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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 21 July 2022

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

QUEEN'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

The Vice-Chamberlain of the Household reported to the House, That Her Majesty, having been attended with its Address of 10th May, was pleased to receive the same very graciously and give the following Answer:

I have received with great satisfaction the dutiful and loyal expression of your thanks for the speech with which His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales opened the present Session of Parliament on my behalf.

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we come to today's business, I want to mark the departure of two senior members of the House Service. Penny Young, Librarian and Managing Director of the Research and Information Team, is retiring at the end of the month. Isabel Coman, Managing Director of the Strategic Estates Team, is leaving the House Service in September.

Penny came to the House of Commons in 2015 following a distinguished career in the BBC, and latterly as chief executive of the research organisation NatCen. In her time here, she has consistently championed the provision of high-quality information and research for Members and the public. She has been valued by her team for her supportive and calm direction, and her ability to get to the heart of any issue.

Isabel joined Parliament in March 2020 and has had a huge job, leading not only on major construction projects, but the Maintenance, Customer and Catering and Heritage Collections teams. She has overseen the completion of a number of major estates projects and has set us on a journey to improve the way we approach major works in Parliament. The insight and experience Isabel has brought to her role since joining has been greatly valued, and I am sure will stand her in good stead in her next role at Transport for London.

I am sure the House will join me in thanking Penny and Isabel for their contribution and wishing them well in the future.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Free Trade Agreement: India

1. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What progress her Department has made on securing a free trade agreement with India. [901216]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): India is a dynamic, fast-growing trade partner, and a free trade agreement offers the opportunity to deepen our already strong relationship, which was worth £24.3 billion in 2021. Round 5 of trade agreement negotiations began on Monday 18 July and will continue until the end of next week. We have already closed 12 chapters and continue to work hard to reach a balanced and comprehensive agreement. We are in detailed negotiations and discussions on texts now and are confident in our progress with India, as we work towards a comprehensive FTA.

Bob Blackman: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Clearly, doing a trade deal with India is complex and difficult. The European Union, for example, has been trying to do one for 25 years without success, so I wish her and her team well on negotiations. Clearly, it will be challenging to achieve it by Diwali, but I know that she is committed to doing so. Will she set out, for the benefit of the House, the benefits to the UK and to India of the free trade deal she is undertaking?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Our priority in talks has always been to address the significant barriers that businesses face in exporting to India. In the past decade, UK services exports to India have increased by 60% in current prices, totalling £3.6 billion in 2021. However, the reality is that India's barriers to services trade are still relatively high compared with those of other trading partners, so this FTA will provide a great opportunity to address those barriers and support the UK's service sector, in particular, to do business in India's growing markets.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State must know that Huddersfield and West Yorkshire are the beating heart of the manufacturing sector; so many firms are good at exporting, and have expertise and a history of trade with India, but they are still finding huge barriers to any exporting effort they make. Can her Department not really step up the action to help, especially for the small and medium-sized enterprises?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As always, the hon. Member is a champion of businesses in his constituency. He is exactly right: those barriers to trade are still difficult, and the free trade agreement brings us the opportunity to work with India to strip away those market access barriers. We are listening, obviously, through the consultation process. On the FTA process, at the beginning of the year we asked businesses to talk to us and share their own experiences and the particular areas where they wanted us to negotiate reductions in barriers. I hope that we are doing that. I would be very happy to hear directly from the hon. Member's businesses whether they have particular areas in mind. We are looking to reach a broad and comprehensive agreement that will strip away many of those market access barriers, be they tariff areas around goods or, indeed, those very many areas of service sector activity, which will benefit both sides. We have some highly mutually compatible business opportunities to work on together.

Trade with the EU

2. **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to help increase trade with the EU. [901218]

8. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to help increase trade with the EU. [901228]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Andrew Griffith): This Government continue to seek an excellent trading relationship with our former EU partners, just as we do with other international markets. Hon. Members will be pleased to note that goods exported to the EU for May 2022 were over 17% higher than the 2018 monthly average, so trade here is already increasing. To increase exports, we need to get more British businesses exporting, and to do that the Department has initiatives such as the Export Academy and the export champions scheme that help to give them the knowledge and practical help that they need.

Mr Speaker: I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box.

Helen Hayes: Research by the London School of Economics has found a huge drop in the number of trade relationships between UK businesses and the EU, with a 30% decrease in the variety of goods sold. That is a clear indication of the damage that the Government's Brexit deal is doing to smaller businesses, which cannot afford the increased costs of administration. Will the Minister detail how many small and medium-sized enterprises applied to the Brexit support fund and how many were successful? May I also ask the Minister, on behalf of the small and medium-sized businesses in my constituency, where is the urgency to find solutions to enable SMEs to trade with our EU neighbours once again?

Andrew Griffith: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your welcome. I also thank the hon. Member for her question. Of course, she did not support the EU trade agreement that this Government put in place, so it is quite rich for her now to turn around and say that we are not increasing exports. In my previous answer, I talked about the many interventions that this Government are making, including internationalisation and the Brexit support fund of £38 million that is going to small and medium-sized enterprises to help them overcome the barriers that the protectionist EU puts in place.

Dr Huq: I, too, welcome the Minister to what I hope is a long and fruitful career. My question is about services, not goods. Our biggest export is the English language—it is the lingua franca of the world, isn't it?—but the language schools that teach teenagers over the summer months are collapsing at quite a scary rate. Only seven out of 20 remain in Hastings, and there are three in Ealing, but before 2019 there were five. Will the Minister—whoever it is at any particular time—and their officials sit down with me and the trade bodies? They say that there has been an 80% drop in business, which is now going to Malta and Ireland. We can do better than this in global Britain. Can we sit down to talk about removing those things for this once lucrative—

Mr Speaker: Order. Come on—you have to get to the question eventually.

Andrew Griffith: Education is indeed one of the great opportunities, and the lingua franca of English is one of the benefits as we seek to do trade deals not just with

our friends in Europe but across the whole world. I am very happy to talk to my colleagues in the Department for Education and between us respond to the hon. Lady.

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): As we look to the future, does my hon. Friend agree that it goes beyond the EU, as do the opportunities for trade around the world? From my constituency of Watford to the rest of the world, we have the opportunity to build industry and opportunity for everyone.

Andrew Griffith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He is a champion of small business in his constituency. That is why it is so important that, as we seek to do trade deals such as the comprehensive and progressive trans-Pacific partnership and those with the Gulf, India, Canada and many more, we have SME chapters and SME preference within them.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State, Nick Thomas-Symonds.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I join you in wishing Penny and Isabel well for the future. I also welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box.

I ask this question in place of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas), who has covid. I am sure that the whole House will wish him a swift recovery. The tonnage of UK trade in food, feed and drink with both the EU and non-EU countries has fallen and has been steadily falling since 2019. Looking back at the record of this Government over the past three years, does the Minister accept that they have failed to make Brexit work?

Andrew Griffith: I am sure Government Members wish the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) a speedy recovery as well.

Tonnage is, of course, only one measure. I note that, for the year to March, the value of British exports actually increased. [*Interruption.*] It will be a combination of growing markets, a growing number of exporters and a greater ability of exporters to obtain the price for their exports. That is what we on the Conservative Benches are focused on.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I, too, welcome the Minister to his place.

Thanks to Westminster's disastrous hostile post-Brexit immigration policy, our lack of workers means that Scottish exports of fruit and vegetables to the European Union are down by 53% and of dairy and eggs by 33%. Given that both candidates for Prime Minister as well as, indeed, the Labour Leader have stated that they will not do anything about that, is it not time that the UK Government stood aside and gave the powers over immigration to the Scottish Government so that we can protect these businesses and their Scottish trade?

Andrew Griffith: I am very happy to talk to my colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions about the access to skilled workers, but I hope the hon. Gentleman will join me in thanking the Department's Edinburgh-based team for its dedication to promoting the work of exporters from Scotland.

Drew Hendry: That answer will not give any comfort to those growers who are struggling at the moment. Of course, trade goes both ways, and our importing businesses are being hammered by long delays and increased costs. A single invoice shared with me by a small importer in Inverness, Oil and Vinegar, showed many new charges from the UK Government, running to many hundreds of pounds of additional costs. It contained separate lines for duty, admin fees and import custom fees, and the largest of all the costs was a curiously titled “Customs Add”. Does the Minister know how much the Treasury is raking in from these schemes? It must be vast sums. Will it call for any of it to be returned to those struggling businesses?

Andrew Griffith: I share the hon. Gentleman’s pain in hearing of the friction presented to British firms in seeking to do trade internationally. That is why Scotland remaining in this great Union is a great advantage to British businesses that want a single one-stop shop. If he has not already availed himself of the Export Support Service’s helpline, I would be very happy to connect his businesses to that.

Free Trade Agreements: Workers Rights

3. **Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What steps she is taking to ensure that workers’ rights are maintained in all UK free trade agreements. [901222]

9. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What steps she is taking to ensure that workers’ rights are maintained in all UK free trade agreements. [901230]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena): Her Majesty’s Government have been clear that there will be no reduction in British labour protections in signing up to new free trade deals. Our new agreements with Australia and New Zealand demonstrate that. We engage extensively with trade unions to make sure that the interests of workers are fully considered in our policy. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has hosted trade unions, including the TUC, at the recent UK-US trade dialogues.

Dame Diana Johnson: With the greatest of respect to the Minister, given the contrasts and contradictions in the Government’s approach around things such as the P&O ferry scandal and the recent events with the rail industry, can he tell us what guarantee he can provide to the House that the Government will not sail down the river the rights of working people in this country?

Mr Jayawardena: I would point to precedent. The United Kingdom has ratified all eight of the fundamental International Labour Organisation conventions. We continue to encourage our partners to do the same around the world. The agreements with Australia and New Zealand, as I said earlier, reaffirm our commitment to comply with the core international labour obligations that we are party to.

Chi Onwurah: When I visited Washington DC with the British-American Parliamentary Group, I was told in no uncertain terms—I know that the Secretary of State had the same message at the Baltimore talks—that

there could be no trade agreement with the United States that did not, first, protect workers’ rights and also reflect the workers’ voice. Will the Minister set out the detailed process by which he will ensure that British workers’ voices will shape the prospective deal with the United States and how those voices will be reflected throughout international discussions? I know that the Secretary of State’s predecessor met the American trade union movement. I think it is really important that British workers’ voices are reflected consistently in deals as well.

Mr Jayawardena: I thank the hon. Lady for the question and I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met the same bodies. We engage extensively with trade unions to make sure that the interests of workers are fully consulted in our trade policy. We have a trade union advisory group, the TUC is a part of our strategic trade advisory group and, of course, this Conservative side of the House represents the views of hard-working people across the country.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): The Government are currently negotiating a free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council. The majority of the Gulf countries do not meet basic international standards for workers’ rights, such as the right to unionise. Why on earth, therefore, did the Government drop human rights and the rule of law from their stated negotiation objectives?

Mr Jayawardena: We decide on future deals based on the potential benefit to our economy, economic trends and whether we can negotiate a quality agreement supporting the British people and the British national interest. Closer engagement is how we increase our influence around the world and support higher standards, including with countries that might have rights that differ from ours. The United Kingdom will not compromise on our high labour standards, and we will continue to work hard to maintain those standards through our free trade agreement programme.

UK Arms Exports: Transparency

4. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the adequacy of the transparency requirements for UK arms exports. [901223]

16. **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the adequacy of the transparency requirements for UK arms exports. [901238]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena): We publish more licensing data than any other country. Yesterday, we published our annual report covering 2021. The data reveal that of 4,234 licensing decisions on standard individual export licences, 96.1% were issued, 1.5% were refused and, because of our sanctions on Russia and Belarus, 2.4% were revoked. The Government remain committed to openness on strategic export licensing to provide Parliament with the means to hold us to account.

Jeff Smith: In February, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs issued its biggest ever fine of £2.7 million for breach of the arms exports controls. HMRC has refused to publish any details so we do not know who was fined, the name of the company, the military goods exported or where they ended up. How does the Minister expect us to have any faith or confidence in our arms export controls when they are so shrouded in secrecy?

Mr Jayawardena: The hon. Gentleman refers to HMRC which does not fall under my Department, but I will ensure that the relevant Minister provides him with an answer.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I heard the Minister's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), but the reality is that the changes to licensing criteria have reduced transparency and accountability. Can the Minister explain the rationale for changing Government guidance on granting licences from refusing a licence if there is a clear risk that items may be used in violation of international humanitarian law to if the Government determine there is a clear risk?

Mr Jayawardena: As we have left the European Union, we have decided that it is right to review many aspects of our system. This is one part, and we have made the wording of the criteria clearer than before to provide certainty to exporters and others.

Export of UK Services

5. **Steven Bonnar** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): What recent assessment her Department has made of trends in the level of exports of UK services. [901225]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Andrew Griffith): The Government are committed to promoting the UK's world leading strengths in services. Latest figures published by the Office for National Statistics show that service exports were £316 billion in the 12 months to the end of May, an increase of 7% on the previous 12 months. The Government's export strategy, published in November 2021 by the Secretary of State, recognises the importance of services and commits the Government to working with the sector in its implementation. That includes working with the CBI-led Trade in Services Council to understand and promote trade in services.

Steven Bonnar: The Centre for Economic Policy Research has calculated that since Brexit there has been a 6% drop in service exports to the EU. Services are Scotland's biggest export, so what, if anything, is the Department doing to stabilise service exports, never mind grow them? There is a real fear that the Government have no real plan for progress or change.

