that makes so many people come to visit our beautiful part of the world. That is why I am calling for a cultural landscape payment as part of the new farm payment system: to make sure that we value and reward our upland farmers.

It is absolutely ridiculous that we have a farm payment scheme—a Government agricultural policy—that has a strategic aim of reducing our capacity to feed ourselves and actively taking land out of food production. That is not only stupid when we are trying to protect ourselves in a grave international situation, but immoral, because it means that we will now be fishing in markets where developing countries are seeking their grain and their commodities. We are pushing up the prices for the poorest people in the world because we have a wrong-headed farm payment system that is taking land out of food production. That is stupid and immoral.

Let me now say something about housing, and the impact of the last two years on the housing crisis in rural communities. This has become a catastrophe. We have too few houses that are lived in permanently, and communities are dying as a consequence. During the pandemic, 80% of house sales in my community have gone to the second-home market, and at the same time there has been a 32% increase in the number of properties that have gone into the holiday-let market. In Devon, this has meant a 70% reduction in the long-term private rented sector.

What do those two developments mean? First, there is excessive second-home ownership. No one wants to be beastly about second-home owners—we want to be generous and welcoming to people who wish to spend their time in our communities; it is nothing personal—but the fact is that this has a massive impact on the communities that I am privileged to serve in Cumbria. It means that communities are hollowed out of full-time occupation, so they lose the school, they lose the post office, they lose the pub—they lose community itself. Secondly, there is the huge and very speedy transition from long-term lets to vast numbers of holiday lets. What does that mean? It means that people who have lived in an area for years are expelled—evicted through the section 21 notices that the Government said they would abolish and have not. That was not in the Queen's Speech, and it should have been.

These people who are being ejected from their communities are people in work and with children at local schools. They have nowhere else to go in a place like the lakes or the dales, so they have to leave altogether, uprooting their kids and leaving their work. That is outrageous. The impact on our communities is devastating, and the Government are doing pretty much nothing about it.

One proposal in the Queen's Speech has been floated—for the Government to borrow something of the Welsh Government's proposals to double council tax on second homes. I thought "great" when I first read about that, but now I have seen the detail, and it is rubbish. What will happen is that council tax will be doubled for a second-home owner who never goes to their home. That is a tiny minority of second-home owners. The proposal takes no account of the fact that, for instance, 90% of second homes bought in my constituency are bought for investment and then let out for 70 days a year. What does that mean? It means that this not a second home; the owner is a small business, and this is a holiday let. It means that the small business will pay no council tax and no business rates either, and that people in Kendal, Penrith, Appleby and Ambleside who are going to food banks are subsidising wealthy people with second, third and fourth homes. The Government, who know that for sure, having undoubtedly listened to their own Back Benchers representing rural communities, have chosen to do nothing meaningful to tackle the outrage.

Let me finally say something about planning. If we want to tackle the second-home crisis, the holiday-let crisis and the affordable-housing crisis, we should change planning law to make second homes and holiday lets different categories of planning use so that national parks and councils can just put a lid on it. That would be the easiest and most straightforward thing to do. Why have the Government not chosen to do it? We talk about building more houses, but the problem in areas

[Tim Farron]

such as mine is that while those who build houses will sell them, we are building for demand and not for need, and it is time to build for need.

Earlier today, I was talking to some of my local councillors—Jenny Boak, Pete Endors and Sue Sanderson, who represent Grange & Cartmel. Just outside Cartmel, in Hags Lane, 39 properties are to be built, only eight of them affordable. Why? Because the Government do not give planning authorities the power to say to developers, “Get knotted unless you are going to build for local people and families and make those places affordable.” So I am angry, not just on behalf of my community but on behalf of communities across rural areas of our great country, that there is so little, if anything at all, for us in this Queen’s Speech.

It seems to me, looking at it from the inside in Cumbria, that this Conservative Government are doing to rural communities in this decade what a Conservative Government did to urban communities in the north in the 1980s. The difference is that Margaret Thatcher had a plan—I will give her due for that—while this Government, shambolically, through neglect and through taking rural communities for granted, are devastating those communities. They will not be excused for that, and they will not get away with it. We have seen the results of last week’s elections in Cumbria and Somerset, and I hope we will soon see the result of an election in Devon. We will see that rural Britain will not be taken for granted.

8.49 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I want to look at the context of this Queen’s Speech. We have escalating poverty; there is absolutely no doubt about that. We know that 14 million people are living in poverty, over 8 million of whom are in work. We also know that 4.5 million children living in poverty and, again, more than half of them are in working families. There is an increase in pensioner poverty, and an increase in the number of disabled people living in poverty. The net effect of the autumn Budget and the spring statement is that there will be 1.3 million more people living in absolute poverty, including 500,000 children. When we talk about social mobility and educational attainment, as many Conservative colleagues have been doing, we need to recognise that that is the context.

I chair the all-party parliamentary group on health in all policies, and we had a session on health inequalities with Professor Sir Michael Marmot a week or so ago. He described how the UK and the United States are outliers among advanced economies in terms of our life expectancy and our healthy life expectancy because the length of time that we are expected to live in good health is actually falling, and we should be really ashamed of that. We also heard from another academic, Professor Clare Bambra, who has been looking at the regional impacts of this. She has developed estimates showing that £13.2 billion a year is being lost because of this differential in health. The lower healthy life expectancy that we are seeing is the product of structural inequalities, which have got worse under this Government.

People say, “Well, what can we do about that? We’re doing the best we can.” That is absolute rubbish. We have the highest tax burden in 70 years. That is a Government choice. We have escalating energy costs

and food costs. Again, the Government refuse to accept that they need to do more on this. The Opposition parties and the chief executives of various companies—Tesco was the latest one, this morning—have been saying that there should be a windfall tax, which would not be inflationary. But again, the Government have refused to act. There is no emergency Budget, no help with energy bills, and no scrapping of the national insurance contributions that are adding to the burden that people are feeling. There is nothing on social security support for people in work or out of work, or for pensioners. There is just 3%, when we know that inflation is currently at 7% and predicted to go to 10% by the end of the year. On top of that, the Government have now decided that they are going to move people who are on legacy benefits across, through the managed migration process. That has to happen in the next three months, and the impact, according to the Government’s own documents, is that nearly 1 million more people will be worse off. A million more! These are Government choices, unfortunately.

There was nothing in the Queen’s Speech on retrofitting our homes so that we can not only help people with the cost of their energy use but reduce the demand for energy, and nothing on how we are going to transition to support for businesses that produce and stimulate sustainable green jobs. There was nothing on tackling the inequality that is depriving our citizens not just of opportunities but of the ability to live long healthy lives. If the health of our children is a litmus test of how our society is doing, we must conclude that we are doing very badly, given that we have the highest level of infant mortality in western Europe.

There was nothing on the Government’s pledge to double research funding to find cures for the diseases that lead to dementia, which is the most common cause of death in this country; it is what people over 60 dread the most. There was nothing on how to correct the injustice experienced by disabled claimants who have lost their lives and by their families and friends, and nothing about an inquiry that will investigate how this happened. What we do have is more of the same from the Government, including stripping British citizens of their human rights and protections under the law. We will have to see whether such privations are restricted to the many, not the few. Some people clearly believe that the Government make laws for others that they do not need to abide by themselves.

To illustrate the Government’s thinking and how they are oh-so-skilfully packaging their Bills in emotive and divisive language, we helpfully have the Brexit freedoms Bill. The Government say it is designed to get rid of red tape, such as those annoying employment rights that try to hold abusive employers to account, or those troublesome health and safety regulations designed to stop us dying at or from our work.

Even more fundamentally, where is the legislation that will build back trust and confidence in our politics and our politicians and that reinforces that politics is about public service and serving our communities and our country, not ourselves or our mates? Legislation must address the inequality not only in income and wealth, but in power too, including in political power. Where is the legislation that would put the ministerial code on a statutory footing, as it is in the devolved nations,

underpinned by the Nolan principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership? Where is the legislation that would make lying to this House and to the people of this country a sackable offence? Where is the legislation that would make it an offence to lie about a candidate in speech, in print or online during an election in order to influence the outcome? The Representation of the People Act is clearly inadequate in today's digital age.

We do not need to see the results of the many surveys that show our citizens do not trust us; we just need to look at the turnout at last week's elections, especially in our part of the world, Mr Deputy Speaker. We must change the culture of our politics. Being an honourable Member, whether in this Chamber or a local authority, should mean something. Our constituents must know that we will act with integrity and decency and that we will be on their side. However, with people allowed to stand in last week's elections who based their campaigns on misogyny, racism, division and hate, and with others dishing out leaflets containing Trump-esque QAnon conspiracy theories to rabble-rouse, I am afraid that we are a long way from where we need to be.

8.57 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Queen's Speech frequently seems to have coincided with significant electoral or political developments in Scotland over the past few years. Once again we meet in the aftermath of council elections, and I congratulate all those elected in Glasgow North last Thursday, particularly my returning SNP colleagues Ken Andrew, Kenny McLean, Jaki McLaren, Allan Gow and Franny Scally. I also congratulate Linsey Wilson on a fantastic campaign in Partick East/Kelvindale that did not get the result she deserved.