Andrew Griffith: As we recover, we expect to see a continued increase in services exports. The hon. Member is right that Scotland is a significant exporter of services—worth more than £21 billion in 2020-21—making it the third largest exporting region in the UK. I wish all of our Scottish service exporters well, and it is the work of this Department to try to continue to grow that.

Barriers to Global Trade

6. **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): What steps her Department has taken to help reduce barriers to global trade for British businesses. [901226]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena): Removing trade barriers boosts our exports to new and familiar markets around the world. We have resolved 396 barriers around the world in the past two years, and just 45 of the 192 barriers we resolved in the last financial year could be worth around £5 billion to businesses across our country. If we can remove the next 100 trade barriers on our most wanted list, it has the potential to deliver export opportunities for British businesses worth around £20 billion. As one example, last month we removed barriers in Mongolia that prevented the export of British poultry and fish, opening up a market worth £10 million.

Selaine Saxby: Many of my North Devon farmers and the National Farmers Union are concerned about food imports, but given the quality of our British food and drink, and the vast global market for our superior produce, what support has my hon. Friend's Department put in place to promote and help farmers export around the world?

Mr Jayawardena: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We see real potential for British food and drink exports to grow, particularly in high-growth markets where the middle classes are expanding—notably the Asia-Pacific region. We work closely with farming and food organisations, such as the NFU, to deliver a practical range of export support for farmers and food businesses. We are removing trade barriers globally, as I have referenced, including the ban on British beef in the Philippines, opening up a market worth £375 million a year to British farmers. We are expanding our overseas network of more than 100 agriculture, food and drink trade advisers to include eight new dedicated attachés, who will focus on unlocking trade barriers for our great British farmers.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): What a load of bollards the Government are putting in the way of British trade with other parts of the world, and in particular with the European Union. Historically, loads of British orchestras, theatre groups, ballet groups and bands have toured easily across the whole of the European Union, and endless Committees have been told by Ministers that it is all being sorted out. The truth is that they are now prevented from taking that British export across the European Union. When is any one of these Ministers actually going to do something and get it sorted?

Mr Jayawardena: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, which he puts in his usual way. The truth is that we continue to bang the drum for British exports of all kinds around the world, and we will continue to do that with the EU and beyond.

Exports to the EU: Devolved Nations

7. **Dave Doogan** (Angus) (SNP): What steps she is taking to help increase exports from the devolved nations to the EU. [901227]

13. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What steps she is taking to help increase exports from the devolved nations to the EU. [901235]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Andrew Griffith): The Department is delivering prosperity through trade and investment to all parts of the United Kingdom. In addition to UK-wide initiatives such as the UK Export Academy for smaller enterprises, we have established teams in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, and I hope in my role to be visiting them over the coming months. Those teams will bring business support closer to businesses in the nations and work in partnership with devolved Administrations.

Dave Doogan: I thank the Minister for his answer, but it is clear to farmers across Scotland, nowhere more so than in Angus, that Brexit has made a great many things harder and more expensive, made nothing any easier and created no more opportunity whatever. *[Interruption.]* That will be the same in Banff and Buchan, by the way. With regard to Australia, and without reference to whisky or salmon, what dedicated analysis has his Department undertaken that evidences net increases for Scotch beef and lamb exports to Australia in quantitative, not rhetorical terms? If he cannot say, will he write to me with that data, please?

Andrew Griffith: I note that Invest in Angus, based in the hon. Member's constituency, estimates that food and drink is worth more than £200 million to the Angus domestic economy. We are supporting farmers and food producers across Scotland, including in Angus, and that is one of the reasons why we are seeking opportunities for greater agricultural exports through the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership and the Indian trade deal, and with the Gulf.

Patricia Gibson: I am sure that James Withers from Scotland Food & Drink will be interested to hear what the Minister has said, because James has said:

"Brexit has made absolutely nothing better and it's made a lot of things worse."

Does the Minister share my concern—I hope he does—that the candidates in the current Tory leadership race are simply not being up front about the mess we are in because of Brexit? They need to listen carefully to businesses and make exporting easier, instead of pretending that Brexit is working for business in Scotland and across the UK, because clearly it is not.

Andrew Griffith: I look forward to meeting Scotland Food & Drink and hearing about the positive opportunities. I hope that it is not overly infected by the hon. Lady's pessimism about the prospects for this great Union outside the European Union.

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Welsh food and drink exports have no better showcase than the Royal Welsh show—the largest agricultural show in Europe—which concludes in my constituency today. It has been fantastic to see visitors from right around the world back on the showground. I want to pay particular tribute to Steve Hughson, who is stepping down as the show's chief executive after 10 very successful years.

Does my hon. Friend agree that agricultural shows are fantastically helpful for boosting our exports around the world?

Andrew Griffith: I thank my hon. Friend for promoting the great opportunities for British food and drink. The Royal Welsh show is a great institution and I am sure that everyone on the Government side of the House thanks Steve Hughson for his endeavours.

SMEs: Trade with the EU

11. **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to support small and medium-sized enterprises trading with the EU. [901232]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Andrew Griffith): Small and medium-sized businesses make up a huge part of Britain's economy, accounting for over 60% of employment and more than half of all turnover from the UK private sector. The Department for International Trade is doing all it can to help businesses overcome the barriers that the protectionist bloc of the European Union now imposes when consumers seek to buy goods from elsewhere in the world.

Wera Hobhouse: The only thing that Brexit has brought for many small businesses in Bath is increased costs, paperwork and border delays, as has been confirmed by the Public Accounts Committee—more barriers, not less. Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy. Will the Government please reintroduce the SME Brexit support fund, with a simplified application process and a significantly expanded remit?

Andrew Griffith: I am proud of the endeavours of my colleagues and those in local enterprise partnerships up and down the UK in disbursing the £38 million internationalisation fund to support businesses as we go through some of the changes that result from leaving the European Union and seek opportunities elsewhere in the world. I will of course undertake to look at any way we can make it simpler for small businesses, in particular, to engage with the Department.

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

12. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What progress her Department has made on securing UK membership of the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. [901233]

The Minister for Trade Policy (Penny Mordaunt): The UK is well on the way to joining CPTPP, one of the largest trading blocs in the world. We are now in market access negotiations, which are the final phase of the accession process.

Michael Fabricant: May I first say what a great pleasure it is to ask my right hon. Friend—and she will always be my friend—this question? Will she say—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, that was an emotional moment, Mr Speaker; I hope you will forgive me. Will she outline the real advantages that CPT—whatever the bloody thing is called—*[Interruption.]* Whatever the ruddy thing is called. Will she outline the benefits of membership,

and will she perhaps also say what sort of difference it will make to our trading relationship with the United States, which is also a member?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my very dear hon. Friend for that question. He is right to point to the benefits of joining this trading bloc: 99.9% of all UK goods are eligible for tariff-free access, it will increase wages in this country, and obviously it will help our relationships with other nations outside the bloc. The UK moving to the accession process will encourage and strengthen other like-minded free-trade nations around the world to co-operate and do more together, and to reform the World Trade Organisation.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Minister's answer. If the United Kingdom becomes part of this bloc, will the Minister outline what trading advantages will come directly to Northern Ireland and its businesses? We obviously want to gain from it as well.

Penny Mordaunt: Those very same benefits will also apply to Northern Ireland, and the hon. Gentleman will know that we are providing extra support to help with the particular export opportunities, including for services, that are so strong in Northern Ireland. We are determined not only with this accession, but with the other FTAs we are doing, that all businesses can benefit, because that is obviously our end goal.

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for a fantastic, brave, clean campaign for the leadership of the Conservative party and to be Prime Minister.

As a passionate Brexiteer, does my right hon. Friend agree that being a force for good in the world for free trade is an absolutely honourable goal and one that the UK should promote at every opportunity?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend. I am amazed to find myself here this morning given my reported work ethic, but here I am.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that the UK, a G7 nation, leaving the regulatory orbit of the EU is an international event. It gives us a huge opportunity, alongside nations like the United States, to set out our view of the world and of capitalism and to fight for the things we believe in.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Environmental campaigners have raised concerns that joining the CPTPP would put our deforestation commitments at risk because it drops generic trade tariffs. What assurances can the Minister provide that our trade deals will not put our environmental commitments at risk?

Penny Mordaunt: I would point to the forestry programmes that this nation has funded—some more than 30 years old—in parts of the world that are covered by this trading bloc. This country has an important history under successive Governments of protecting not only our own environment but that of other nations. I ask the hon. Lady to point those programmes out to any of her constituents who are concerned.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister, Ruth Cadbury.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): From swerving eight invitations to attend the International Trade Committee to avoiding bringing a debate with a vote to this Chamber before ratification, we have seen a truly shameless attempt from the Department for International Trade to dodge to any form of scrutiny of the trade deal with Australia. With the UK now negotiating membership of the CPTPP, I have a simple question: will the Minister promise that this House will be granted a full and timely debate before any deal is ratified—yes or no?

Penny Mordaunt: I will ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to set out any parliamentary business and timetable for any future trade agreements. We have clearly committed to a particular process. For my part, every time the International Trade Committee or other body of this House has asked me to go before it, I have. That is the attitude of the ministerial team, and we will continue to do that.

Australia and New Zealand FTAs: UK Food Sector

14. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What assessment she has made with Cabinet colleagues of the impact of the Australia and New Zealand free trade agreements on employment in the UK food sector. [901236]

The Minister for Trade Policy (Penny Mordaunt): The trade deals with Australia and New Zealand are expected to increase bilateral trade by 53% and 59% respectively in the long run.

Kerry McCarthy: It has been revealed that when the Foreign Secretary was Secretary of State for International Trade she ignored advice from her officials that the Australia and New Zealand trade agreements would shrink our food and farming sectors. I think we can all agree that that is a disgrace—[*Interruption.*] I am glad someone got the joke. The food and farming sectors are already hurting due to severe labour shortages and rising costs, and these rushed trade agreements could be the final nail in the coffin. If the Foreign Secretary cannot be trusted to do the right thing for farmers, can she be trusted to run the country?

Penny Mordaunt: If the hon. Lady would like to write with the specific details, I am sure the Department will be able to provide a full answer to her assertions. The economic modelling was based on full employment, which does not reflect the change in employment between sectors and, critically, does not estimate jobs lost or gained in any sector. However, if she writes with the specific details, I am sure we can address that for her.

UK Exports

15. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help increase the (a) volume and (b) reach of UK exports. [901237]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Andrew Griffith): Increasing the volume and reach of British exports is at the heart of the Department's

export strategy. It includes a comprehensive set of support for exporters, combined with seeking trade deals in the areas of greatest opportunity internationally.

Liz Twist: Tourism to the UK is our third-largest service export. I am sure the Minister, or at least the Secretary of State, will agree that the north-east is a fantastic place to visit and that we want to encourage visitors. In September 2020, the Government ended the VAT retail export scheme and the VAT shopping airside sales concession for airports, such as Newcastle airport. With the majority of visits including shopping as part of the trip, including shopping in Newcastle Metrocentre and, no doubt, Berwick, what discussions is the Minister having with the Treasury on that anomaly?

Andrew Griffith: I assure the hon. Lady that it is not just the Secretary of State but the Exports Minister who agrees about the potential of the tourism economy. We on the Government Benches will do everything we can to make the most of that opportunity, just as we are with freeports, which we are able to establish by being outside the EU. I note that one of those freeports is in the north-east.

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): I welcome the Exports Minister to his place. I hope he will join his Front-Bench colleagues, both past and present, who have on many occasions come to Sedgefield to visit our outstanding export businesses. At last week's Great Yorkshire show, I met Billy Maughan, one of my local farmers, and other members of the National Farmers Union, who talked to me about the opportunities from deals such as the India deal. It would be great if he could meet them to explore those opportunities further.

Andrew Griffith: My hon. Friend is a doughty champion for all sorts of businesses in Sedgefield, including his local farmer. I would be very happy to arrange to meet him and Billy and continue what is clearly a tradition.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am asking this question on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith), who is away on parliamentary business.

There is a concern among businesses that unlike its predecessor, the trade access programme, the current trade show programme will support a company only if it is exhibiting for the first time or venturing into new markets. We all know that marketing for export requires repeated efforts. There is evidence that there is now a drop in the number of UK exhibitors in some sectors, just when the Government are struggling to stimulate growth in the UK economy. Will the Minister now listen to businesses hoping to export, make the scheme more generous and widen the access criteria to allow businesses to benefit from the support by attending more than once?

Andrew Griffith: As we seek to get more businesses exporting, the first step is clearly often the hardest, so it seems thoroughly reasonable to put the highest amount of support into helping businesses make that first step outside the UK. The trade show programme supports over 128 different overseas trade shows across 28 different

markets. I will listen to the hon. Lady, and I have been meeting business organisations in my first few days in this role. We will make sure that the trade show programme, which is a great example of the Department supporting British businesses, remains fully supported.

Free Trade Agreements: Scrutiny

17. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of scrutiny mechanisms for future UK free trade agreements. [901239]

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The Government are committed to effective scrutiny of trade agreements. We have put in place enhanced transparency and scrutiny arrangements for every stage of FTA negotiations. That includes publishing our objectives prior to talks, providing additional time for scrutiny at the end of the process and putting in place the independent Trade and Agriculture Commission to report on new agreements. We are delivering on those agreements. The Australia FTA has been available for scrutiny for seven months, enabling three Select Committees to take evidence and to report on the agreement prior to ratification.

Mr Carmichael: We all know what Government undertakings in relation to trade agreements are worth, and it is not an awful lot. If the Secretary of State does not believe me, she can ask the farmers and crofters in my constituency. Is the breach of the undertaking on the trade agreement with Australia to be a one-off, or is it the start of a course of conduct?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As I set out, we have followed a broad and open process. There is no breach of any situation such as the right hon. Member suggests. The arrangements in place are robust. We want to make sure that as we go through the process—there will be enabling legislation for the Australia and New Zealand trade deals in the autumn—there will be an opportunity for colleagues who wish to raise issues. We know that this process is effective. I talk to fellow Trade Ministers around the world who work with us and it is interesting that they consider our process to be very robust and very inclusive, both at a parliamentary level and with the business community.

Topical Questions

T1. [901206] **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): Our exports strategy, coupled with our trade, investment and foreign policy, are a potent combination. For our brilliant UK exporters to reach the people and places where they can be most effective, we need to be able to build closer relationships around the globe, so my Department has launched our Government-to-Government capability. We can now bring industry experience and UK support to provide tailor-made solutions around the world. G2G is a powerful new tool for the UK. It better connects our prosperity, trade and diplomacy agendas and opens exciting new

possibilities for our businesses. We are working closely with our Ukrainian counterparts to get UK businesses delivering crucial repairs to bridges, modular homes and railways before the winter sets in. New tools such as our G2G capability will allow us to achieve more in Ukraine and globally, ensuring that UK trade acts as a force for good in the world.

David Duguid: We have heard today about the value of agricultural shows across our United Kingdom, not least in my constituency where we had the New Deer show last weekend and we have the Turriff show, the largest two-day agricultural show in Scotland, at the end of the month. They provide a huge opportunity to showcase the wonderful Scottish food and drink that we have to offer. Will my right hon. Friend confirm what DIT support is available directly to the fabulous Scottish food and drink producers, and what conversations she has had with the Scottish Government to make sure that that support is made directly available to those producers?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: We are indeed hearing of the wonderful shows that go on across the UK through our summer months and I commend all Members to visit some if they can. Speaking as a north-east MP who occasionally pops across the border to enjoy some Scottish hospitality, the Scottish shows are as good as any others.

The DIT Scotland team are now based in Edinburgh; we established the new office last year. We have trade and investment expertise there dedicated to supporting Scotland's businesses to grow through their exporting efforts. We also work closely with the Scottish Government to ensure that all businesses in Scotland have access to DIT support and the full reach of the UK's global network, including what has been set out by the new Minister responsible for exports—the Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith).

Mr Speaker: Never forget the Royal Lancashire agricultural show. I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): We Opposition Members have long argued that the Government are not doing enough to support exporters. It is now clear that the former Minister, the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), absolutely agrees. He argued that the trade access programme is underfunded and said of it, “We support too few shows, we don't send enough business, our pavilions are often decent but overshadowed by bigger and better ones from our competitors.” He is absolutely right, is he not?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: It was a pleasure to have the former Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), in the team; he has been a champion for growing our new tools. Brexit gave us opportunities to own our trade policy and to start to really champion and talk to our businesses about where they can find opportunities across the globe, whether for goods or services. We have a fantastic suite of tools in the export strategy, which we launched in November last year, and we can now really push on with that. As with everything, perhaps Labour Members can tell me where I can rapidly find a great deal more cash to make

these measures much more effective. In the meantime, we have put together a fantastic fund that we will continue to use to encourage our businesses to trade.

Mr Speaker: Order. These are topical questions, not “War and Peace” questions. Nick Thomas-Symonds.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The truth is that the Government have fallen behind woefully on their manifesto commitment to have 80% of UK trade covered by free trade agreements by the end of this year, and there is no comprehensive US trade deal in sight. Something has been going severely wrong. I welcome back the Minister for Trade Policy, the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), after her efforts in the Tory leadership contest, but the Secretary of State is far less complimentary about the right hon. Member's efforts in the Department. She said:

“There have been a number of times when she hasn't been available, which would have been useful, and other ministers have picked up the pieces.”

Mr Speaker—[Interruption.] Conservative Members shout “Shameful” at me, but these are the Conservatives' words about each other, not my words. The reality is that it is the British economy that has been suffering. Our projected growth is the lowest in the G7 apart from sanctioned Russia. Is not the truth that trade policy is yet another Tory failure?

Mr Speaker: Order. These are topicals. Topicals are meant to let those people who did not get in earlier ask a question. They are about Back Benches, not about Front Benches indulging themselves at the expense of others. Secretary of State—briefly.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I have a fantastic team of Ministers, which is exactly why we are able to do all that we can to make sure that our UK businesses have access to UK Government support to get their fantastic goods and services out across the world. We are rolling out the FTA programme at incredible pace by the rest of the world's standards, which we are fêted for, and we will continue to do that with the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, India, the Gulf states, Switzerland and Israel—all ongoing at the moment.

T5. [901213] **Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con):** My constituency of Aylesbury has many brilliant businesses exporting their goods and services around the world. One example is Sterling Thermal Technology, which I visited recently and which manufactures bespoke heat exchangers. Many more would like to follow suit, so how can the Department help them to reap the benefits of Brexit and our new trade deals?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Andrew Griffith): I congratulate my hon. Friend, who has a strong reputation on the Conservative Benches as a champion of the many excellent businesses in his constituency, including Sterling Thermal Technology, whose products are not just sold around the world, contributing to the path to net zero, but used, I note, in our own Hinkley Point C. One of the benefits of leaving the European Union is that we can now tailor trade deals to suit the needs of British businesses as well as prioritising the markets that are of most interest to exporters.

T2. [901208] **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): The Trade Remedies Authority has bizarrely recommended the dropping of anti-dumping duties on Chinese reinforcing steel bar, a move that will undermine UK manufacturers of the product and the whole industry. Will the Secretary of State call that in for investigation?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The opportunity for the TRA, as our independent adviser, to look at these issues is one that we have great respect for. As Members across the House will understand, we await its decision and we will look at that in due course.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The seafood processing sector based in my constituency and neighbouring Grimsby is anxious to increase its exports. Will the appropriate Minister meet me and representatives of the industry so we can push forward with a new initiative?

Andrew Griffith: I will be very happy to meet my hon. Friend's constituents.

T3. [901209] **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): Only one in 10 British firms trades overseas, and exports are falling. Many of my Bath businesses have suffered significantly as a result. What steps is the Department taking to increase exports with the EU, our closest neighbour and, in the past, our biggest trading partner?

Andrew Griffith: I am sorry to hear that the exports of the hon. Lady's local businesses are falling. That is not the general experience in the UK; the value of exports was up 9% in the 12 months to the end of March. If she would like, I will write to her with the comprehensive set of measures that I hope she and other hon. Members will take the summer months to promote to small businesses in their constituencies.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I have always been struck by the quiet diligence with which the Minister for Trade Policy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), does her job. Can she please update me on progress on signing individual deals with US states, which my farmers in Rutland and Melton are particularly interested in?

The Minister for Trade Policy (Penny Mordaunt): This week we have continued our negotiations with Utah; yesterday, we also signed the second state-level memorandum of understanding with North Carolina, which will be based on green growth. We are currently negotiating with half of all US states. The first eight deals that we will sign will cover 20% of the US economy and that will open up procurement, enable mutual recognition of qualifications, and enable British businesses to take a larger share of exports of both goods and services.

T4. [901212] **Sarah Green** (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): There was cross-party agreement during the urgent question earlier this week that Parliament has not been given the opportunity to properly scrutinise, debate or vote on the Australia trade deal, despite assurances from the Government that time would be made for debate. I heard the Secretary of State's response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland

(Mr Carmichael). What assurances can she give that future trade agreements will make it to the Floor of the House for debate and a vote before they are ratified?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As I set out earlier, we have a robust process of transparency and we will continue to follow it as we bring more ratified free trade agreements to the House in due course.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Topically, the Government have announced yet another deal with the American states, in no small part due to the allegedly "work-shy" efforts of the Minister for Trade Policy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt). Think what she could achieve if her focus was actually on the job!

The economies of many of these American states are larger than those of European countries. Texas is the 12th largest economy in the world. Can my right hon. Friend give us a cumulative total of the sort of economies that we are dealing with in these trade deals and that are likely to be signing up over the next few months? I think that total is considerable, thanks to her efforts.

Penny Mordaunt: States such as California and Texas are super-economies: if they were nations, they would be the seventh and eighth largest economies in the world. We hope that Texas will be in the first eight deals that we sign. In addition to the potential for their economies and ours, this is also about bringing together smart people, money and ideas to solve problems that we are all grappling with. Texas in particular is doing a huge amount on fintech blockchain; the synergy between what it is doing and the innovation in the City of London could be really special.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Small businesses in my constituency wanting to export to the European Union tell me that they have to fill in customs declarations of up to 70 pages. Why are the Government putting such barriers in the way of small business exports?

Andrew Griffith: It is not at all the intention of the Government to put barriers in place; this Government are about knocking down barriers to export and unleashing the potential of small businesses across the United Kingdom to make the most of the opportunities not just in the European Union but in the rest of the world, as we have heard from Government Members.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Recently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced enhanced free trade deal negotiations with our close allies and friends in the state of Israel. Will she set out for the benefit of the House the aims of those negotiations and what the benefits to the UK will be?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mr Ranil Jayawardena): I thank my hon. Friend for his diligence in championing the opportunities from free trade with Israel and many other countries around the world, including India. As two like-minded partners with expertise in areas such as tech and innovation, we are very confident that we can agree an ambitious deal that will complement both economies and showcase our leading businesses, growing our trade even further than we already have today.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I was interested to learn from the Minister about the close relationship that Department for International Trade officials apparently enjoy with the Scottish Government—something that I suspect will be news to Scottish Ministers.

The Lords report on the Australia-UK trade deal criticised the fact that, despite the heavy impact of the deal on the food and drink sectors in the devolved nations, those nations have been shut out of negotiating the terms of that deal and no doubt future ones. Will the devolved nations be consulted from the outset and throughout negotiations during future trade deals, and will Ministers make Parliament aware of their views?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: We have regular and ongoing discussions and a good relationship with all the devolved Administrations, but of course the trade policy programme is reserved to the UK.

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): The volume of the trade deals that we are hearing about is incredibly encouraging and shows the role that the UK has around the world. Will the Minister please update me on the trade deals with the Gulf?

Mr Jayawardena: My hon. Friend is a great champion for businesses throughout his constituency of Watford, and they will want to seize the benefits of new trade deals, including with the Gulf Co-operation Council, a group of six countries that want to trade more with the United Kingdom. The GCC is already equivalent to the fourth largest trading partner with Britain, with total trade worth more than £33 billion last year. We are going to boost the economy even further to create jobs, increase wages and support levelling up throughout our country.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): According to HMRC data, UK food exports to the EU fell by 19% in the 15 months following Brexit, at a cost of £2.4 billion. What steps are Ministers taking specifically to protect and promote our fantastic UK food businesses in future trade deals?

Andrew Griffith: Of course, the aftermath of covid reduced trade of all kinds with every part of the world. This Government's job was to protect businesses in the aftermath and is now to use our dedicated food and drink advisers across the Department's offices to make sure the world understands the enormous opportunity for the high-quality produce produced not only in the hon. Member's constituency but throughout the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: I call Jim Shannon

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. You almost caught me off guard there, but I do have a question and it refers to Northern Ireland. I know that the Secretary of State is particularly keen to ensure that all the advantages that come out of any trade deals always follow down the line so that my local businesses, especially those in the farming sector, can take advantage of them. Will the Secretary of State confirm that we will always get that advantage?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for making sure that the important voice of Northern Ireland was heard in DIT questions today. Northern Ireland remains at the heart of the UK and we will make sure that, in respect of all our trade deals and, indeed, in the work we do to reduce market-access barriers, our teams speak to businesses in Northern Ireland and throughout the rest of the UK. We are working to support them to make great British exports around the world.

Net Zero Strategy: High Court Ruling

10.32 am

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to provide a response to the High Court ruling that the net zero strategy is unlawful.

The Minister for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change (Greg Hands): Over the past three decades, the UK has driven down emissions by more than 45%—the fastest reduction of any G7 country. We have one of the most ambitious carbon-reduction plans in the world, pledging to reduce emissions by at least 68% by 2030 and by 77% by 2035, compared with 1990 levels, before of course reaching net zero by 2050. Our track record speaks for itself: the UK overachieved against the first carbon budget and exceeded the second by nearly 14%. The latest projections show that we are on track to meet the third carbon budget as well.

In its judgment on the judicial review of the net zero strategy, the High Court found that Government had not complied with Climate Change Act 2008 in relation to some specific procedural issues and the level of analysis published as part of the 164-page net zero strategy. I stress that the judge has made no criticism about the substance of our plans to meet net zero, which are well on track. Indeed, even the claimants in the case described the net zero strategy as “laudable”. The independent Climate Change Committee described the net zero strategy as

“an ambitious and comprehensive strategy that marks a significant step forward for UK climate policy”

and as

“the world’s most comprehensive plan to reach Net Zero”.