I make a particular mention of Councillor Abdul Bostani, whom I have spoken about in this Chamber before. Abdul arrived in Glasgow aged 18, after fleeing for his life from the Taliban. Twenty years later he is representing his adopted community in Maryhill as a city councillor, he will be joined in the chambers by Glasgow girl Councillor Roza Salih, the first refugee to be elected as a councillor anywhere in Scotland. When Glasgow says it loud and says it clear that refugees are welcome here, we mean it. We elect refugees as councillors to champion their local communities.

What a contrast that is with the Tory Government's increasingly hostile environment for people who want to make the UK their home. That rhetoric continues in the Queen's Speech today. I hope that the provisions in the anti-refugee Nationality and Borders Act 2022 are challenged at every turn as the Government seek to implement them, and constituents in Glasgow North who want to see the Government held to account for their inhumane attitude to refugees can rest assured that SNP MPs will continue to speak up loudly and clearly.

The Home Office is collapsing under the weight of the policy and attitude. The Homes for Ukraine scheme is moving far too slowly; many Afghans who still want to come here cannot; and now even UK citizens who just want to go on holiday are unable to travel because of chaos at the passport office. Constituents are getting in touch daily, and the Government really need to get a grip.

The hostile environment is just one aspect of the increasing divergence between the politics of Westminster and the policies of the devolved Administrations. Where the Scottish Government are doing everything in their power to tackle the cost of living crisis—doubling the child payment and increasing social security payments by 6%—this Tory Government are slashing universal credit and hiking up national insurance. They have had to be dragged by immense campaigning work across the country, including by my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), to propose in the Queen's Speech the social security end of life Bill, which will finally allow people, including one of his constituents, a very close friend of mine, Melanie Finlay, to access the benefits they ought to be entitled to after receiving a terminal diagnosis. I congratulate her on her bravery in facing her illness and on helping to front up Marie Curie's campaign to make sure that nobody dies in poverty. Why in the 21st century does any organisation have to run a campaign with such a slogan? That is the level of ambition that needs to be tackled and is largely missing from the Queen's Speech.

That divergence continues in other policy areas. The Scottish Government have helped to support the refurbishment of The Burrell Collection in Glasgow, and the city is becoming ever more popular as a location for the film industry, while the UK Government embark on the privatisation of Channel 4, which does not cost the taxpayer a penny, for purely ideological reasons. As others have said, the Queen's Speech is as notable for the Bills and policies it does not contain as for those it does. People in Glasgow North want to see the highest standards of animal welfare applied across these islands and will be disappointed at the lack of ambition outlined today.

We need more and faster action to tackle the climate emergency. This time last year, the UK Government were boasting about their "soft power superpower Global Britain is great" status as the host of COP26. That got barely a mention in the speech delivered in the House of Lords earlier. The real agenda of the Conservatives is revealed as they seek to drop net zero action as quickly as possible. Real reform of housing and energy would reduce not only emissions, but the cost of living. Again, such action is posted missing, and that is simply not good enough. The vast majority of councillors returned in Scotland last week are fully committed to tackling climate change and that is a message that Ministers should heed. Next week, I, and I know many other colleagues, will be joining constituents in "The Big Plastic Count" to help to build a UK-wide picture of plastic waste and the action we and the Government need to take to tackle it.

How we approach climate change also speaks to how seriously we take our other international obligations. Constituents in Glasgow North were overjoyed at the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, but they have not forgotten prisoners of conscience and other human rights defenders who are oppressed and persecuted elsewhere. They want urgent action to secure peace in the middle east, an end to arms sales to brutal regimes and the restoration of the 0.7% aid spending target. Again, all those points of ambition are lacking in the Queen's Speech and the associated documents. Instead, what we see from this Government is constitutional overreach, more attempts to undermine the devolution

[Patrick Grady]

settlement, and the solution to EU legislation and regulation being, apparently, yet more legislation and regulation. The biggest Brexit opportunity seems to be an even greater power grab by Executive, rather than the promised taking back of control for Parliament.

Many of us will be keeping a close eye on the so-called “Brexit freedoms” Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) mentioned, we are seeing the Queen’s Speech trying to put into action the Government’s muscular Unionism policy. The Scotland Office is going around boasting that 27 of the 38 Bills will apply across the UK, but many of them will encroach on devolved areas. The Tory Government are not just disrespecting devolution—they seem to have forgotten that devolution exists at all, which is perhaps not a surprise, given that they never really supported it in the first place.

So the divergence on these isles, by the insistence and action of this Tory Government, continues. Scotland’s Government and Parliament are progressive, outward-looking, internationalist and focused on helping those who need it most in challenging times. The Tories pursue their pet obsessions no matter the cost to the economy, society or the environment. So the choice for Scotland is clear. Our best future, our best opportunity to build a fairer, greener society, will be as an independent country. If the Tories are so convinced of their case for the Union and the level of support for the Union that exists in Scotland, they should be welcoming the opportunity of a referendum, instead of trying to block one. Their candidates all stood last week obsessed with an independence referendum; all their literature said, “Vote for the Conservatives to stop a referendum from happening.” Well, people did not vote for the Scottish Conservatives and the SNP secured its best local election result in history, so perhaps they should listen to the message that is being sent by the voters.

The reality is, as this Queen’s Speech has shown, that every promise made to Scotland in 2014 has been broken. Scotland was told in 2014 that, if it voted for independence, it would leave the European Union, the cost of energy would skyrocket and supermarket shelves would be empty. All those things have happened and the last time I checked Scotland did not vote for independence, but next time it will. That opportunity is coming soon and, when the people of Scotland have that opportunity, they will choose an independent future.

9.4 pm

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). It was also good to see the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan) back in her place earlier, and to hear the very good maiden speech by the new hon. Member for Southend West (Anna Firth). We have been reminded of the three good colleagues we have lost: David Amess, James Brokenshire, whose memorial service took place yesterday, and, of course, our own Jack Dromey. They are all missed.

I intended to say a few words about the Prime Minister, but I will save that for another day. I will touch on a few issues. The Government have put forward a higher education Bill, and I look forward to that. I am particularly

interested in proposals for lifelong learning, but there are huge issues across the educational sector in terms of what is happening in our schools and nurseries. There is the haemorrhaging of teachers, teaching assistants and senior leadership teams because the budgets are not there, the pressures are so great and morale has sunk through a lack of respect from the UK Government.

The priorities that the Prime Minister is missing are around the cost of living. The Prime Minister and his Chancellor are really out of touch. We should remember that the Prime Minister said in the autumn that any talk of high inflation was unfounded. I hate to say this, but I was on BBC Coventry and Warwickshire Radio last September, saying how concerned I was that inflation might reach 6%—it was only 3.5% at the time. Of course, it has now run away.

We should have had an emergency Budget. Why do we not have one? People are hurting badly. One in seven people are food insecure and an estimated 2 million people are unable to eat every day. People going to food banks are saying, “I’m sorry, but I won’t take food that needs cooking. I’ll only take food that’s cold because we can’t afford to cook it.” I know that from visiting food banks in recent weeks. That is the harsh reality.

The Business, Enterprise and Skills Committee heard from the energy companies, which anticipate that 40% of UK households will be in energy poverty by the autumn. They estimate that a typical annual bill will be £2,900 for households come the autumn. That is why the chief executive of ScottishPower said the other day that he believes that 10 million homes will need something like £1,000 per household to see them through the energy crisis. Of course, no money on anything like that scale is coming from the Government.

Yet we could have that—we have proposed a windfall tax. When we hear the figure of £9 billion a quarter, it sounds like a telephone number—it is hard to get our heads around it. Just 12 years ago, the company I worked for was worth £3 billion, and that was the Peugeot-Citroën corporation globally, yet here we are considering £9 billion in one quarter. It is a huge amount of money and a windfall tax could allay so much of the financial crisis for households throughout the country. The energy cap in France was 4%. How can they do that, but we cannot?

On inflation, the Federal Reserve says that it is a serious problem that will be sustained, whereas the Bank of England is being slightly too optimistic in its forecast.

The outlook for the economy is not good. We will have the worst economic performance of the G7 countries next year. We also had the worst economic performance in 2019, before the pandemic, so we are the hardest hit. I am not sure how that is getting the big calls right. That is probably the most marked indicator of how the Government and this Prime Minister got it wrong. We have had 15 tax increases since the Chancellor took over two years ago.

I would have liked some talk of an industrial strategy in the Queen’s Speech, addressing the challenges of our automotive industry, which has seen a 34% reduction in production this year. Last year was not that great, either. We need to address the global supply chain issues and the issue of semi-conductors. We also need to urgently get our heads around the need for the transition

to electric vehicles and hydrogen motor power, sourcing lithium production, cheaper energy and the gigafactories, such as the one proposed in Coventry, that we desperately need.

On the energy Bill, Warwickshire is one of the few counties that has no onshore wind turbines. We desperately need that. It is the cheapest form of energy and we should be investing in it.

On housing, I cannot believe that we are so way off the pace on the sort of housing that we need, the mix and the volume. The fact is that zero-carbon homes should have been built from 2016. The last Labour Government would have delivered 1 million zero-carbon homes. Instead, I see houses, to this day, with 50mm insulation, which is nothing. That is why we have the worst housing stock in Europe when it comes to energy efficiency.

I would love to see what is going to come out on planning. We had the national planning policy framework in 2012. The Localism Act 2011 promised the public and communities more say, but guess what? That did not happen. Communities up and down my constituency do not have the required infrastructure—the bus services, the shops, the cycle routes and so on.