We are now considering the implications of the Court judgment and deciding whether to appeal. As we do this, our focus will remain resolutely on supporting people in the face of globally high energy prices and on boosting our energy security. Our recent British energy security strategy—launched by the Prime Minister—which puts Great Britain at the leading edge of the global energy revolution, will deliver a more independent, more secure energy system and support consumers to manage their energy bills.

Kerry McCarthy: Let us be clear: we are here because the High Court has ruled that the Government’s net zero strategy is unlawful and is in breach of the Climate Change Act. The Climate Change Committee, which the Minister cites, said only a few weeks ago that the Government

“will not deliver Net Zero”

on current projections. Not only have the Government failed to set out the detail of how they will reach net zero, but Ministers cannot even do basic maths, because, as the High Court made clear, adding up the emissions cuts in the strategy will leave a 5% shortfall. How embarrassing that his Department must be dragged to court to hear what we have known for months—that the numbers simply do not stack up.

This week has made it clear why we have to act now. The country has suffered through a sweltering heatwave causing fires across the country and infrastructure failure. But at a crucial time, this Government are directionless

and collapsing in on themselves. The High Court has ordered that a revised strategy must be presented by next March. That will be under a new Prime Minister. Yet the current candidates have made their views on net zero clear. One has spent two years in the Treasury blocking climate action that might have saved the Government this embarrassment; the other wants to scrap green levies.

So forgive me if I have little faith that the situation is set to improve—but it has to. We need to insulate millions of homes to slash emissions and bring down bills. We need a green sprint for renewable energy to wean ourselves off expensive fossil fuels. Labour will deliver that, and more, with our £28 billion climate investment pledge. That is what the public want and what the planet needs, so will the Government get their act together, meet their legal obligations, and finally deliver the green future that we need?

Greg Hands: I thank the hon. Lady for that set of questions. Let me first stress that the net zero strategy—I have it here—is a very comprehensive document with pages and pages of annexes as well. It would be well worth all Members re-reading it today. It is a comprehensive plan for meeting our climate targets, outlining measures to move to a green and sustainable future. The Court found that we had not complied with the Climate Change Act only in relation to specific procedural issues and the level of analysis published as part of the strategy. The judge agreed that it did not need to contain measures with quantifiable effects to enable the full 100% emissions reductions required. [*Interruption.*] We are talking here about a strategy for the next 28 years. Inevitably, there will be some evolution in the strategy, and inevitably there will need to be some flexibility in a strategy with a 28-year timeframe.

The hon. Lady asked about the Conservative leadership candidates. In all the hustings that I have been to—and I think I have been to almost all of them—all the candidates made strong commitments to meet net zero, including at the hustings chaired by her near neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore).

When it comes to net zero and climate change, I am not going to take any lessons from Labour, which is the party that said in 1997:

“We see no economic case for...new nuclear power stations.”

That has set us back decades. There is a reason why 11 of our 12 power stations are coming off-stream before the end of this decade: the decisions, or non-decisions, by the last Labour Government, who increased our dependence on gas from 32% to 46% of our electricity generation—which could only have cheered Vladimir Putin. On energy efficiency, we inherited a position where 14% of properties in this country were rated A to C. We have increased that to 46%. When we took office, renewables made up only 7% of our electricity generation mix. That is now at 43%. So I am going to take no lessons from Labour. It is this Government who are taking the tough decisions, including on Sizewell yesterday, and moving forward on renewable energy and nuclear—not any of the Opposition parties.

Mr Speaker: We now come to SNP spokesperson Deidre Brock. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry. I did not think anybody was standing. I call David Duguid.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I did wonder if I had managed to catch your eye.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this Government, whoever leads them after the summer, will remain committed to the net zero by 2050 target, given that, as he rightly said, in successive hustings, all candidates confirmed their commitment to maintaining that target? Will he also confirm that the UK oil and gas companies are at the forefront of driving forward the energy transition through so many different initiatives, such as carbon capture and storage, which will be so important to the St Fergus gas terminal in my constituency?

Greg Hands: My hon. Friend is correct. He is always a strong voice for all the industries in his constituency, whether they be traditional oil and gas or those making the transition to carbon capture, utilisation and storage, hydrogen and so on. All these technologies will be crucial. The Climate Change Committee itself has said that carbon capture, utilisation and storage is “essential” to the achievement of our net zero goals. We remain on course to reach net zero by 2050 as a world leader, particularly under the COP presidency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma).

Mr Speaker: I call the Scottish National party spokesperson, Deidre Brock.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The judge ruled that the Minister could not have “rationally” reached the conclusions he did or made the decisions he did as a consequence of his lack of information in making the policy. If, as the judge ruled, the Minister could not have “rationally” made his decisions, on what irrational basis did he make them?

What confidence has the Minister that his Government’s climate policy can be fixed when both candidates for his party’s leadership are at best lukewarm on climate issues, and at worst willing to sacrifice net zero? The Foreign Secretary said this morning that she would scrap the green levies, for example.

It is estimated that Scotland is missing out on 2,500 green jobs owing to the languid pace at which the UK Government are developing the renewables sector. Does the Minister agree that the UK Government should devolve financial powers to Scotland so that the Scottish Government can push forward renewables and clean technologies where the UK Government have failed to do so?

In 2020, the Met Office conducted a hypothetical thought experiment to determine what the weather would be like in 2050 if climate change accelerated as expected. Several of those projections are coming true now, 28 years early. Does the Minister not agree that it is vital for our plans to fight climate change to be up to the job, and that the next Prime Minister must remain completely committed to that fight?

Greg Hands: It is entirely wrong to say that any of the candidates to be the next Prime Minister are lukewarm on climate issues. On the contrary, the commitment to net zero from all the candidates—well, both the candidates in the last round—is absolute. I am a little surprised by the Scottish National party at times: this is the UK Government who brought COP26 to Glasgow and brought it to the attention of the world, and all that the SNP has done in the last year is snipe from the sidelines.

The hon. Lady mentioned jobs. There are already 430,000 people across the United Kingdom working in low-carbon businesses. The British energy security strategy will increase the number of clean jobs in the UK, supporting 90,000 jobs in offshore wind, 10,000 in solar power and 12,000 in the UK hydrogen industry by 2028. I think it is about time the SNP got behind our energy transition—supporting, for example, the move to nuclear power, which is a key part of decarbonised electricity generation—and got behind what the UK Government are doing on behalf of the people of Scotland, as well as the rest of the UK.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I attended nearly all the hustings as well, and I was pleased to hear all the candidates support the net zero target and express their commitment to climate change. One of the challenges that we face, however, is the fact that the homes of people in rural areas are less likely to be well insulated and less likely to be easy to insulate. Furthermore, we have no mass transit systems—which, indeed, would be impractical in most rural areas—so we rely much more on fuels for our cars. What can the Minister do to ensure that, as we move towards climate change as a country, we do so in a way that does not penalise those in the countryside most financially, but spreads the risk and the penalty evenly?

Greg Hands: My hon. Friend is a continuous and doughty champion on behalf of her rural constituents, and she has raised with me previously issues relating to properties that are off the gas grid and the costs of heating oil and liquefied petroleum gas. I am looking at these matters very closely, and have held roundtables both with Members of Parliament and with the industry. I urge her to engage—in fact, I am sure she has already done so—with the trade body, the UK & Ireland Fuel Distributors Association, which will make a strong case that there is a competitive market there. Obviously prices are high—driven by the high global prices of energy, particularly oil—but a price cap, for example, would be an inappropriate means for those companies to use.

I strongly agree with my hon. Friend that the commitment of this party and this Government to net zero is absolute, and one of the strongest in the world.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Oil and gas giants have driven the climate crisis, yet one Cabinet Minister banked £1.3 million from an oil company while a Back-Bench MP, and another has accepted £100,000 from a firm run by an oil trader. I will be tabling a Bill to kick oil and gas money out of politics. Is it not time we did just that?

Greg Hands: That is a familiar refrain from the hon. Gentleman, and he ignores a lot of evidence that those same companies are big contributors to our world-leading renewable energy programme. We have Europe’s largest installed offshore wind capacity, we are moving into tidal, we are increasingly moving into onshore wind and we are ramping up our solar ambitions. A large part of our hydrogen production and our carbon capture, utilisation and storage is being done by energy companies. I look forward to seeing whether the Labour Front Bench supports his Bill.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): The Climate Change Committee has warned that the Government are on track to cut only 40% of the emissions required to reach the 2050 net zero target. The reality is that the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is not sufficiently senior to co-ordinate the Government's net zero response. Does the Minister agree that, perhaps as part of the evolving strategy he has described, we should have a Department and a Secretary of State for climate change, as there used to be, so they can be held accountable for delivering on that net zero target?

Greg Hands: That is a slightly curious question. The hon. Lady said the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy was insufficiently senior to take the decisions, but she then appeared to propose halving the size of his Department, which would probably make him less senior.

On the hon. Lady's central point about the net zero strategy, this country remains on course to deliver net zero by 2050. Nobody ever said it would be straightforward or easy. The strategy set a 29-year path at the time of publication, and we are on good course. I have every confidence that the strategy will be the blueprint as we move forward.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I do not recall so much complacency oozing from the Government Front Bench in a very long time. I do not know about the Minister's background, but when I studied economics, I was impressed by what John Maynard Keynes said:

"In the long run we are all dead."

I believe the heat over the last few days means that 2050 will be too late for much of our population. We have to revise the target and move faster. There are some good things coming, but there are still so many closet climate change deniers in the Government and in the country. It is about time they opened their mind to the fact we now have to move faster and firmer.

Greg Hands: I am afraid to say that is an extraordinary attack, even by the hon. Gentleman's standards. Actually, this Government were the first to introduce a net zero target. At COP26, we saw our Prime Minister and our COP President leading the world on action against climate change—action that others now seek to copy.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The UK has the lowest tax take in the world from offshore oil and gas. Even with the temporary energy profits levy, the tax take will still be six percentage points lower than the global average, and the new investment allowance announced by the Government will compensate companies 91p for every £1 they spend on new oil and gas projects. Will the Government look carefully at the fiscal regime and abolish the obscene subsidy that is distorting investment into outdated fossil fuels instead of new renewables, which do not qualify for that investment allowance?

Greg Hands: I return to what I said earlier. The situation we inherited from the last Labour Government is that renewables provided only 7% of our electricity mix; it is now 43%. When it comes to oil and gas taxation, the Government's energy profits levy—the hon. Gentleman will know this, as I very clearly remember

him debating it in the Chamber—is set to raise £5 billion this year, which is considerably more than the tax proposed by the Labour Front Bench, which he backed.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I just remind the Minister that it was Labour's Climate Change Act that called for those targets to be set—in section 4. However, it seems that this Government were asleep at the wheel, knowing that there is a 5% deficit in terms of being able to attain—this is what the judgment said—their net zero target. Therefore, the Government's inaction has led to the decision of the courts. The Government's inaction is also leading to the absence of a new green deal for York. We have been promised that by his Department, which supports 4,000 jobs and the upskilling of 25,000 people with a new green deal, yet the Minister has not come forward with the money. When are we going to get that?

Greg Hands: I was referring to the adoption of net zero, of course, which was by this Government in 2019. I answered a question earlier about the jobs being provided through our action on climate change and our move into renewable energy, which I would hope the hon. Lady supports. The hon. Lady suggests that this Government and this party are not taking the tough action that we need and not putting the money there, but we have pledged £30 billion to combat climate change over this spending review. That is a considerable sum and a considerable political commitment by this Government.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The High Court ruling that the Government's flagship policy on climate change is unlawful is a clear warning that this UK Government are not doing enough on climate change. They should embrace that criticism and do something about it urgently, but instead they try to dodge it. The Minister mentioned the Climate Change Committee. It has said that nuclear will take too long; there needs to be a rush for electricity through renewables, and carbon capture and storage needs to be developed more quickly too. Why are the Government lagging behind and not taking this advice to deal with this important issue?

Greg Hands: As I said, we are considering our options in the aftermath of the Court ruling, but let me deal with some of the substance of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He is saying that nuclear will take too long. The SNP has been opposed in principle to nuclear power since its very existence. So on the one hand he is saying he does not want it, but on the other hand he is saying it is taking too long. That makes no sense at all. The hon. Gentleman will remember that on the very day we published the net zero strategy we also announced the programme to move forward with carbon capture, utilisation and storage—we are on good track there.

On renewables, the whole of the UK is taking part in our huge move into and boost for renewable energy. Scotland is a vital part of that, which is why we have announced the first ever tidal contracts in the contracts for difference regime, as well as the first floating offshore wind deals. We are making sure that the whole of the UK benefits from our offshore wind assets, including, for example, in the Celtic sea between Wales and Cornwall, as well as off the north-east coast of Scotland, the North sea and the Irish sea.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): I am surprised by the right hon. Gentleman's response to this debate, because the summary of the findings highlights that the net zero strategy

"did not reveal that the quantitative analysis put before the Minister left a shortfall against the reductions required by CB6".

Does the Minister agree that this House should have known that and also known how the Government planned to mitigate that? Are they not embarrassed that they felt that they could hide such an omission from this House, where we hold them to account?

Greg Hands: We have to understand the context, which is setting out where 95% of emissions will come from in carbon budget 6. CB6 covers the years 2033—not 2023—to 2037. If we were to have gone back 30 years and asked, "How will we do our emissions over the next 30 years?", I venture to suggest that that would not have been an entirely accurate exercise. I think that 95% is very credible for CB6, which covers 2033 to 2037. It is worth pointing out again that the court judgment was on this very narrow aspect—it is not about the net zero strategy as a whole. It sounds as though the hon. Lady has read part of the net zero strategy, and I strongly commend that she goes through the whole thing in more detail.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): The Minister refers back to the Labour Government in 1997. Can I just point out to him that that was 25 years ago, and that for the last 12 years his Government have been in power. So in those 12 years, what has been done to rectify this particular problem, apart from possibly one of the major things: a moratorium on land-based wind generation, which has been a complete and utter disaster from that perspective? Has the Minister been asleep at the wheel, or is he only just remembering 1997 now, not in 2010?

Greg Hands: The Opposition cannot have it both ways. The hon. Gentleman is saying that he is going back to decisions made by the last Labour Government 25 years ago, but somebody else in the Opposition has said that new nuclear will take too long. It is worth thinking for a moment about the connection between those two. One of the reasons why 11 of the 12 nuclear power plants in this country are going off generation over the course of this decade is the failure to make the decisions in the 1990s and the first part of this century to replace them. He will be delighted to hear—he will have been in the Chamber to listen to this—that we have rectified that by approving Hinkley Point C and yesterday announcing the planning approval for Sizewell C, and also through the strong numbers in the British energy security strategy to move forward to 24 GW of nuclear by 2050. It is this Government who are making the tough decisions that were ducked by the previous Labour Government.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): There are two zero-emission policies that the Government could adopt to comply with the High Court's request for a deliverable plan. One is a zero-emission home strategy. Since this Government have been in power, 1 million homes have been built without those standards in place, which makes a huge contribution to carbon outputs. The second is onshore wind, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) has already

mentioned. Why have the Government not taken on board the carbon savings that we could have if a significant amount of new growth in onshore wind could be invested in?

Greg Hands: When it comes to wind, I just do not know what would satisfy the Opposition. We are No. 1 in Europe when it comes to our offshore wind capacity—[HON. MEMBERS: "Onshore wind!"] I hear Members shouting about onshore wind. We have even more onshore wind than we have offshore wind. When it comes to energy efficiency, it is worth pointing out that when we took office only 14% of homes in this country were rated in bands A to C—the most energy efficient. We have increased that to 46%—a trebling of energy-efficient homes—and we have allocated £6.6 billion in this Parliament for energy efficiency. So I would say that we have answered the hon. Lady's questions and we have raised them, in terms of the capacity of offshore wind, onshore wind and energy efficiency.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): The Climate Change Committee recently said that the Government had credible plans to reduce only 39% of UK emissions and that the UK was not on track to meet net zero. Now the High Court has said that the net zero strategy is unlawful. Is it not simply the case that the Government need to grasp the nettle, accept responsibility and just get on with making those detailed plans? When will the Minister do that?

Greg Hands: The court did not say that the net zero strategy was unlawful; I refer the hon. Lady to my earlier remarks. The Climate Change Committee praised this Government for the moves we have made on electricity decarbonisation. As I say, we are a world leader in this space, and I think she should show a little bit more pride in the efforts that the country is making, including off the coast in the North sea near her constituency, and also in our efforts on electric vehicles. There is a great deal for us all to take pride in across the whole country in terms of our net zero strategy and decarbonisation.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): This week, Conservative Members have given both a full vote of confidence and an enthusiastic standing ovation to a Prime Minister who deliberately missed an emergency Cobra meeting to plan for the heatwave emergency because he was away playing at "Top Gun" with the RAF—playing the part of Maverick, I understand. How can anyone take seriously the climate change credentials of a party that so wholeheartedly supports a Prime Minister who, like some latter-day Nero, chooses to fiddle with his joystick while London burns?

Greg Hands: Well, I do not know quite where to start. I am not sure whether there was really a question embedded there. [Interruption.] Now that I have the hon. Gentleman's attention, let me say that it is about time that SNP Members started to talk to the Scottish Government, with whom, I have reason to believe, they may have some influence, about why they have an ideological opposition to new nuclear. Nuclear is absolutely the way to provide the baseload zero-carbon energy for the future. Why is his party, and the Scottish Government, fundamentally opposed to it? His time would be spent more usefully on engagement with them than on watching what the Prime Minister was up to at the weekend.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Minister will agree that we need to strike a balance. Will he outline how he intends to address concerns in the agri-industry sector in Northern Ireland about the fact that livestock numbers in Northern Ireland would have to halve if we are to meet the net zero target by 2050? That would put 113,000 jobs at risk. Can he outline the steps that will be taken to ensure that the demands being made will not have that result?

Greg Hands: I always welcome questions from Northern Ireland. In my previous job at the Department for International Trade, I enjoyed greatly my interactions with the Ulster Farmers Union, with the hon. Gentleman, and with colleagues on behalf of agriculture in Northern Ireland. It is an important sector for the whole country. We are making sure that Northern Irish agriculture can access markets around the world. I would be delighted to pass on his comments to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, though obviously agriculture is devolved to Northern Ireland. On trade in particular, we will make sure that Ulster farmers can access markets.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Calculations have been made to quantify the emissions cuts that will result from the policies in the Government's strategy. The cuts do not add up to the reductions required to meet the sixth carbon budget; there is a 5% shortfall. That is equal to 75 million tonnes of CO₂, which is nearly the total amount of emissions in a year from car travel in the UK. What measures will be implemented to ensure that in future, calculations as crucial as these are informed by those with expertise, and are checked thoroughly before they are relied on in national policy?

Greg Hands: To put this in context, what the hon. Lady describes as a 5% shortfall is not, if I read the judgment correctly, a doubt that the Government can reach the target; it is simply a criticism of why we had laid out only 95%, rather than 100%, of the measures that are needed. I remind her that we are talking about carbon budget 6, which is for the years 2033 to 2037. There is a reasonable case—it was made by the Government in court—for saying that it is commendable that they could outline 95% of the journey that we are intending to make in 11 years' time.

Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre

11.3 am

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities if he will make a statement on the future of the proposed holocaust memorial and learning centre in Victoria Tower Gardens.

The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Paul Scully): The Government remain committed to the creation of a new national memorial commemorating the victims of the holocaust. The new holocaust memorial will be the national focal point for honouring the 6 million Jewish men, women and children who were murdered in the holocaust, and other victims of Nazi persecution, including the Roma, and gay and disabled people. We must build this new national holocaust memorial and the learning centre, so that future generations can never doubt what happened. That is the only way that we can be certain that it will never happen again.

The commitment to creating a holocaust memorial was first made by the then Prime Minister, with cross-party support, in January 2015. I am pleased that the project has continued to enjoy support across a very broad range of people from all political parties, different faith communities, and all parts of society. The current Prime Minister is also very keen on and supportive of the project.

Following an extensive search for suitable sites, in which around 50 possible locations were considered, Victoria Tower Gardens was chosen as the best possible location for the memorial. Constructing the memorial next to Parliament, at the heart of our democracy, provides a powerful signal of the importance we attach to remembering the holocaust and seeking to learn its lessons. Following a lengthy public inquiry, planning consent for the memorial and learning centre was granted in July 2021. Sadly, though, a challenge was brought by the London Historic Parks and Garden Trust, which led to the High Court quashing the consent in April this year.

The loss of that consent was a disappointment, especially to those holocaust survivors who place such high value on sharing their testimony and who want to be confident that their message will continue to be heard. It was a further disappointment that the Court of Appeal decided yesterday that an appeal against the High Court decision would not be heard.

We will of course study those decisions carefully as we consider our next steps, but in addition to the Prime Minister's personal support, our commitment to holocaust survivors remains strong. The lessons of the holocaust must be remembered and told with honesty and clarity. As the number of survivors sadly dwindles, we face an urgent task to ensure that their work in sharing those lessons continues.

Sir Peter Bottomley: I am grateful to the Minister for coming to answer the urgent question at short notice. Joshua Rozenberg observed today:

"If the government had chosen in 2015 to build the memorial and learning centre at the Imperial War Museum, it would have been open by now"

[*Sir Peter Bottomley*]

alongside the powerful Holocaust Galleries. I mention that because the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation's research and education has led my family to learn that over 100 of my grandfather's cousins died in the death camps and concentration camps.

The Minister knows that Jewish opinion is divided. Will he take this opportunity to read the National Audit Office report of two weeks ago? Will he also read the Holocaust Memorial Foundation's September 2015 specification, which said that most of the money should be spent on education, rather than on construction? All the money spent over the past seven years has gone on proposals for construction, with nothing for education, which matters most.

Will he also look at the page suggesting possible central London locations, which include the whole of Regent's Park, most of Hyde Park, and the Imperial War Museum?

Will he say to fellow Ministers that, as well coming to answer questions here, it is time to look again at how to fulfil the aims of the Holocaust Commission and the specifications of the Holocaust Memorial Foundation and actually to talk to those of us who have been trying to say to the Government for quite some time that Victoria Tower Gardens—I played there and have studied, lived and worked nearby for two thirds of my life—is not the place to put a mound and a hole in the ground? The area is insecure and of doubtful value in meeting the purposes, as well as being only one third of the size specified by the foundation only seven years ago.

Paul Scully: I thank the Father of the House for asking the question in the first place and for his thoughts. Victoria Tower Gardens was identified as a site uniquely capable of meeting the Government's aspirations for the national memorial. There cannot be a more powerful symbol of our commitment than to place the memorial in the gardens next to the centre of our democracy in Parliament. The learning centre exhibition serves a different, although complementary, purpose from the Imperial War Museum's new Holocaust Galleries, which are now largely completed, making it far more difficult to place the memorial there.

On terrorism, it would clearly be absolutely unacceptable to build a memorial in a less prominent location simply because of the risk of terrorism, because that would be to allow terrorists to dictate how we commemorate the holocaust. However, we will clearly work with security experts, Government agencies and the Metropolitan police to ensure that the site has the necessary level of security.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the NAO report and, as I am new in post, I will get into it in some more detail, but I am reassured that the investigation confirms our assessment of the risks and challenges associated with such an important, complex project. It recognised the challenges we face in managing the cost pressures in the context of inflation across the construction sector and the delays arising from opposition to the planning application. He said that money should be spent on education rather than on building, but many of the costs have related to the consultations and legal challenges that we have faced. We want to get on and build the memorial while holocaust survivors are still here to look at it.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister, Alex Norris.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): This is an issue that has generated a range of very strong views, but there should be a common sadness that such an important memorial is set back yet again. Remembering the holocaust and what it says about humanity's past, present and future is an intergenerational necessity—6 million Jewish people, Roma and Gypsy people, Slavic people, LGBT people, disabled people all savagely murdered. Antisemitism remains a scourge today that we all must fight together.

I am proud that Nottinghamshire is home to the National Holocaust Centre and Museum, and I urge right hon. and hon. Members and anyone watching proceedings today to visit it. They would not accept credit readily, but the work of the Smith family is a model of how memorials can be very thoughtfully done by bringing people together. We lost Marina Smith last month and I know that all colleagues will want to pass on their best wishes to the Smiths.

We are now faced with the question of what to do next. The Leader of the Opposition made very clear last week our commitment to a national memorial and his very strong belief that it should be sited next to Parliament. Does the Minister intend to bring forward legislation to make sure that this memorial happens? Will he commit to a cross-party, all-community effort to revitalise the project? I know that he is by instinct a consensus builder, and I suggest that he leans on that now, because this is a project of huge national importance and it is a source of sadness that we cannot make something of such universal significance happen. We now must come together to ensure that it does.

Paul Scully: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his words. Yes, indeed, we will continue to work. I think that the fact that the commission is chaired by Ed Balls and Lord Pickles shows the cross-party nature of the approach. We all want to have the best sign—the best memorial—to remember, and to teach and bring in a whole other generation of witnesses, as described by one holocaust survivor. In terms of legislation, it will clearly be for the next Prime Minister to direct that, but we will look at the court case and consider all options available to us.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for coming here to respond to the urgent question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley). I am encouraged by the continuing strong measure of cross-party consensus on the importance of delivering the holocaust memorial and learning centre in Victoria Tower Gardens.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the story of the holocaust is, in part, a British story, too, with the taking in of Kindertransport refugees, the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen camp and the taking in of child camp survivors? It is important that we tell that story from the heart of Government here in Westminster, and delivering the memorial and learning centre would be a powerful way of doing that. Will he consider strongly the suggestion of the need to legislate in order to get through and break the deadlock?

Paul Scully: I agree with my right hon. Friend on all those points. It is, indeed, a British, international and global story, and we need to reflect Britain's place in the

global response and make sure that it can never happen again. We will look at what happened in the court case, but also at what measures we now need to take. As I have said, it will be for the next Prime Minister to take those final decisions, but we will certainly be considering it in the weeks to come.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): As the Minister indicated earlier, the holocaust is now slipping from memory into history. I am convinced that that at least partly explains the rise in antisemitism and holocaust denial that we have seen across Britain and Europe. Is it not even more important now that the holocaust memorial centre should, as a number of hon. Members and the Minister have indicated, be right by the epicentre of democracy? I find it absolutely extraordinary that the argument is being advanced that we should not have it in Victoria Tower Gardens because it would become a target. On that basis, why do we not close this place down, because this place is a target? Will the Minister give a commitment, as the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) asked, to bring forward legislation in September to enable the construction of the centre?