There is a lot of other legislation on which I would love to touch, including the issues for renters and the precarity that they face, with the increase in the private rental market. There were a lot of warm words on the environment. We have to address that with the onshore wind energy that I mentioned earlier. Fracking is not the right solution. It would be deeply damaging to our environment. It is not necessary and we could have anticipated the energy shortages a long time ago by building in resilience.

On justice and the police, of course we want safer streets, but we have lost 7,000 police since 2015. It was clear what was going to happen on our streets—hence the rise in knife crime in constituencies such as Warwick and Leamington, a rise in drugs, a rise in antisocial behaviour, a rise in speeding and so on. We need more community support officers on our streets and the police hubs to go with them.

When it comes to security, we should be talking much more about food security and sourcing more food from the UK. My constituency has some excellent farmers, but we are losing land to housing development and potentially to quarries, as is happening just outside Barford.

There are several omissions in the legislation that the Government have put forward. I have only touched on some of the Bills that have been proposed, but I see that there is nothing in terms of legislation on business reforms. For example, there is a need for legislation on auditing and governance. Let us think about the £4 billion that was lost in covid loans. How did that happen? There is no true oversight. We need an audit watchdog, which is something that the Institute of Directors has been calling for. It is disappointing that the Government's football measures have been dropped from the Queen's Speech. We desperately need them and clubs such as Leamington FC and Racing Club Warwick would have loved to see them as well.

A lot of legislation is being proposed by the Government. I hope that they can change their priorities because the public are desperate to be heard and desperate for their needs to be met. The cost of living is such an immediate

crisis, as is the climate crisis. So many of these issues are inter-related. I fear that, without the right strategies in place, such as the industrial strategy that I mentioned, for housing and for the automotive industries, those priorities will not be met.

9.14 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The bare bones of a list of Bills has now been revealed to us all by what I call a skeleton of a functioning Government. Bill titles conceal their contents and aim, and this Parliament must ensure that they address the community's greatest needs. Distracting attention with divisive laws will not mask the deep inequality we see across our communities or the cry of the people we represent—a cry that is getting louder day by day as they are plunged into abject poverty. I will reserve judgment until I see the detail of the Bills, but I will make the case for my constituents in this debate.

In light of the economic crisis, where the few profit, and seriously profit, many of my constituents are paying, and they are seriously paying. This Queen's Speech should have been a cost of living speech. We have heard many speeches in this place to confirm why: 4.3 million children in poverty, 2.1 million pensioners in poverty and 11 million people in our country overall in poverty—a number that, when we put in housing costs, rises to 14.5 million.

This should have been a housing Parliament debating housing measures. For York, measures on housing and planning will be the most significant. Reforming the planning system and giving residents more involvement in local development will be important. In York, after 76 years without a local plan, the inquiry has commenced. We have a serious housing crisis, but the measures I have seen coming forward from Government will not address that.

As things stand, developers and property tycoons have found ways to profit from virtually every scheme, sucking money and eventually people out of our communities while ticking Government boxes. Many people have nothing left in their pockets. For my constituents in York, housing is the greatest driver of inequality, yet a home can provide the greatest source of stability and security. The ownership generation may rest easy, but renters are at the mercy of their landlords extracting every last penny, causing house prices and rents to explode, with easy profit.

Far too often, new-build developments are luxury apartments, which no one in my community can even think of affording, for investors to buy up and Londoners to find a bolthole. Existing stock is now being hoovered up for buy-to-lets, houses in multiple occupancy and Airbnbs. Families in York are being priced out of their community and we are regressing.

The council is slow to build and the number of people now on waiting lists has tripled during my time in this place. Housing poverty is soaring. Leaseholders are becoming enslaved, renters are trapped and more and more people are forced to move away. Jobs are left vacant, with the local economy and public services understaffed and suffering. It feels as if everything is spiralling down and imploding. The system is broken and Ministers know it, but they need to put in place the frameworks to repair it—something Labour would do if we were in power now.

[*Rachael Maskell*]

Local plans are nothing if they are not prescriptive, especially regarding the tenure of housing that is needed. People and planning are not two separate entities, but must be together in one united purpose. Take short-term holiday lets and Airbnbs: we must leave this Parliament with regulation on them, and I will do all I can to secure that.

Imagine a beautiful city such as York, which I have the privilege of representing, now prey to the weekend stags and hens chasing local families out of our city centre, with tourists leaving in disgust. The city then spews out the crowds into our communities; every street fears the arrival of a party house, an Airbnb or a short-term let. We have 1,785 of them in my constituency alone and the number is rising sharply. That is why the legislation is so crucial.

For some, the parties and antisocial behaviour are there all weekend, every weekend. These were once family streets, but no longer. Residents must live with the misery or sell up, and when they move, guess what happens to their home? Then comes a string of party houses, hosting maybe 30 guests, turning up the volume. Investors are buying up York's housing stock where local families should reside. It is easy money. It denies local people a chance to live in their city, work in their city and contribute to their city, pushing up house market prices even further; in York Central alone they have increased by 29% since July 2019. That is destroying my community.

These are not individuals letting out a spare room; they are organised businesses that are not paying their way through council tax or business rates. It is completely unregulated. That is why legislation, however we can find a way, must address this crisis. The Government need to get a grip on that, and not just register but license these places. There must be regulations for councils to license all current and future Airbnbs and short lets, with full powers to refuse them or fine them for noise, as they do in Nice; restrictions on ownership and how long they can be let for, as in London, and on how a licence can be revoked; a doubling of council tax, as in Wales; and a right to place a blanket ban on certain communities, all with a licence fee to cover costs. That must be a major focus, or else my community will be destroyed—not just the community but the economy too.

We all know that this is not just about party homes; landlords are also converting family homes into HMOs, and then very rapidly into Airbnbs. Those should demand full planning, with proper community engagement—I will be interested to see what the Government's proposals are—and then licensing, with no weakening of permitted development rights. Local authorities must have the right to refuse. In some student areas, streets no longer have a mix of residents and communities are dying. Better regulation will bring better stability.

As for standards in the private rented sector, I welcome today's announcement to strengthen the rights of tenants and ensure better-quality, safer homes, but I want to see the detail. We need to up the stability of homes and the sustainability of homes. Minimum levels of energy efficiency need to rise. That is why Labour's programme to retrofit 10 million homes is needed right now. Things like infestations and damp—issues that come across my

desk so often—must be able to be assessed by people inspecting these homes. We need a register of landlords, an inspectorate and enforcement. If landlords break the law, they should lose their right to rent on any of their properties—plain and simple.

However, we cannot talk about standards if we do not talk about rents. Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 must be repealed. Its abuse is now widespread as it enables private landlords to repossess their properties from assured shorthold tenants without having to establish fault on the part of the tenants. No-fault evictions are seen as a way of getting more rent from their next tenants. However, with rents going through the roof as available properties are disappearing and with house prices rising so fast, landlords are simply able to name their price. That needs rent controls. Local authorities should be able to demand rent controls in places where housing costs are out of control. Leasehold properties are also dominating new build. Leaseholders need protection. As we have heard, leaseholds need to be something of the past, with people now paying extortionate amounts for services which, if needed, could be delivered locally for far less. Ending the leasehold model is crucial.

All this comes back to planning and good housing legislation. We must protect our current stock and build to meet local need. If it is in the hands of this Parliament to stop the extraction model, to stop evictions and exploitation, and to protect the existing stock and build a new generation for local people to have a safe and secure home, that would be a job well done by this Government. I fear that we will not get to that point, as our communities are under such pressure: food, energy and now shelter—the basic things that everyone should have as of right—are being stripped away. I want to see the Government's response in the fine detail of that legislation, and I will be scrutinising it, because my community deserves so much better. The Government carry a heavy weight in this Parliament, and I trust that they will listen carefully and ensure that our communities are left stronger, safer and more sustainable.

9.24 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a real delight to follow my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (*Rachael Maskell*), who I know has such a deep understanding of housing and the problems that so many of our constituents face, from the basics of mould and infestations right through to the complexities of leasehold properties, cladding and all of that. It was a very good speech, and I thank her for that.

There are some very good themes in the Queen's Speech; the question will be in the detail and about how much we manage to achieve in this parliamentary Session. I welcome this opportunity for the Queen's Speech and the platinum jubilee celebrations. I do not know whether you will be at any street parties, Mr Deputy Speaker, but you will be very welcome to come along to the Cecile Park street party if you are available over the four-day holiday. No one has mentioned that today, but giving us those extra few days to enjoy the jubilee is probably the best thing that the Government have done in the past few years. It is a bit of a boost for the local economy and a bit of a celebration as well that we have got through a pretty tough time with covid. We are hopefully at the other side of that.

The other positive elements that have a lot of potential in the Queen's Speech are the modern slavery Bill, about which the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) spoke at length, with the possibility of civil penalties for organisations that do not comply with modern slavery requirements; and the economic crime and corporate transparency Bill, which will hopefully contain the long-overdue Companies House reform. We know that that is key to cracking down on the kleptocracy that was so evident when President Putin began his terrible assault on Ukraine earlier in the year.

I will focus in my short remarks on the context of this Queen's Speech coming straight out of an election period. I wonder whether that is why the Government Benches are completely empty except for one Whip and one Front-Bench Member. Perhaps the wind is out of their sails following the 500-odd losses at local government level. Who is to say? I am not sure why the Government Benches are so empty, but the context of the Queen's Speech is pretty desperate. We are on the verge of a recession, and we cannot afford to be complacent. We want to see an emergency Budget as well as this Queen's Speech, and I was a little unsure as to whether there would be a statement from the Chancellor. The Prime Minister mentioned that, but that was then ruled out by his spokesperson at 10 Downing Street. If anyone can clarify, please do intervene.