Paul Scully: I agree that we need a response and a sign and memorial right at the heart of our democracy. I cannot personally commit to legislation, but certainly we will look at that. It will be a decision for the next Prime Minister, but we will have a robust response as best we can.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): The building of the national holocaust memorial was a manifesto commitment by this Government. It has cross-party support and it also has the support of every living Prime Minister and all the faith leaders of this country. It is a cause of great sadness to me that a small number of individuals, many of whom are local residents, are causing this great national project to be delayed. They will not succeed. All they will succeed in doing is ensuring that fewer survivors of the holocaust live to see the memorial open, and that is a national disgrace. Will the Minister bring forward the simple three-clause Bill that is now required? If he will not, I put him on notice that I will amend the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill to do just that, and I am sure that colleagues across this House will support me in ensuring that this project proceeds.

Paul Scully: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. As I have said, any legislation will be the decision for the next Prime Minister. It remains a manifesto commitment to build the holocaust memorial so that we remember. On the location, 90% of the gardens will remain unchanged and open. Less than 10% will be used by the memorial, which will be open to the public. That is why Government believe that it fitted within the existing legislation. That is also why we will be reviewing the court case to see what it says, and our response will be in place accordingly.

Mr Speaker: The proof is in the pudding.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I say to the Minister that this is not a party political matter—it goes across the parties? We want this centre to be built and we want it to be built sooner rather than

later. My father fought in the last war and was one of the Royal Engineers who went to Germany for the clear-up. He never recovered from what he saw there at the end of the war. I have this plea to the Minister. People will be disturbed by this. I was sorry to see that, under the contract that had been let, all the materials will be brought in and the waste taken away by road, but it would be much better for the residents and for the people in London if it were all carried on the river. Will the Minister consider that?

Paul Scully: As Minister for London, I will happily look at that last request, because we are significantly underusing our river. I agree with the hon. Gentleman when he talks about the cross-party nature of this project. We do need to get on and build this memorial, for this generation of holocaust survivors and for future generations.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I declare my interest as co-chairman of the all-party group for the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre. It is absolutely crucial that we get the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre alongside Parliament as quickly as possible. I know that, in answering this urgent question, my hon. Friend cannot bind the hands of his successor, but can he not do the sensible thing and, having got the support of the current Prime Minister, consult both candidates, one of whom will be Prime Minister in September? If they both agree that we should bring forward the legislation, will the Minister bring it forward to us on 5 September?

Paul Scully: I will be speaking to both candidates about a number of things, including this matter. I was supposed to be getting a briefing on this from my team today, as I am new in post. Clearly, there is a lot to bring to this issue, and we need to make sure that our candidates understand the feeling of the House.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): A report from the Community Security Trust was released last week on antisemitism in the pandemic. It outlined a very disturbing case in Manchester, my home town, of Jewish people being targeted for spreading covid. Fortunately, the perpetrator was arrested and jailed for six months, but does that not just demonstrate that this does not go away and that there is always an excuse? That is why it is absolutely crucial that we have the national centre to educate future generations on this issue.

Paul Scully: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The reason that we are talking about Victoria Tower Gardens is that it is next to Parliament. This is not a London memorial. We are talking about a national memorial, sitting next to the centre of our democracy. He is absolutely right: antisemitism does not start and stop within the M25.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Of course we should have a holocaust memorial and of course we should have a proper holocaust museum. It is not surprising that Westminster City Council turned this application down, or, indeed, that the Government have lost the case in the High Court and then in the Court of Appeal. Based on questions that I and others asked, the Act of Parliament dating from the beginning of the

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

20th century is very clear that the park was laid down as a park. May I suggest a compromise? Given that the debate is carrying on and on, the obvious solution is to have a holocaust memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens, next to Parliament as everybody wants, and similar to the other memorials such as the Buxton and Pankhurst memorials. It could be a potent symbol, it could blend in with the park and the surroundings and there would be no controversy about it.

The controversy has been about the underground learning centre and all the disruption it would cause. The difficulty with the underground learning centre in that very constrained site is that it would be nothing like the proper memorials and museums in Washington and Berlin. Have the memorial in the gardens and a proper museum at the Imperial War museum.

Paul Scully: As I have said, the education centre would be complementary to the Imperial War Museum. We believe that the plans are consistent with the provisions of the London County Council (Improvements) Act 1900, and that is why we are disappointed by the result of the court case. The design is sensitive to the existing gardens and would allow residents and visitors alike to continue to benefit from the green space, but we will clearly reflect on the court decision.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The memorial has to be near Parliament. At a time when antisemitism was commonplace, in the 1930s in British society, Victor Cazalet MP was the first person in the House to warn of the coming holocaust. Jack Macnamara MP visited Dachau and when he came back he said that we had to fight Hitler. Rob Bernays MP was called “a filthy Jew” by Hitler’s friends in Germany. All three of them lost their lives and have shields on the walls of the Chamber. This is intimately about Parliament, democracy and antisemitism, and we have to put those things together.

Paul Scully: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his usual erudite approach. There is not a lot I can add, but he is right about the need to site the memorial next to the centre of our democracy.

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con): One hundred and seventeen holocaust survivors were interviewed about the memorial, and it is upsetting that, because of

the delays, many will not have the opportunity to see the opening. The holocaust is a part of British history, from the Kindertransport and the liberation of Bergen-Belsen to welcoming survivors. It is not always a good story, so the memorial has to be built beside Parliament to remind every future Government of the history. Can the Minister confirm that the Government will do all they can to build the memorial as soon as possible?

Paul Scully: The memorial for the holocaust remains a manifesto commitment of the Government and we will clearly look at the court decision and work out where to go next. It will be a decision for the next Prime Minister, but my hon. Friend has fought for this and spoken out about the holocaust on several occasions, and I know that she will continue to do so.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I get the impression that the Minister greatly understands the concerns of everybody in the Chamber, but can he outline what discussions have taken place with members of the Jewish community to underline the fact that this discouraging news will not deter the Government from taking appropriate steps to facilitate a central permanent holocaust memorial centre to show that this great nation—the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—is united in ensuring that future generations understand the importance of remembering the holocaust as a horrifically sad and bloody lesson for everyone?

Paul Scully: I always commend the hon. Gentleman for his work on religious freedom and tackling religious hatred, including antisemitism. With the court’s decision being so fresh, it is early to have had those conversations with the Jewish community, but this is the first signal of our intention to stick to our manifesto commitment of building a holocaust memorial. As the newly installed Minister for faith, I will have talks with the Jewish community across the summer.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In case anyone thinks that I did not declare that I have studied here in Westminster, worked here and lived here for two thirds of my life, I repeat that. I also say that it is not a minority who have blocked the proposal: it is two judges. We should not refer to a High Court judge and an Appeal Court judge as “a small minority” when they are actually getting the Government to obey the law.

Mr Speaker: Right. We now come to business questions.

Business of the House

11.24 am

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mark Spencer): It would be a pleasure. The business for the week commencing 5 September will include:

MONDAY 5 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill.

TUESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 7 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Financial Services and Markets Bill.

THURSDAY 8 SEPTEMBER—Consideration of an allocation of time motion, followed by all stages of the Social Security (Special Rules for End Of Life) Bill [*Lords*], followed by a general debate on parliamentary services for Members. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 9 SEPTEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 12 September includes:

MONDAY 12 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Bill of Rights Bill.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business. Colleagues on the Opposition Benches will be particularly pleased to see that we will have all stages of the Social Security (Special Rules for End Of Life) Bill. Thanks to those colleagues who have worked so hard on that.

I wish all Members and staff an enjoyable summer recess. As it is culture's come-back summer, I invite everyone to visit Bristol West and our fantastic cultural life, as well as to visit festivals, the Proms and Edinburgh. Speaking as someone who was at a prom last night, it is fantastic that we are back in real life. I congratulate the Lionesses, who I understand are a football team, on their thrilling victory against Spain last night—that is what it says here. Sorry, anyone who knows me knows that I do not understand football; I do however understand a team at their peak, strong leadership and an electrifying atmosphere, and I have to say it sounds like a far cry from the Tory leadership debate.

I have a bit of an end of school report here. First, on behaviour, there is no sign of the updated Members code of conduct in the forthcoming business. The Standards Committee's welcome work and recommendations have been with us for a while now. Will the Leader of the House tell us when he will allow them to be debated and voted on?

"Bills going up", "taxes rising to the highest level in 70 years", and, "the economy is heading for a recession"—those are not just my words, but those of the leadership contenders, talking about the Prime Minister's legacy and the cumulation of 12 Tory years. These were senior Ministers in his Administration, yet yesterday at Prime Minister's questions, there was applause, cheers and a standing ovation. I hear rumours that there were even tears of despair that it was all over. Can Government Members not remember why the Prime Minister was forced out of office, including by some I can see in this

Chamber, I think? This was the man who partied through the pandemic, ground our economy to a halt, stood by as Britain burned, and they all tolerated his bad behaviour.

Moving on with the end of term report, on paying attention, we have a Prime Minister who has already checked out by checking in at Chequers, failing to attend crucial Cobra meetings. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, not the Prime Minister, came to this House to answer questions on extreme heat, but only when forced to do so, and he might as well not have bothered. He said to "wear a hat", "stay in the shade" and to drink water. This is not an online local residents' group; they are the Government. When will they start acting like one?

As the chief scientific adviser Patrick Vallance told MPs just last week, this consequence of the climate emergency was predictable and predicted, yet whether healthcare, transport or safety at work, this Government left us all underprepared for the national emergency. Their consultation on a national resilience strategy closed nearly 10 months ago, and still there is no plan for resilience. Where is it?

This morning, the High Court ruled that the Government's net zero strategy breaches obligations under the Climate Change Act 2008—passed, by the way, by a Labour Government—so will the Leader of the House ask the Tory leadership contenders to say how they plan to meet targets?

Moving on to attendance, it is yet another week where the Home Secretary did not bother to turn up to the Home Affairs Committee. There was a note—a bit like having a note from your mum saying, "Please let her be excused"—but yesterday, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy sent another note saying why he was not going to the Environmental Audit Committee. That scrutiny is part of their jobs, and they know it. Mired by infighting, this party cannot even manage the basics, so could the Leader of the House remind Cabinet colleagues about simply turning up?

Moving on with the school report to the subject of science, the Government have not bothered to fill the vacancy of Science Minister. It has been two weeks, and we are supposed to have the UK as a science superpower. Can the Leader of the House tell us when the remaining vacancies will be filled?

Moving on to the organising of work, backlog Britain is still piling misery on to millions of people, crippling our economy and costing billions. For example, with the Home Office, Members and staff tell me that despite civil servants' tireless work, everything is still bad: offices spending hours on hold to departmental hotlines, costing the taxpayer; MPs waiting months for responses on asylum claims and passport applications for constituents; people left stranded; and families forced to pay more for worse. I have asked week after week for the Home Secretary to make sure that there are enough people just to pick up the phones. Has the Leader of the House been passing on my messages? What is he going to do to reduce the long, hot, slow queues at the Home Office hub in Portcullis House? Will he tell the Home Secretary to sort this out?

I will finish my end of term report. Whether it is writing off billions to fraudsters or turning Britain into a laughing stock on the world stage, there seems to be no hope that either of the two remaining Tory leadership

[Thangam Debbonaire]

contenders will offer the change we need. Like every single Tory MP, they propped up this Prime Minister; they were complicit. There is no plan. Labour is ready to take over, and that is the only way we will get a fresh start. Thank you for your indulgence, Mr Speaker.

Mark Spencer: Let me start by joining the hon. Lady in congratulating the Lionesses on their performance last night. To come back from one-nil down and win in extra time is a huge achievement, but I will say no more because I do not want to jinx them in the semi-final.

We have had a very hot week. All week I have been hoping for a little cloud to shade me, and then along comes the hon. Lady, our own little cloud of doom. She is becoming the Eeyore of the Chamber, casting shadow wherever she goes. She needs to be a bit more upbeat and enthusiastic. I think she has fundamentally misunderstood the British people, with her rampant pessimism. There are undoubtedly challenges, I acknowledge, with the global energy and food price increases and with post-pandemic backlogs, but what our constituents want is this Government and our plan.

Labour Members want to sit there and snipe, but they offer absolutely no solutions. We are putting £39 billion of support into our NHS, which they voted against. We are putting in £35 billion of rail investment, as well as £96 billion through the integrated rail plan, and all they want to do is stand on the picket lines with their union paymasters. I want to thank the hon. Lady and her colleagues for binding the Conservative party together by offering us the chance to have a vote of confidence in the Government and getting us all in the same Lobby. Only the leader of the Labour party could inspire the Conservatives as much as he does.

We are getting on with the job. We are supporting families with the cost of living, with £37 billion of investment this year alone. Over 2 million public sector workers will be given the highest uplift in their wages for nearly 20 years. Unemployment rates are close to a 50-year low. We are delivering historic funding to our NHS. We are recruiting 20,000 police officers, with 13,500 already in place.

Finally, as we get to the Sir David Amess debate this afternoon, which the brilliant Deputy Leader of the House will respond to, I know that all Members will want to add their thanks and best wishes, along with the shadow Leader of the House, to all the staff who have helped us: the civil servants, Clerks, cleaners, catering staff, *Hansard*, the broadcasting team, and everyone else I have missed. If I may, I will flag up the team in the Tea Room, who brighten my day every day.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Declare an interest!