I was surprised also that in the Prime Minister's brief remarks about the Queen's Speech, Peppa Pig did not make any appearance. At one point, given the speed at which he delivered his remarks, I thought "Peppa Pig" might just accidentally pop out of his mouth as he was speaking. It felt like one of those speeches. I do not know if anybody else shared that sentiment. Listening to how it revved up and then slowed down again, I thought it could have perhaps gone into that.

Speaking of Peppa Pig, I note that the CBI today has said that the Queen's Speech and the economic measures proposed are not good enough. That is a real pity, because the Chancellor's response during covid was a correct tripartite response among our Government, the CBI and the TUC. The TUC has severely criticised the Queen's Speech for sadly not having an employment Bill where we could address: the lack of security in our workplaces; the vexed issue around flexibility at work and who should be in work and who should have the right to work at home; and maternity provision, pregnancy provision and adoption provision. Those are all things we could have put into that speech to improve our workplaces and address retention. We know that a lot of good workplaces do not know why they cannot retain staff. That is a real missed opportunity.

The other missed opportunity is on the environment. We really want to be turbocharging the insulation of all of our homes, particularly in areas where those of us have very old Victorian stock, which is expensive to retrofit, but desperately needs to be tackled.

An hon. Member spoke earlier about the failed green deal in 2010, which was a tragedy, and the second scheme that failed after the 2017 election. Time after time, we have had schemes that have failed. I was pleased to hear the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) praise the role of local government during covid; if local government were given cash to get all its own stock up to scratch, we would be doing a lot for the environment and fuel poverty, and a lot to

reduce people's bills. We have had two failed schemes that cost a lot but did not do much for the environment or the consumer, so in the end, those sorts of basic schemes cost less. That would be a way to achieve things again.

We have heard many contributions about food poverty. All hon. Members want to see fewer queues at food banks in our constituencies and people being able to afford to work a decent week's work and put food on the table with their earnings. I do not know why that is so difficult, but I do know that by the end of the year, when inflation hits 10%, we will see even more people queuing at food banks, which is not a sight that any of us wish to see. Of course, that situation will also be exacerbated by the 30% drop in Ukraine's exports, particularly of cooking oil and wheat, which will increase hardship at our tables. We need the Government to step in, take responsibility and roll out a programme that addresses that lack.

We also need much more innovation in our industrial strategy. I was disappointed that the Government cancelled the industrial strategy last year; that was a real missed opportunity. For example, why do we not just fund the manufacturing of more personal protective equipment? We know that we need it because we need to have stock ready. We have plenty of centres, such as Leicestershire, parts of London or parts of the midlands, where we could begin that and fund it, and then it would pay for itself over time. Let us get innovating, have a Brexit dividend and be creative.

In addition, we have the productivity challenge, which comes back to the fact that we have far too many people in low-quality further education courses because we still have not put right the 50% cut to FE in 2010. That desperately needs to be addressed. It was good to hear other hon. Members speaking about the apprenticeships and the way that many apprenticeship schemes have failed.

On public services, it is essential that we tackle the lack of GP appointments and that we look at the record NHS waiting lists to see doctors and nurses. We simply do not have enough health practitioners working in the health service. We have been promised parity of esteem for mental health for years and we still do not have it in this sketch-out of Bills, but we will keep fighting for people who have mental health problems for those to be considered as seriously as physical health problems.

On supersize classrooms, we know that the last time that a Labour Government came in in 1997, they immediately reduced classroom sizes and kids started to learn better. We need to do that now—let us not wait for Labour to come in and do it again—because we know that it works. We are still spending per child only what we spent in 2010 on education, which is holding our productivity back severely. We need to address that urgently.

I am pleased that victims of crime are mentioned in the Queen's Speech, but I want to see what that means. Far too many victims of crime are not being supported and are getting desperate that our justice system is not working for them. I will be following that detail closely. We know that just one in 35 victims of rape, for example, end up with a successful charge. That must absolutely stop.

My time is up, but we can revisit those issues. You are shaking your head, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I will conclude as I know that there are one or two more

[Catherine West]

speakers to come. All I will say is that an opportunity has been missed today. We have had a very interesting and engaging set of speeches from Government Members, but perhaps not attached to what the reality is in our own constituencies—whether on the Northern Ireland protocol, which we had a bit of a debate about; apprenticeships and young people; manufacturing in some of our hubs; or the housing crisis, which my hon. Friend the Member for York Central mentioned. There are so many areas that could have been addressed by those on the Government Benches, yet it did not seem to occur to the Prime Minister to talk about the pressing issues. To come back to my first point about the empty Benches on the Government side of the House, I wonder whether this disconnect led to the loss of 500 council seats, because in the end in a democracy, if we do not talk about the issues that matter to working people, we do not end up winning an election.

9.35 pm

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I would like to start by passing on the very best wishes of the people of Chesterfield to Her Majesty the Queen, who we were all very sad was unable to be here, and I know people will be wishing her well.

This was a remarkable Queen's Speech day, and not just for that reason. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) said, the speed at which the Prime Minister's speech was delivered suggests to me that when he finally loses his job, which he should have done several months ago, he might be gainfully employed as a horse-racing commentator. Alongside that, the debate has been remarkable for two things. The first is the fact that, as we were listening to Government Members and the issues they wanted to address, it was remarkable to think that the Government were responding to a country they have been running for 12 years. It was also so clear that so many of the issues facing the country are not an accident, but a deliberate result of the policies this Government have pursued for the last 12 years. It was a Queen's Speech simultaneously packed with different initiatives, yet at the same time failing to meet the challenges that the British people are struggling with so much at this moment. It is for precisely that reason that this Government look so exhausted, so tawdry and so out of touch.

Let us have a look at what this Government's priorities will be—as Mr Speaker suggested we should, I have obtained a copy of the Gracious Speech. The Government start by claiming that they will

“grow and strengthen the economy and help ease the cost of living for families.”

On growth, this is a Government of high taxation because they are a Government of low growth. They are a Government who have had low growth during 12 wasted years. They have consistently grown our economy by less than the previous Labour Government. In all but one year, growth under this Government was less than 2%. Under Labour, 2% growth was achieved 10 years straight. So why should we believe that this is a Government capable of delivering on their priority to grow the economy?

On strengthening the economy, the Government's consistent failure to deliver the Brexit they promised means that our economy is considerably weaker and less resilient than it was before the Prime Minister was elected. On the cost of living, their refusal to implement a windfall tax means that this Government, uniquely among all the European Governments, are allowing oil and gas producing firms to enjoy obscene profits while raising taxes on working people. We are only two lines into the Gracious Speech, and already the Government are referring to three areas—growth, strengthening the economy and the cost of living—in which they have indisputably failed.

The speech goes on with the Government claim that they will support the police to make our streets safer, but we have 7,000 fewer police than we had in 2010. Our court backlogs mean that terrified victims of crime wait months and even years for their perpetrators to face justice, and the Government were forced to exclude fraud from their crime statistics to try to pretend that crime was falling.

Just last week, I met a woman in my constituency, Jane Allen, who still mourns the loss of her brother, Phillip. He was murdered by a man who was on licence after being released from prison halfway through his sentence. The murderer, Jordan Maltby, should have been housed in an approved premises, but none was available. He should have been in regular contact with probation officers, but he was seen only once in the nine weeks he was out. He should have been monitored by police, but the demands on police time meant that did not happen. In a completely unprovoked attack, he murdered Phillip Allen in cold blood outside his house.

The Government's failures to provide the number of police we need, or properly to fund probation or address court delays, mean that under this Government our streets are less safe, not safer. In 2013 there were 634,000 violent offences in England and Wales. Last year there were 1.78 million violent crimes, which is 1.78 million opportunities to see the full cost of that failure. We have a larger population, but fewer police, more violent crimes, longer court delays and a failing probation service, and the Government want us to believe that they will make our streets safer.

Catherine West: Our condolences go to my hon. Friend's constituent, Jane, for the loss of her brother. Does my hon. Friend agree that as so many crimes happen because of the same group of people, if we do not get them the first time, the issue multiplies? The failure to bring a charge in the first instance makes the situation ever so much worse for more and more victims.

Mr Perkins: That is absolutely the case. Whether courts are not seeing people in time, or deciding not to send people to jail who they really should because jails are so overcrowded, or giving people shorter sentences, there are a whole variety of reasons why these violent criminals are making our streets less safe.

The Government claim that they will fund the NHS to reduce covid backlogs. This is the Government who caused the pre-covid backlogs. We went into covid with the longest waiting times since—guess when?—the last time we had a Tory Government. Labour left government with a two-week cancer guarantee and waiting times below 18 weeks across the country. This Government

reduced NHS spending from when they came to office in 2010 to 2019, when the covid pandemic hit, so that Britain went from being in line with the European average to being a backmarker once again. They presided over an NHS staffing crisis, failed to train enough doctors or nurses, and discouraged European nurses from helping out. This failure is on their watch—and I have not even got to the end of the first paragraph of the Gracious Speech. We have a Government who ask us to believe that they are the party to address the very problems they have caused. These are not issues that the Government inherited, but ones that through a decade of austerity, through their failure on Brexit and their prioritisation of culture wars ahead of the business of government, explicitly acknowledge the failure that 12 years of Tory rule has led to.

We should not be fooled into believing that this is a Government with a plan to address those failings. The Budget showed that a Government who have normalised food bank usage will not be a Government committed to helping people with the cost of living. It is remarkable. We heard the Prime Minister on his feet today claiming that we will see action on the cost of living in the coming days, only for Treasury sources to brief that the Chancellor of Exchequer knows nothing about that, and that there are no plans. This Government not only fail to take action on the cost of living, but they fail even to agree on a line about when they will take different steps.

The Government had a choice about how the global rise in energy prices could be tackled. They could have chosen to ask energy companies to share a little of their grotesque wealth, or they could have asked landlords and property billionaires to pay a little more. Instead, the Chancellor's eyes fell, as they always do, on the working poor, with the British Government uniquely

raising taxes for working people. This is a Government big on tactics but bereft of strategy. The Home Secretary wanders around looking for a culture war to join, while failing to address the issues that make our streets, and indeed our homes, less safe.

A Labour Queen's Speech would have contained measures genuinely to alleviate food and energy poverty, and support people with the cost of living crisis. We would have seen a commitment to an industrial strategy that targeted the greatest resources on those areas that need them most, and addressed the ways that things such as the apprenticeship levy are failing. A Labour Queen's Speech would have recognised that we cannot cure NHS waiting times unless we resource and value carers in our community, and that overseas workers help us to allow our elders to grow older in dignity. A Labour Queen's Speech would have tackled tax avoidance and non-dom status—as it turns out, that was the modus operandi of prominent members of the Cabinet and their families—and rooted out the scandalous wastage of public money that the Government routinely allow. It would also have prioritised repairing relations with our European counterparts so that Brexit can be a mutual success, rather than revisiting previous failures as it appears that, depressingly, the Government intend.

This is a Government exhausted of ideas and too mired in their own disgraces to address the problems of the nation, and it is well past time for them to be gone. They have now reached the stage where the Prime Minister is so weakened that he has to threaten his own party with an election if they do not offer him their support. Labour will be ready when that election comes, and that cannot come a moment too soon.

Ordered. That the debate be now adjourned.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

UK Diagnostics Industry and Covid-19 Recovery

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(David T. C. Davies.)

9.45 pm

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): I want to start by illustrating how important diagnostics and testing are, and nothing does that more clearly than the decision to discharge elderly people to care homes without testing. The Government's answer that asymptomatic transmission was not understood properly does not excuse the fact that fundamental and standard infection control measures were not in place.

The Prime Minister said earlier that he wanted to create "high-wage, high-skilled jobs" that will drive economic growth across the United Kingdom. I will measure that soundbite against the Government's performance and track record on the UK diagnostics sector. The domestic diagnostics sector should be at the vanguard of the world's intellectual development, but the evidence does not support the Prime Minister's claim that the Government support it. I will look at past performance in the early days of the pandemic and where we are presently as well as look to the future with the Government's strategic plan and the opportunities that it could miss, to our shared peril.

My interest in the area is underscored by an NHS career spanning a quarter of a century in which infection control and management was a staple part of my responsibility. I understand the important elements of genomic and epidemiological surveillance. I first raised that with the chief medical officer in July 2020 and repeatedly explored testing with the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) when he was Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, focusing in particular on his exaggerated claims that lateral flow device tests were 99% accurate. My concerns have always been sincere. I am bringing my genuine clinical concerns to the Government's attention yet again. This is not a political point, and I am not making a constitutional point, because many of the issues that I will talk about are as true north of the border as they are south of the border, and they are very serious.

There is an additional element to my interest in the case. My constituent Craig Inglis contacted me to express his concern about his investments in one of the diagnostics companies contracted by the Government to provide lateral flow devices, and he and many others watching the debate feel utterly betrayed by them because of events that I will set out in due course. The same is true of the diagnostics sector.

One insider told me:

"There is a lot of acrimony remaining, with many UK companies saying they would not respond to the UK Government if a similar crisis arose."

Now, I do not believe that they would not. I think that they would, but the good will and trust has been severely damaged, if not completely broken.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this issue forward. Does he not agree that the methods by which we were able to roll out the vaccine strategy, making use of public

facilities and spaces, is an indication of the capacity that already exists in the NHS? Does he not agree that the focus and time given to that successful roll-out must be used to assist the NHS to address the backlog and, even better, to address its efficient operation, which we believe, and I think the hon. Gentleman also believes, can happen?

Neale Hanvey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He makes some really important points. The first point I make—and I have previously paid tribute to the chair of the Vaccine Taskforce and continue to do so—is that there were excellent strategies for the control of infection in terms of barriers, mask wearing and the like. However, a fundamental part of infection control is that we cannot pick and choose the bits we do. We have to do them all. And that has been sorely lacking when it comes to testing. It has not been robust. It has been lacklustre to say the least and it has been oversold. The hon. Gentleman's point about the important role of diagnostics in moving the NHS forward and picking up the backlog is really important. I will touch on that very briefly at the end. This is such a huge subject that I struggle to get everything in, but the points he makes are really important.

In terms of where we started, Operation Moonshot was supposed to build domestic capacity, and there was, I think, genuine engagement with the industry. Certainly, from the conversations I had with industry and the UK Rapid Test Consortium, it was something they felt very keen to progress. However, it failed. I understand the challenge the Government faced and I understand the reasons why they went to the international market to secure lateral flow devices or any kind of tests. This is not about bad China or anything of that nature; fundamentally, it is about UK Government decision making and—I hate to say this, but it is true—profiteering in the sale of those devices.

The reliability and validity of the results of the lateral flow tests have been undermined by various different assertions. The Government's original assertion was that "lateral flow tests are accurate and reliable and have extremely low false positive rates"

and a specificity of at least 99.9%. However, leaked emails by the then Secretary of State's advisor Ben Dyson cast doubt on that, estimating that as few as 2% to 10% of positive results may be accurate in places with low covid rates. The Government's own evaluation, conducted by the University of Liverpool, found that lateral flow devices failed to detect two-fifths of positive PCR cases. They also missed a third of high viral load and highly infectious cases. Throughout that time, however, the Government were telling everyone that they were reliable, trustworthy tests that we could depend on. I recall one case where the daughter of a constituent had had multiple negative lateral flow tests and it was not until they insisted on getting a PCR test that they found out she was infected and that she had infected everyone around her. That was a mini-cluster that caused great concern.

Throughout this time, I worked with academics who have been absolutely fantastic. They wrote in the *British Medical Journal* and other respected journals, setting out those concerns. They are experts, but the Government at the time—I focus in particular on the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care—did not listen to those concerns and did not modify the message.

Lord Bethell said in his infamous tweet of 15 March 2021 that Omega Diagnostics and Mologic were in line for an order of 2 million lateral flow devices per week by the end of May, promising jobs and security. Those assertions did not come to fruition. Like several companies, Omega has suffered big losses and has had to make significant changes to its operations. It had to sell its Alloa site and is looking to divest its remaining infectious disease portfolio. As part of the rapid test consortium, the UK Government committed to supporting the manufacture of lateral flow devices and other diagnostic equipment.

On 11 February 2021, Omega announced that it had agreed a contract with the UK Government. Colin King, the then chief executive officer, said:

“We are delighted to formalise our relationship with the UK Government and to utilise our lateral flow test production capacity to support the COVID-19 mass testing programme being rolled out across this country...The new financial year will see this growth opportunity realised, and will also see the full impact of COVID-19 antigen testing, and so we are likely to deliver substantial revenue growth...These are very exciting times for the business and I am delighted that we can play a part in supporting the UK Government’s national effort to control the spread of the Coronavirus.”

The Herald newspaper in Scotland had the headline, “Jobs boost as Scots firm Omega scoops up to £375 million government contract to produce ‘instant’ Covid tests”, but none of it happened. Despite those promises, significant barriers were put in place and have continued to be erected to the domestic diagnostics sector. In the case of Omega, additional manufacturing capacity was created to meet the demands of the UK Government, but they failed to deliver on the contract and promises. Instead of substantial revenue growth, the shares in Omega Diagnostics lost more than a quarter of their value when the Government pulled the rug from underneath them.

Some investors have lost substantial sums of money on the back of the UK Government’s promises and announcements on Twitter by Lord Bethell. They feel utterly betrayed, and understandably so. We have a situation where the UK Government failed to meet a commitment made in full public view and are now seeking to recover the costs of the readiness preparation for that expansion from companies such as Omega, despite them doing everything that they were asked to by the Government. The UK Government distorted the market with those decisions, so will the Minister commit to reviewing the impact of them on investors and industry?

The other side of this issue is that the domestic diagnostics sector felt completely let down, but the Department of Health and Social Care found £3.7 billion to fast-track Innova-branded lateral flow devices with an eye-watering profit margin to middle men, taking a tiny UK firm run by a property agent and a shoe retailer from being £3,500 in debt to a £20 million profit in a year. That was all facilitated by an exceptional usage authorisation from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency—more on that in a moment.

In contrast, UK companies have had to navigate their way through and overcome additional regulatory hurdles. The situation is best summed up by the industry body, the Association of British HealthTech Industries, which called on the UK Health Security Agency “to remove the confusion and uncertainty surrounding the implementation of the Coronavirus Test Device Approvals process”.