Mark Spencer: Most importantly, I thank my brilliant civil servants in the Office of the Leader of the House, who have been very helpful and supportive.

I wish everyone a restful summer recess, as we go back to our constituencies. It is important to put on the record that MPs do not go home and rest; MPs from across the House will be working hard in their constituencies, despite what the *Daily Mail* might imply. I hope that all MPs get a bit of rest this summer and come back refreshed in September.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Can I also wish everyone all the best—all Members of the House and all the staff who work here?

Somebody said that the Leader of the House should have declared an interest in the Tea Room, and on that basis I think I ought to call him: Alec Shelbrooke.

Alec Shelbrooke: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Before I ask my question, I make the House aware that I am a member and vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary groups on Argentina, on Latin America, on Formula One, on Gibraltar and on surgical mesh, and I am a member of the APPGs on cricket and on the BBC.

The Committee on Standards recently published its report on APPGs, suggesting a range of measures to regulate them. Do the Government support those measures, and if so, do they have a preferred recommendation?

Mark Spencer: The Government welcome the thoughtful report and recommendations on APPGs by the Committee on Standards. While the regulation of APPGs is a matter for Parliament, the Government welcome measures that provide proportionate regulation of their functioning and appropriate transparency about their financial support. I acknowledge that this does need some work. If I may be so bold, Mr Speaker, I will write to you and to the Lord Speaker—I think responsibility lies at both ends of the building—on my right hon. Friend's behalf to ask what you could do to help us move this forward. I put you on notice, Mr Speaker, that that letter is on its way.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson, Pete Wishart.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Can we have a debate about rats in a sack? There is a confrontation going on just now that makes those much maligned rodents seem like sedated gerbils on tranquilisers. This is ferocious, unrestrained stuff, with no mercy shown—they are going for the kill. Accusations, poisoned barbs, simmering resentment—and that is just what they are saying about each other in their own camps.

Mr Speaker, I offer myself as a peacemaker. I think I could bring some calm to the proceedings. Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there are Tories kicking seven shades out of each other, let us bring offerings of tax cuts. The leadership circus is coming to Perth. Already, we have put the city on an amber warning, with the threat of flying debris. This could be even worse than what we had in the heatwave.

For the third time in as many years, a Prime Minister is going to be chosen by a small group of right-wing Conservative party members—a tiny constituency with almost the exact opposite of the mainstream values of my nation. While democracy will count for that tiny demographic, the democracy of my nation is to be denied. Scotland will have another Prime Minister we did not vote for, while the referendum that we most clearly and decisively voted for is to be rejected. That is not lost on the people of Scotland; this democratic absurdity will be challenged.

I fear for the Leader of the House. I hope this is not his last business question. He is my sixth Leader of the House in as many years. In his short tenure, we have rubbed along quite well together, so I really hope that

he will come back. He is perhaps just a little too close to Big Dog and just a little too forgiving of some of the more suspect and dodgy practices, but we hope to see him here when we return in September. I wish him well, and I wish all Members—and, of course, all the staff, as you said, Mr Speaker—well for the recess. I will not go over all the staff again, but we on the Scottish National party Benches hope they have a happy, relaxing and peaceful recess, and we will see you all back here in September.

Mark Spencer: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments—I, too, pray for my survival. Of course he wants to talk about independence again; he does it every week. He did not mention the new plan for independence—the glorious vision for Scotland that the Scottish Government produced, which happened to have an English wind farm on the front cover. I do not know if that is a sign that, even though they do not want to say it out loud, they actually do acknowledge that Scotland is stronger in the Union.

Perhaps it is time the Scottish Government stopped their ideological fixation on independence, but we know why they are doing it. We know what they want to cover up. The CBI and KPMG have produced reports showing that Scotland lags behind the rest of the UK on nine out of 13 productivity indicators. On education, the First Minister said that she would be judged on her Government's ability to narrow the attainment gap between schools in poorer and wealthier areas—she even said that she would be willing to put her “neck on the line” for that pledge—but then she dropped her promise to help poorer students in Scotland.

The Scottish Government are receiving more funding than they ever have since devolution. The question is, what are they doing with it? I think the answer goes some way to explaining why the hon. Gentleman is so agitated when he comes to the Chamber; it is because he is so frustrated with his colleagues. Today, *The Times* published research showing that the SNP is hiding behind endless commissions, inquiries and working groups to avoid making the hard decisions required to help its Scottish voters. Since it came into power, we are talking about almost 400 advisory groups under a whole range of different names that it has used to put off taking any action. Five of the nine public inquiries commissioned by the SNP since 2007 are still ongoing, including the Edinburgh tram inquiry and the child sexual abuse inquiry, which have been sitting for more than six years. Maybe they could ask their input-output expert user group for some advice on how to get something done.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): Now then. The BBC has covered up for Jimmy Savile, Gary Glitter, Rolf Harris and a whole list of predatory perverts. Now, sadly, it is attacking our brave SAS in an outrageous “Panorama” documentary, accusing it of having its own death squads. The SAS is the finest fighting unit in the world, saving thousands of innocent civilians from being killed, whereas the BBC has turned a blind eye to hundreds of victims being abused by staff on its own payroll. Does my right hon. Friend think we should have a debate in this House to celebrate all the great work done by the SAS over the years?

Mark Spencer: Now then. I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We have the best armed forces in the world. It is hugely important that Parliament and the

public should have confidence in how our armed forces conduct themselves overseas, so we need to reflect on how operations have taken place. Any allegations must be investigated and criminal behaviour held to account. He will understand that it has been the long-standing position of successive Governments not to comment on operations and activity of UK special forces overseas. To do so would put individuals and operations at risk.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, Ian Mearns.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I am very grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I thank the Leader of the House for announcing in the business statement that we will have some time for Back-Bench business on 8 September. It is good to see the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), in his place. Since his appointment, I have been reflecting that this has to be one of the most classic cases of poacher turned gamekeeper the House has ever seen. I am sure it has not escaped his notice that, with all the things he has asked the Leader of the House to do over the years, he is now almost in a position to do them. I am really looking forward to that relationship developing.

I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. This is an important point: at the Transport Committee, Mr Steve Montgomery, representing train operating companies, told the Committee:

“We have not agreed to close any ticket office at this moment”.

However, in negotiations with the rail unions, employers have been explicit regarding their intention to close over 900 station ticket offices. Has Mr Montgomery potentially made a contempt of Parliament by making a misleading statement to the Select Committee, and may we have a statement regarding the Department for Transport's intentions for station ticket offices in franchises that it directly owns?

Mark Spencer: I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the brilliant Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone).

On ticket offices, I would hope that even the hon. Gentleman, with his strong union links, recognises that the world is changing. When I buy a train ticket now, I buy it on my phone on an app. We need to get more people from behind glass screens on to the platforms supporting people as they go about their business commuting to and from work. The railways need modernisation. We need to bring modern working practices to the railways to support our constituents. I hope that he would assist us in doing that by convincing the unions to come back to the table and negotiate rather than strike.

Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con): Sticking with the rails, my constituents in East Grinstead are fed up with the lack of regular services. It is frustrating many of my Mid Sussex commuters who simply cannot get to their desks for 8 o'clock in the morning, particularly in the City. That is having an impact on people who want to come back to the office, which supports local businesses and hospitality. Often, services are dropped to prioritise central London services, where people have tubes, trains and other options. Sussex commuters have less choice.

[Mims Davies]

Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on post-covid rail services, so we can properly support local communities and those who want to get back to business as usual?

Mark Spencer: My hon. Friend is a true champion for the needs of her constituents, and she is right to mention the importance of local transport links for people living outside our cities. That is why the Government have committed to more than £35 billion of investment between 2022 and 2025. Our transport Bill will modernise rail services and improve their reliability for passengers. High levels of short-notice cancellations are unacceptable and the Department for Transport is working with operators to ensure a reliable service is provided to all passengers.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am indebted to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you so much. You are most kind. The Leader of the House has had his request answered, as indeed have I. Flabbergasted as I am, I have a question.

Yesterday marked the 23rd anniversary of the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners by the Chinese Communist party. Over the last 23 years, this group has been subject to arbitrary arrest, torture and organ harvesting on a commercial scale. In this time, we have also seen China's systematic persecution of Uyghur Muslims and increased pressure on Christians and other minorities.

The Leader of the House is always receptive, which I appreciate. Will he join me in making a statement of solidarity with China's persecuted religious or belief minorities? Does he agree that the new Prime Minister, whoever it might be, should keep freedom of religion or belief as a key foreign policy priority?

Mark Spencer: The hon. Gentleman has arrived so early that we may need an incubator. Foreign Office questions are on 6 September, and I know he will be in his place. He is a true champion for human rights around the world. He is right to draw the House's attention to the appalling record of the Chinese Government. I know my colleagues in the Foreign Office will do all they can to press the Chinese Government to improve their human rights. The hon. Gentleman plays a huge part in the campaign to put pressure on that Government.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The London fire brigade has been busier this week than at any time since the second world war. Indeed, across the country, the emergency services have been under incredible pressure. Unfortunately, there was a massive fire on Tuesday in a building owned by the Swaminarayan Hindu mission that will end up being a temple. Several houses were destroyed, too. Will my right hon. Friend join me in commending the work of the emergency services and, indeed, Harrow council in ensuring that all who were evacuated have been found emergency accommodation and, in the long run, will be provided with new housing?

Mark Spencer: I think I speak for the whole House when I say that we all want to pay tribute to our emergency services and those in local authorities who

step up in such moments of horror. I know colleagues on both sides of the House will have watched on TV screens as those fires burned and people's homes were destroyed. We all have enormous sympathy for those individuals, as well as pride and gratitude that our emergency services stepped in during the most horrendous circumstances.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): In my role as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on ending the need for food banks, I was pleased to speak at the launch of Centrepoint's "Young, homeless and hungry" report on food insecurity among homeless young people. Centrepoint's survey and research found that one in four young people with experience of homelessness has £20 or less monthly income left after rent and priority bills, leaving them with less than £5 a week. Given the current food inflation, that is frankly impossible to live on. Can we have a debate on this issue in Government time, particularly given that benefits are widely paid at a lower rate to people under the age of 25?

Mark Spencer: The hon. Lady is of course right to highlight the need to get people into housing. That need is why the Government have committed £10 billion of investment into housing supply since the start of this Parliament. It is vital not only to try to get the next generation on to the housing ladder but to offer support mechanisms to people in the most difficult circumstances to get them into housing and make sure they can conduct their lives.

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): In business questions last week, I spoke about the potential closure of Doncaster Sheffield airport. After recent meetings with Peel Group, I am afraid I am deeply disappointed. Doncaster Sheffield airport is the crown jewel of my local combined authority. Unfortunately, the meeting was held virtually, without Peel's chairman even attending. I found that particularly poor. In the absence of the chairman, I asked Peel's board members for an extended consultation period and to be open to talks with future investors. To me, that only seems fair when thousands of jobs are at risk. I have still had no real answer to my request, so will the Leader of the House grant Government time in this place to discuss the corporate responsibility of large landowners and the future of Doncaster Sheffield airport?

Mark Spencer: Ultimately, it is a commercial decision for the airport's owners. I know that this topic is close to your heart, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to your constituency. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work to highlight the challenges in respect of Doncaster Sheffield airport. I will of course mention the issue to the Secretary of State for Transport, but I encourage my hon. Friend to apply for an Adjournment debate so that he can get all his concerns on the record and hear directly from the Secretary of State.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am very cross with the Leader of the House. Not only did he refuse to have a meeting with me this week—the first time, I think, that a Leader of the House has ever refused to have a meeting with the Chair of the Standards Committee—but he says he is going to reply to our Committee's report on all-party parliamentary groups by writing to the

Speakers, when it has nothing to do with the Speakers: our Committee has produced the report and the Government have so far failed to produce a response.

The Government have also failed to produce a response to our new code of conduct, which significantly strengthens the code. I would have thought that this House, at this particular moment, would be keen to consider that as a matter of urgency.

As I understand it, the Commission has finally got around to interviewing the wonderful candidate we proposed from the panel to be the new Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, but there is still no motion on the Order Paper. Will the Leader of the House please get on with all these things? Or has he just been off to all the parties with the Prime Minister? It feels as if the Government are not working—get on with it, man!

Mark Spencer: The hon. Gentleman did request a meeting, but last Thursday he stood up in the Chamber and said that I was about to get the sack; there did not really seem much point in meeting him if he was convinced that I was not going to be the Leader of the House in September. I suggest that he requests a meeting with his new Leader of the House—whoever has that privilege.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are going to move the motion on the new Standards Commissioner very early in September. I have no desire to upset the hon. Gentleman; it is my desire and intention to make him happy, if at all possible. I know that is an aspiration that I will never achieve, but I am committed to trying to assist him in his work, not frustrate him.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): May we have a debate about women's football? While the women's Euros has been a great success, in Moray we have been celebrating Buckie Ladies, who lifted their first piece of silverware when they won the Highlands and Islands league cup final. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Mel Smith and the entire team on their victory? The club has been formed for only five years and is already winning silverware. Will he also congratulate the club on everything they do to promote women's football in the area and to coach those of all ages, from youngsters through to the first team? They are a great success story for Buckie and for Moray.

Mark Spencer: I of course join my hon. Friend in congratulating Buckie Ladies. Let us spare a thought for Sutherland Women's FC, who lost in the final—I think it was 3-1 on penalties—but it was fantastic for Buckie Ladies.