The CTDA process is a hurdle that only domestic producers have to navigate. All the imported products that I have set out the problems and flaws with, from the

Government’s study, have a free pass. They are not subject to CTDA; only the domestic market has to deal with that challenge. Innova and Orient Gene tests are exempted from CTDA, putting the domestic diagnostics sector at a significant disadvantage. Private feedback from the industry is that the procurement process suffers from a lack of progress, transparency and poor communication. Will the Minister say why the UK Government are purposefully disadvantaging the domestic diagnostics sector? Surely there should be a level playing field.

In the last Session, I asked the Government a simple and straightforward written parliamentary question:

“what the (a) number and (b) proportion of (i) PPE, (ii) lateral flow tests, (iii) PCR tests and (iv) other covid-19 testing equipment are that have been manufactured by UK based companies.”

The response was absolutely staggering:

“We are unable to provide the information requested for lateral flow device and polymerase chain reaction tests and other COVID-19 testing equipment as this information is commercially sensitive.”

10 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

Neale Hanvey: How can such a basic statistic be commercially sensitive? No one is asking for information about the companies. I am certainly not asking for information about how contracts were awarded. I am merely asking for the number of Government-procured tests that were manufactured in the United Kingdom—not assembled, not put in boxes, but manufactured. It is a really important point.

Further back, on 8 April 2020, another tweet from Lord Bethell read:

“We’re backing a new business consortium, including @UniofOxford, to rapidly develop a home-grown, reliable antibody testing kit to determine whether people have developed immunity after overcoming the virus”.

Perhaps the Minister can tell me what the total amount of the Government’s investment has been in the domestic sector, and what has been the success to date. What volume of products has been made available by SureScreen to the NHS? When will the Government invest at the scale necessary to allow biomedical research to flourish and prosper, and successfully underpin effective partnerships among business, academia and the NHS?

Another important part of the issue is biomedical research. Before the 2020 autumn statement, there was a Westminster Hall debate about the Association of Medical Research Charities’ proposal for a life sciences partnership fund to help charitable research and sustain it through the pressures of the drop in covid funding. It would have been a drop in the ocean for the Government: £300 million was needed to sustain that research. There was cross-party support, and many of the medics on the Government Benches came and spoke passionately about the need to sustain the research portfolio, but the Government did not put in what was asked. There might have been £10 million in there—I could not say for sure—but that does not meet the needs of the research community.

The Academy of Medical Sciences has underlined the value of biomedical research and its importance to the economy and health of the population. Its campaign “What’s it worth?” has concluded:

“Every £1 invested in medical research delivers a return equivalent to around 25p every year, for ever”—

[Neale Hanvey]

so there is a 100% recovery from the investment within four short years, and we continue to accumulate value thereafter. The Academy of Medical Sciences is calling on the Government to invest 3% of GDP in research and development, setting 2.4% by 2027 as an intermediate goal. Will the Minister commit to seriously considering that request from this important and prestigious organisation?

One charity working in the research space, Action for ME, has said:

“Collaborating with the M.E. community could further support UK diagnostics research in their pursuit of tackling Long Covid”, because there are clinical similarities between long covid and ME, and there is a real opportunity for further research in both fields.

I want to talk about the future. The rest of the world is planning a 10-year strategy to deal with the novel virus covid and its further mutations. The US has effectively cornered the lateral flow device market from the east—a very clear explanation of the difficulty that we had in the winter in securing lateral flow devices and probably PCRs. But covid is not the only novel virus that we could have to deal with, particularly as a result of global warming. Novel viruses and variants of Ebola and dengue fever are possible, and it is therefore important for us to have testing and diagnostic equipment that is sensitive to all those different eventualities. What we cannot do is ignore surveillance, which must be robust and effective. Testing and surveillance are the answer when it comes to protecting the nation from further lockdowns.

I have spoken to two innovative companies. I will not go into detail about them, but one is in Scotland and the other in England. Their technology and expertise could be lost to the United States because the United Kingdom Government are dragging their heels over their support for the domestic diagnostics sector. AI tests are particularly sensitive, and can be tailored to all these novel viruses. Once a profile is available, it can be deployed very swiftly. A new variant can be put into the system, the sensitivity to it can be built up, and the tests can then be deployed. However, that intellectual property is now at risk of being taken out of the country because the United States is so interested in the technology. That illustrates how important it is to value the science community that has got us out of a very nasty scrape.

It is clear to the industry that the UK is not preparing for any future pandemic. I myself am not convinced that the Government have learned any lessons from the current pandemic, and I do not know how they would incorporate such lessons in their planning for future pandemics. I know that some surveillance is taking place at the border, but it is not clear to me or, I think, to any other Members what that actually looks like. Are the Government considering implementing civil contingency planning and attaching it to a ministerial portfolio with responsibility to report regularly to the House and to Select Committees? Are Ministers being provided with civil contingency training and the decisions they must take confidently during any future pandemic?

The industry is focusing on how to establish a playbook of recommendations in the case of a future pandemic, and the UK Government must pay attention to the

industry. It also hopes that the UK regulations for medical devices and diagnostics currently in development are flexible enough to cover emergency situations, so that we do not see a return to ad hoc regulations such as those on emergency use authorisation and coronavirus test device approvals, and to a distorted playing field. Mechanisms such as statutory instruments that put barriers in the way of the domestic diagnostics sector are damaging the sector and impeding its progress.

There is a need to find a way through these barriers, fostering new ways of working and ultimately finding solutions. That, surely, is what we all want to see. Realising the UK’s ambition to be a scientific superpower depends on valuing the scientific community. The future health of whole populations, both in the UK and abroad, relies on this investment. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) pointed out earlier, the domestic diagnostics sector is vital to tackling the NHS backlog, in relation to not just cancer but a range of other diseases. It is important for that capacity to be built up and ready to be deployed. The success of the UK diagnostics industry is critical to achieving all of this, and there is a huge potential for UK companies to break into international markets with novel approaches and new emerging technologies that will benefit patients at home and abroad, as well as exporting intellectual know-how.

There is no point in our crossing our fingers and hoping that covid has gone away. New variants are lurking in the background and they could strike at any time. We must have the diagnostic capacity to be able to switch on, almost immediately, both genomic and epidemiological surveillance.

10.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (George Freeman): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Neale Hanvey) on securing this important debate and thank him for putting on record some serious points, which I have listened to and will read with great interest. I also pay tribute to his own personal experience as a respected professional clinician in the fields of oncology and adolescent cancer in particular. His bringing this different expertise to the House is hugely valuable and I welcome his input. I am grateful for this opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government.

The points the hon. Gentleman has made are probably better answered by someone from the Department of Health and Social Care, and I will raise them with the Department, particularly his points on infection control in the new post-pandemic landscape and on the importance of learning the lessons from the pandemic procurement emergency and the lessons for a sustainable and vibrant diagnostics sector. I also note the concerns he raised on behalf of his constituent, Craig Inglis, about investments, and the issues around Omega, the reliability of the lateral flow tests and the new pathogens. The point made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) was also well made: Belfast University in Northern Ireland is a diagnostics powerhouse. I am very well sighted on that in the heart of our science superpower and innovation plans, and I am looking forward to revisiting Belfast to see that work.

In the three minutes that I have, I cannot deal with all the points that have been made, but I will pick up the specific questions that the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath has raised and write to him with an answer. It is worth saying that the covid pandemic was the most extraordinary unprecedented emergency that we faced, and the first pandemic that we faced as a generation—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): You have until half-past.

George Freeman: I have until half-past? I will not detain the House unnecessarily, but that means that I do not need to rush quite so much.

If we cast our minds back to January and February 2020, the truth is that we were confronting completely unprecedented national decisions and emergencies. There was no playbook for this. Sadly, I was unable to bring my expertise in this sector to the Government at the time because I was liberated from the burden of office on 13 February, in the Valentine's day reshuffle. In fact, my last Government role was to attend the first Cobra meeting on what was then called the virus emergency.

Neale Hanvey: I may be professionally slanted on this, but one observation I made was that we had lots of very "academic" academics involved in the decision making at Cobra. There are some extremely capable and experienced senior nurses and emergency clinicians who deal with major incidents day in and day out, and they are the ones who understand how to run an emergency and where the gaps might be. I have a bit of a professional hero in Louise Boden. She was chief nurse at University College London Hospital and she got us through the 7/7 bombs and the Admiral Duncan pub bomb. Unfortunately I was on duty for both of those incidents, which was not pleasant, but it was important to have someone of that capability there, and I would gently suggest that the Government have someone with that kind of major incident experience in the room when planning these things in future.

George Freeman: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Sadly, I was not a Minister at the time—I would love to have been—but I do not think it is a state secret to say that there were clearly mistakes made in that national emergency. That is why there is a proper and full inquiry. He has made some important points that need to be picked up, but I do not think he would expect me to give a running commentary here on the decisions that were taken. If we cast our minds back, there was a two or three-week period when we were worried that the lack of ventilators would be the great crisis. Innovative groups all around the country were stood up as part of the national challenge to try to design ventilators, with engineers working out how to do things. All that happened in very fast order, and all sorts of issues were raised and procurements flagged that we did not need in the end. I do not think anyone would say that it was a seamless process; it was a national emergency, and there were clearly many lessons to learn.

To deal with the hon. Gentleman's bigger points—I will perhaps pick up the specifics in detail in a written reply—as a former Life Sciences Minister, I observe

that the pandemic revealed that things that we had done seven or eight years earlier in the coalition Government had paid not just the four times return on investment that is traditional in this sector, but many times over that. The truth is that the reasons we were able to sequence the virus so fast were the launching of the genomics programme, which I was proud to have led back under the coalition, the accelerated access review we put in place, the parallel approvals process with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, the early access to medicines scheme, and the setting up of Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre. John Bell and I suggested in 2016 that it would be a sensible piece of foresight to invest in vaccine manufacturing, which was clearly going to change. Of course, we had no idea that a pandemic would mean that that facility would suddenly become incredibly important.

Also important was the establishment of NHS Digital. One of the lessons of the pandemic is the importance of really good data and of both national and local data sets. As a Norfolk MP, I remember being frustrated that we did not have the granularity of data or the ability to do public health by cities or districts; it was instead by big, clumsy Government regions. There are all sorts of lessons there about how an emergency requires not only national implementation and measures but the subtlety of local control, empowering local experts on the ground who are best equipped to work out how to contain and control.

I want to focus on where I can add perhaps most value in this debate and on the hon. Gentleman's points about the importance of the diagnostics industry. One of the great lessons of the pandemic, which has absolutely been taken to the heart of Government, is that we must recognise that globalisation will drive more and more infectious disease challenges. God forbid we have another pandemic of this type, but over the past 10 or 15 years we have had zika, Ebola and covid. It is likely that we will see more such things. Hopefully they will be local or regional, but if we are not ready to contain them, we could see outbreaks of disease.

Globalisation will drive the release of new pathogens, which is why pathogen detection is one of the technologies that I am putting at the heart of our three-year plan going forward. Indeed, I am working with the chief scientific adviser Sir Patrick Vallance on how we can ensure that we harness our leadership in genomics for broader pathogen detection across animal, plant and human health and make sure that we build that network off the back of the pandemic.

The hon. Gentleman made a more specific point that in the NHS, the care system and the life sciences industry—I say this as someone who spent 15 years in the sector before coming to Parliament—diagnostics was for years the slightly poor relation. Drug discovery and the pharmaceutical sector tended to raise the big money and have the higher profile, but the pandemic revealed that diagnostics is absolutely key to getting on top of the disease. The life sciences industry is moving to recognise that if we want to deliver real value and reduce the cost of disease, which is the real key to the economy and the health system, we need to build in diagnosis much earlier. That means both the easy diagnosis—if I may call it that—of easily detectable and treatable diseases and the deeper science of longer-term diagnosis of tomorrow's conditions.

[George Freeman]

That is why, in the update to our life sciences industrial strategy that we set out last year, we have insisted on closing the gap over the next 10 years between the traditional dichotomy in Government—the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy sponsors the research and the Department of Health and Social Care does the procurement, licensing and approvals—to try to build a much more integrated model through which we focus on diseases in places and the patient pathway and bring diagnosis, treatment and prevention together around the eight disease missions. One thing I hope and intend that that will do is put the diagnostics industry at the heart of those missions; traditionally, it has been an industry that has tended to be about the black box that sits on the hospital ward, but these days it is becoming integral to the life sciences industry and to working out how to treat, understand and detect disease. Those missions are completely key.

Let me reassure the hon. Gentleman and other colleagues here this evening by saying that we are also investing heavily, in this next phase, in the mRNA technologies that are key to the next phase of detection and diagnosis, and in new treatments. VMIC, which we set up as an academic unit to work on future vaccine manufacturing technologies, suddenly became an urgent facility for onshoring during the pandemic. I am pleased that we have transferred VMIC into the hands of Catalent, a world leader in mRNA diagnostics, therapeutics and treatments. So we have established a much more robust national supply chain in dealing with both flu and other respiratory diseases, and other pathogens. Many of the lessons have been learned, but obviously there is more to do.

We have set out in our latest life sciences vision an £8 billion commitment to research, including work with the Medical Research Council, deep research on my side of the portfolio at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and putting some £4.5 billion into the Department of Health and Social Care and the National Institute for Health and Care Research. The NIHR, where we are talking about £1 billion a year, is the sort of engine of research under the NHS. Crucially, we have said that, at its heart, diagnostics has to be central to that landscape. I refer not only to the detection of influenza and other respiratory pathogens, but to molecular diagnostics, biomarkers and genomic insights into disease. That is because the NHS is a huge procurer daily of blood tests for individual conditions, as the hon. Gentleman knows well. If we properly integrate that, we will be building up a database of deep expertise in biomarkers and understanding the early signals of disease, and we can harness that to make the NHS much more of a diagnostics research engine.

The dream and aim in respect of those eight disease missions is that we will be able to mobilise patients much more quickly, through digital technologies, into trials. Patients, through charities, will be able to enrol in clinical research. Using that spine of the biobank and molecular diagnostics, we can start to give industry much quicker access to the patients who are on the frontline of the conditions we need to treat.

That should drive a virtuous circle, in which we detect earlier, treat earlier and attract investment, and ultimately, as the hon. Gentleman says, we move from a paradigm

where the NHS, under cost pressures, is a low-price and often late procurer to a scenario in which it does not have to be a high-price payer because it is giving industry an even more valuable thing: access to patients, charities and disease and patient consent for research. The NHS's role in this sector is, thus, as a research engine. I have made it clear to industry that we will never, in a publicly funded healthcare system, be the highest-price payer—it would not expect us to be—but that the promise I can make it is that we will move heaven and earth to be an earlier adopter, an earlier tester and the best place in the world for it to come to test and diagnose its new treatments, and get the data on which patients they work in. Industry will then be able to use that to go around the world and sell to other countries. That is the vision of the NHS as a 21st-century research engine.

Jim Shannon: The Minister referred to Queen's University Belfast, and I know he has a particular interest in being there and being involved with it. Will he indicate whether Queen's University Belfast, or any other university in Northern Ireland, has been involved in this type of research and partnership? It is so important to take advantage of the massive amount of knowledge in the sector.

George Freeman: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point and invites me to signal again my support for what is going on in Northern Ireland. If we look at the cancer outcomes in Northern Ireland, the Queen's University team that has been working on biomarkers and earlier detection has ended up driving not just investment, but much quicker and better outcomes for the people of Northern Ireland. The real power of the sector is that it delivers better healthcare for everybody within the values of the NHS, but also attracts investment and drives industry. I would go so far as to say that in the new landscape, companies such as Randox will develop affordable consumer diagnostic kits that can help drive earlier detection, building on to a digital interface. We can then support patients to get into trials earlier and drive research medicine. Belfast is on the frontline of that.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This evening's debate has been excellent. In York, we had a company that was developing aptamers to be used in the diagnostic process. The Government did not have a grip on the governance or an understanding of what could be produced and the quality that that would bring. How is that mapping being done to ensure that every part of the manufacturing process is brought together?

George Freeman: The hon. Lady, not for the first time, makes an important point. As I am not a Minister in the Department of Health and Social Care, I had better defer to them on where they are on that specific mapping point. In terms of my responsibility at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, we are looking to grow the innovation economy by mapping the clusters of expertise around the country, including BioYorkshire, which I visited recently, and to ensure that we are aware of and supporting those clusters of research. Given that I have been invited to comment on other geographies, I will highlight how proud I am that the Norwich research park was the first place in the country to establish a local testing facility and local testing infrastructure to support it.

One thing the pandemic revealed was that, whether it is test and trace, data or epidemiological control, the best people to get on top of it are those on the ground locally. One of the lessons of the pandemic is that, yes, we need strong national leadership, but we also need to free up and trust the clinical and professional judgment on the ground.

For the record, it is important to speak about the scale of the diagnostics challenge in the pandemic. At peak, more than 700,000 PCR tests and 74,000 genomic sequences were done daily. It has been the most extraordinary turbocharging of our diagnostics infrastructure. I think everyone is aware of what we owe the diagnostics industry—that needs to be put on the record—but also that the infrastructure must be maintained for future events.

Genomic sequencing technology has been fundamental. The groundbreaking analyses of the combined SARS-CoV-2 genomic sequences and epidemiological data have supported the uploading of 2.7 million of 10.7 million genomes in GISAID—the global initiative on sharing

avian influenza data. We are leaders in the global networks for genomic sequencing because of that genomics investment. More than 2 billion lateral flow tests have been provided across the UK.

I am conscious of the time. With permission, I will deal with the detailed questions that the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath has raised in writing. I hope that I have reassured colleagues that we have absolutely learned the lesson that the diagnostics industry will never again be the poor relation. Emergencies require us to learn the lessons—we will not have got everything right, and the official inquiry is important. I would like to take the politics out of it and ensure that the clinical lessons are learned. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are determined to ensure that the industry is put at the heart of our life sciences vision.

Question put and agreed to.

10.28 pm

House adjourned.

Petitions

Tuesday 10 May 2022

OBSERVATIONS

TRANSPORT

Derwent Walk

The petition of residents of the constituency of Blaydon.

Declares that the Derwent Walk is under significant threat of destruction or irrevocable change through the proposal of a permanent transport route linking Consett and Gateshead and/or Newcastle; notes that the walk lies on the former track bed of the Derwent Valley Railway, opening in 1867 and closed in 1962 under Beeching proposals, due to underuse; notes that the walk has since developed, enveloping C2C cycle routes, the National Cycle Network (No 14) and a country park, and is also the site of a Scheduled Monument, with a vast area covered by the protected status; and further that the proposal of a permanent transport route does not properly account for access for the disabled or the importance of walking and cycling routes.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to accept the concerns of residents, to commit to maintain the integrity of the Derwent Walk, and reject the feasibility study for the above reasons. And furthermore, to discuss the current proposal with members of the ‘Save Our Derwent Walk’ group.

And the petitioners remain, etc. —[Presented by Liz Twist, *Official Report*, 27 April 2022; Vol. 712, c. 844.]

[P002729]

Observations from The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Wendy Morton):

I thank the residents of Blaydon for expressing their concerns about the proposal to improve connections between Consett and Newcastle. The scheme is promoted by Durham Council and Gateshead Council, and sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden).

Durham County Council received up to £50,000 early development funding from the second round of the Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund, which provides early development funding to reopen rail lines and stations to reconnect communities.

Using this £50,000 funding—and £18,000 of their own money—the county council developed a strategic outline business case (SOBC), which examines a number of ways to enhance connections between Consett and Newcastle, including bus, cycle and light/heavy rail options, with new track to be built for the rail options; with the aim of enabling local residents to sustainably access a greater number of services and opportunities and to help to stimulate inward investment.

The council’s final SOBC was submitted in November 2021, and is currently being reviewed by the Department. The Secretary of State for Transport and the Rail Minister are considering next steps for schemes, including Consett and Newcastle, with a decision on the next tranche to progress anticipated later this year.

The Historical Railways Estate (HRE), currently managed by National Highways (NH) on behalf of the Transport Secretary, has regular discussions with the devolved administrations, local authorities and other stakeholders including the National Trust on the possible re-use of parts of the estate to support walking and cycling wherever possible.

We expect restoring your railway proposals to evidence local views in their business cases and, if taken forward, consult with local stakeholders and fully consider environmental impacts.

We also expect the industry to meet current accessibility requirements at new and existing stations whenever it installs, renews or replaces station infrastructure as mandated in the ‘Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations: A Code of Practice’. Failure to comply with the code could be a breach of their license to operate and leave train operating companies open to enforcement action by the Office of Rail and Road.

Road safety

The petition of residents of the constituency of Batley and Spen,

Declares that the issue of road safety within the constituency must be urgently addressed; notes that there has been a significant rise in the number of speeding offences, incidents of reckless driving throughout and inconsiderate parking in the constituency; declares that sympathy should be extended to the victims of road incidents and their families; declares that this issue has had an enormous impact in our community and demands urgent action be taken at a National, Regional and Local level to improve the safety of our local roads.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to provide dedicated resource to Kirklees Council and West Yorkshire Police to clamp down on dangerous driving and consider a review into the impact of high-performance cars rented and driven recklessly. The House of Commons should also urge the Government to explore what legislative measures should be taken to improve the safety of roads in Batley and Spen.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Kim Leadbeater, *Official Report*, 26 April 2022; Vol. 712, c. 733.]

[P002727]

Observations from Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton):

The Government believe that any form of dangerous or inconsiderate driving behaviour is a serious road safety issue. All available research shows a link between excessive speed and the risk of collisions.

We expect all drivers to observe the speed limit and follow The Highway Code. Generally, it is for the police to enforce road traffic legislation and investigate road traffic incidents using their professional judgement. Chief officers will consider the role that roads policing and motoring law enforcement has to play in improving driving standards, promoting road safety, deterring careless and dangerous driving and reducing deaths and injuries on the road. It is important that at all times the chief officer, the constables, and staff remain operationally independent.

It is also the function of elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to make forces truly accountable to their communities by representing all those who live and work in their area. It is for PCCs to identify local needs and, in consultation with the chief constable, draw up a five-year Police and Crime Plan which sets out the local policing priorities. The chief constable, retaining operational independence, will then deploy resources according to the priorities agreed in the policing plan. Local residents, their elected representatives and the police can discuss these matters together.

The majority of central Government funding for local government is not ring-fenced. This is so that local authorities can make the best decisions relating to local priorities, which could include spending decisions on speed cameras.

Local authorities with civil parking enforcement powers (CPE) are responsible for parking enforcement on the roads under their care. Over 98% of local authorities in England, including Kirklees Metropolitan Council of which Batley and Spenningsdale is part of, have CPE powers and can issue Penalty Charge Notices to vehicles that are in contravention of parking restrictions. Councils with CPE powers can enforce against contraventions listed in Schedule 7 of the Traffic Management Act 2004.

Many reputable firms which rent out high performance vehicles adhere to the codes of practice set out by the British Vehicle Rental & Leasing Association vehicles and already place restrictions upon drivers. These can include a minimum driver age limit of 25 or 30 to be able to rent, or a requirement to have had a driving licence for at least three years.

Many high-performance vehicles are fitted with telematics devices, such as black boxes. It may be possible to use data from the telematics device if the vehicle is involved in a collision.

The Road Traffic Act 1988 provides for various offences of dangerous and careless driving, and the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988 specifies the penalties for such offences. Also, under the Police Reform Act 2002, officers can seize vehicles being driven carelessly or inconsiderately, or off the road, and in a manner causing, or being likely to cause alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public. Under the Sentencing Act 2020, the police can ask for a Criminal Behaviour Order to be imposed in addition to a sentence other than an absolute discharge.

Step-free access for Chinley Station

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the lack of step-free access at Chinley Station denies access to public transport for many local residents with disabilities.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to note the need for step-free access at Chinley Station and reallocate funding to complete this project following Network Rail's completion of a viability survey of the station.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Robert Langan, Official Report, 27 April 2022; Vol. 712, c. 844.]

[P002730]

Observations from the Minister of State, Department for Transport (Wendy Morton):

The Department for Transport is committed to improving accessibility at railway stations. However, many stations, including Chinley, date from a time when the needs of disabled customers were simply not considered. Since 2006, the Access for All programme has installed accessible, step-free routes at over 200 stations. Around another 1,500 stations have also benefited from smaller scale access improvements, including at nearby Hadfield station.

The Department is currently in the process of setting the funding envelopes for the next control period 2024-2029. We therefore hope to be able to seek industry nominations for the next tranche of stations shortly.

If funding for the 2024-2029 period does become available, any station, including Chinley, without an accessible route into the station and to all platforms will be a potential candidate. I would therefore recommend that the petitioners engage with the train operating company, Northern, with a view to them submitting a nomination once the nomination period begins.

As in previous tranches, the criteria used to select stations is likely to include: annual footfall, weighted by the incidence of disability in the area, the availability of third party funding for the project, and the priorities of the rail industry itself. We also take into account local factors such as proximity to a hospital. Stations will also be selected ensure a fair geographical spread of projects across the country.

The Government are committed to improving access at all stations and will continue to seek further opportunities and funding, to provide more improvements. The Department for Transport is making strides to ensure a safer network for disabled passengers and improving accessible rail journeys for all passengers.

Ministerial Corrections

Tuesday 10 May 2022

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

River Wear: Pollution

The following is an extract from Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions on 28 April 2022.

Mary Kelly Foy: Following their field trip to the River Wear last month, year 5 and 6 pupils at St Thomas More School in Belmont were saddened by the levels of pollution in the river, especially the amount of plastic, so they have asked me to come here today to keep everyone on the right track. Can the Minister tell the pupils of St Thomas More School what the Government plan to do to help clean up the River Wear to protect local wildlife and preserve the beauty of the riverside?

Rebecca Pow: I commend the St Thomas More primary school pupils for going out, and it is wonderful to get our children out in the environment. It is interesting and perhaps disappointing that they found pollution, but the message to them is that this Government are absolutely on water and river pollution. Indeed, our new proposed target to reduce the amount of pollution in rivers such as the Wear in old abandoned mining areas by 50% by 2030 will make a genuine difference, as will our raft of other measures to tackle storm sewage overflows.

[Official Report, 28 April 2022, Vol. 712, c. 851.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow).

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy).

The correct response should have been:

Rebecca Pow: I commend the St Thomas More primary school pupils for going out, and it is wonderful to get our children out in the environment. It is interesting and perhaps disappointing that they found pollution, but the message to them is that this Government are absolutely on water and river pollution. Indeed, our new proposed target to reduce the amount of pollution in rivers such as the Wear in old abandoned mining areas by 50% by 2037 will make a genuine difference, as will our raft of other measures to tackle storm sewage overflows.

TRANSPORT

Vehicle Tampering Offences

The following is an extract from the debate in Westminster Hall on 25 April 2022.

Trudy Harrison: I will write to my hon. Friend with more specific details of the timeframe. I can certainly say that we will publish our response to the consultation this summer—it will be a matter of a few months, rather than having to wait any longer. In answer to another of his questions, the changes will not be retrospectively applied.

[Official Report, 25 April 2022, Vol. 712, c. 186WH.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison).

An error has been identified in my response.

The correction information should have been:

Trudy Harrison: I will write to my hon. Friend with more specific details of the timeframe. I can certainly say that we will publish our response to the consultation this summer—it will be a matter of a few months, rather than having to wait any longer. In answer to **a question from the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), the proposals would not change the requirements that an existing vehicle would have been designed to meet.**

PETITIONS

Tuesday 10 May 2022

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
TRANSPORT	1P	TRANSPORT — <i>continued</i>	
Derwent Walk	1P	Step-free access for Chinley Station	4P
Road safety	2P		

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Tuesday 10 May 2022

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL		TRANSPORT	2MC
AFFAIRS	1MC	Vehicle Tampering Offences.....	2MC
River Wear: Pollution	1MC		

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**not later than
Tuesday 17 May 2022**

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