It is great to see the growing popularity of women's football up and down the country. The Euro 2022 competition is really drawing the nation's attention to the great role that women's and girls' football plays. I hope the tournament goes on to be a huge success for England. My understanding is that the Government have already announced that they will launch a review of domestic women's football this summer that will look at how to deliver growth at all levels, from the grassroots to the elite game.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is absolutely right for us to thank the House staff as we go into recess, but will the Leader

of the House think of constituency staff? As of yesterday, six of my outstanding written questions remain unanswered. A further two apparently

“cannot be answered right now”.

This has been going on for months. My constituency team cannot get through to the so-called MP hotlines, let alone get answers for desperate constituents. Letters and emails are being ignored or unanswered across Government. This is about issues directly affecting constituents' lives, pensions, social security, passports and much more. When we return, can we have a debate in Government time about how this is so unacceptable and so dysfunctional?

Mark Spencer: I think there have been improvements in the speed at which Government Departments are responding. [*Interruption.*] I am not suggesting for one moment that the situation is perfect and does not require further improvement. I and the Deputy Leader of the House are very keen to see further improvements in this area, but progress has been made. We will both continue to keep pressure on Departments to make sure that they respond within a short timescale, and I share the hon. Gentleman's aspirations.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Recent reports show that the number of children using vaping devices has doubled in the past two years. These devices, with their bright colours and popular flavours, are appealing to children. They are illegal for children to use, but more than half of those who do so say that they are buying them in shops. They contain nicotine, volatile organic compounds and chemical flavourings that may be very harmful to children. When can we have a debate in Government time about how to prevent children from using these devices so that we can protect the health of our nation?

Mark Spencer: I do not know whether my hon. Friend was able to be at Health questions this week, but I pay tribute to the work that she does to draw attention to this matter. I will make sure that I write to the Secretary of State for Health on her behalf to draw his attention to her concerns.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): The Prime Minister and various Ministers have made hollow promises to me and my constituents regarding many serious and time-sensitive matters, including the case of Mr Singh, who was subject to identity theft, causing him to be falsely held by Border Force, his family to be in danger, and his health records to be in chaos. In addition, the families of Chloe Rutherford and Liam Curry, after losing their precious children in the Manchester terror attack, are campaigning to change death registration laws. Will the Leader of the House please use his good offices to ask those Ministers to start doing their jobs?

Mark Spencer: If the hon. Lady wants to supply me with the details of those two cases, I will write directly to the relevant Ministers on her behalf.

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): Last week our brave frontline services attended a fire at the Abbey View tower block on the Meriden estate in Watford. Thankfully, the speed of their action meant that no one was seriously

[*Dean Russell*]

harmed. This past week, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who is not in his place at the moment, those services have been tackling fires across the country, saving lives and keeping us safe this week. These are the people who bravely run into danger while others seek safety. Will my right hon. Friend provide guidance on how we can hold a debate to shine a light on the heroism of our frontline emergency service workers and pay tribute to their bravery?

Mark Spencer: Of course I join my hon. Friend in commending our fire and rescue services for the work that they deliver to protect communities up and down this country. He will have an opportunity, if he chooses, to raise that matter this very afternoon in the Sir David Amess debate, but if he does not get called, I encourage him to apply for a Back-Bench business debate or even one in Westminster Hall, because I am sure that such a debate would be very popular with colleagues.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): A recent Eurostat project showed that Scotland has the most highly educated population in Europe, with more than 50% of 25 to 61-year-olds educated to degree level, and Scotland has recently had its second-highest level of university applications in history, second only to last year's record. However, last year the Institute for Fiscal Studies said that cuts to state education spending in England had hit the most deprived schools hardest. In 2019 the then Children's Commissioner wrote to the Government urging them to take action to stem a "shameful" increase in pupils leaving education without basic qualifications.

In April 2020, the *Daily Mail* said that the number of A-levels awarded in England had been the lowest since 2004, and concerns have been raised about the lack of transparency in the Government's flagship academy schools. May we have a debate in Government time on why the Government—the right hon. Gentleman's Government—are failing to keep up with the improvements that Scotland is making in education?

Mark Spencer: I think that SNP Members are living in a parallel universe. It does not surprise me that middle-aged people in Scotland are well educated; that is because they went through the education system before the SNP arrived. I think what matters is the fact that young people today are being let down by the SNP Government. Their attainment levels are poorer than those in England, and that is a source of shame for the Scottish Government.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): On Tuesday, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service had the busiest day that its chief can remember in a career spanning some 30 years. There were significant blazes in Milton Keynes, Wooburn Green, Denham and my own constituency of Aylesbury, each of which required multiple fire appliances. As we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Watford (Dean Russell) and for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), the same was happening across the south-east. Fire crews were putting in extra hours in incredibly difficult conditions on the hottest day that the country has seen since records began. Will my right

hon. Friend join me in thanking everyone at Bucks Fire and Rescue, and can he suggest an appropriate way for Parliament to pay tribute to the superb work of our fire and rescue teams?

Mark Spencer: I join my hon. Friend in, again, paying tribute to our firefighters. I know that many of them came in on rest days to give their support in terrible circumstances. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Dean Russell), I think that an Adjournment or Westminster Hall debate would be highly subscribed, as Members will want to pay tribute to their own local firefighters.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The children of our service personnel in Cyprus are being taught by supply teachers who were brought out under employment contracts with the Ministry of Defence. The MOD is now threatening to sack them unless they sign new contracts that abolish their pension rights and lower their terms and conditions. Given that the Government profess to be against the practice of fire and rehire, may we have an urgent statement on why the MOD is joining companies such as P&O in using such unfair employment practices, and an assessment of the impact that the dispute with the teachers is likely to have on armed forces children's education?

Mark Spencer: P&O actually broke the law. I should be very surprised if the Ministry of Defence is breaking the law. Unfortunately, we have missed Defence questions, which took place earlier this week, but I will write to the Secretary of State on the hon. Gentleman's behalf.

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): In November, the wife of a constituent of mine died, and the inquest ruled that it had been accidental death by drowning. The hearing was conducted sensitively, but the coroner issued a record of inquest that published my constituent's name and address, which led to his being named in several newspapers with pictures of his house. May we have a debate on how our data protection laws operate? There clearly cannot be a public interest case for causing additional distress of that kind at a time of grief.

Mark Spencer: Let me first convey my sympathies to my hon. Friend's constituent. Individuals should be given privacy to grieve at such times, and it is concerning to hear of his constituent's experience in such tragic circumstances. The UK's General Data Protection Regulation requires data controllers to ensure that the way in which they process personal data is fair and lawful, but I will certainly raise the case with the relevant Ministers on my hon. Friend's behalf.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Issues raised at a meeting earlier this week between representatives of the Public and Commercial Services Union and Members of Parliament—which was very well attended—included constituency office staff staying on the phone for hours and then being cut off, and emails received by the Passport Office not being answered. May I ask the Leader of the House to encourage Home Office Ministers and appropriate officials to hold, over the summer—which will be a critical period for the

Passport Office—regular conference calls and virtual meetings so that Members can raise, on behalf of their constituents, the systemic problems in the Passport Office?

Mark Spencer: We have had, I believe, two urgent questions and an Opposition day debate on this matter. That is why we are recruiting; 850 additional staff have been brought in since April and a further 350 are arriving before the summer. The Passport Office now is processing approximately 1 million passport applications each month. Nearly 98% of all passport applications are completed within 10 weeks, but I acknowledge that the 2% of individual cases that are causing frustration will land in the inboxes of MPs up and down the country, because people have a strong desire to get away. But the Passport Office has made huge strides in processing these passports, with huge numbers of people applying.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Leader of the House might like to know that, at our Home Affairs Committee meeting yesterday, which, very sadly the Home Secretary could not attend—she could not attend the one last week, which had been in the diary for a very long time as well—we heard that actually 55,000 passport applications were over 10 weeks. I say that just so that he knows. What I wanted to ask him about, however, was the fact that my cost of living survey in my constituency has been inundated by people who are genuinely frightened about the energy price hike that is coming down the road. Research from the all-party group on left behind neighbourhoods shows that people in the 225 left behind neighbourhoods in this country will be most vulnerable to the cost of living increases. Orchard Park, in my constituency, has the highest percentage of households in fuel poverty in the whole UK—29.2% compared with 13.5% nationally. So I want to know: can we please have a debate about what the Government are going to do for left behind neighbourhoods—people who live there who are in work? What are the Government going to do to help them with the cost of living crisis?

Mark Spencer: Of course the Government recognise that there is a huge inflationary spike in food and energy bills around the world. We have recognised that challenge, which is why we are spending £37 billion this year alone to help with the cost of living. That means that the most vulnerable 8 million households will receive support of at least £1,200. Last week, the £326 of support started landing in people's bank accounts. We have raised the national insurance threshold, saving the average worker £330 a year. We are doubling the value of the universal October energy bill discount to £400 and we have got rid of the requirement to repay that money. Our household support fund is now worth £1.5 billion. That is a huge package of investment to help people with the challenges of the cost of living.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): In my constituency, a large brownfield site, Shawfield, is contaminated with the dangerous chemical hexavalent chromium. Clyde Gateway has been doing an excellent job remediating it, but a project of this size needs a lot of funding, which is why it will form one of the levelling-up fund bids from my local authority. I am keen to see this

bid succeed for my constituency, as it will open up economic gains. Can we have a statement updating the House on the fund when we return in September?

Mark Spencer: I thank the hon. Lady for her question and wish her well with her levelling-up fund bid. I know that colleagues across the House are working with their local authorities to get these bids in, because the Government have committed a huge amount of cash to assist communities in making sure that they get the right development in the right places, and that their constituencies are economically sound and are generating jobs and opportunities for their constituents.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): May I add my congratulations to the England women's team and, in particular, to Georgia Stanway for that fantastic winning goal? The Leader of the House is a big Nottingham Forest fan, so I have no doubt that he will be looking forward to the new football season. I am an Everton fan. We lost 4-0 yesterday to Minnesota United, so I am not looking forward to the new season. Instead, can I look forward to a debate on the importance of football to the nation and, in particular, how we can drive forward the Crouch review to improve services for fans?

Mark Spencer: I think I can claim to be one of the biggest Nottingham Forest fans that there is. The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the great work that football does, and not only at the elite level—up and down the country, on Saturday and Sunday mornings, parents and coaches go out in all weathers and get kids running around a pitch and kicking a ball, keeping them fit and mentally stimulated. That is a huge tribute to the volunteers who undertake that work. Such a debate would be very popular.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I place on the record my appreciation of colleagues from the Scottish National party and in the Public Accounts Committee, who took on a number of my duties during my recent absence due to covid; they seem to have done that so effectively that nobody noticed I was missing.

Of the 64 written statements that the Government have tabled this week, one from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and one from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy between them give notice of the intention to incur contingent liabilities up to a maximum of £16,000 million over the next four years. Normally, having laid those statements, Ministers would not do anything for 14 sitting days, but clearly that cannot apply here: 14 sitting days takes us right through the recess and almost all the way through the next term, to within a couple of days of the next recess.

Can the Leader of the House assure us that, if there is any indication that these contingent liabilities may become material and involve a call on public funds, the House will be updated with not just a written statement but through an appearance by the relevant Cabinet Minister at the Dispatch Box, so that their stewardship of billions of pounds of public money can be properly held to account?

Mark Spencer: It is good to see the hon. Gentleman back in his place; we have missed his short questions. Of course I acknowledge his concerns, and I will make sure that the relevant Minister is aware of them.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York made the railways and the railways made York, and it is now leading the industry in digital and advanced rail, both in operations and engineering. Bringing the headquarters of Great British Railways to York will level up not only York and the region but the country and the opportunities for people across the nation.

Ian Mearns: Newcastle!

Rachael Maskell: Will the Leader of the House ask the Transport Secretary to make a statement to the House on the purpose of the popular vote in awarding the operational headquarters of Great British Railways? May I encourage everyone to vote yes to York?

Mark Spencer: I am not sure that the hon. Lady carried the House. The shortlist was announced on 5 July. In fairness, I should name Birmingham, Crewe, Derby, Doncaster, Newcastle-upon-Tyne as well as York. Ministers will take the final decision on the location of the headquarters later in the year.

I pay tribute to York. I have been to the National Railway Museum there and it is the home of the Mallard; I think that Thomas the Tank Engine is also there. York does have a huge history in railways, as do the other contenders for the bid.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): May I point out that the Mallard was actually built in Doncaster?

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): This month, the imprisoned human rights activist Dr al-Singace marked one year of his hunger strike from solid foods to demand the return of his confiscated research in Bahrain. In 2012, the Government expressed deep dismay at Dr al-Singace's torture-tainted and internationally condemned conviction. Could we have a statement from the Government calling on Bahrain to return Dr al-Singace's research and release him and other political opposition leaders immediately and unconditionally?

Mark Spencer: I join the hon. Gentleman in that call and I hope that the Government of Bahrain are listening. There are Foreign Office questions the first week back and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be in his place to draw the House's attention again to the plight of Dr al-Singace.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): My constituent was trafficked into prostitution and raped in 2018. Very bravely, she is willing to give evidence against the alleged perpetrator. The trial has been repeatedly delayed and is currently listed for later this year—four years from the offence. She is desperate to travel to see her family, but the failure of the Home Office to extend her leave to remain means that she cannot do that without the risk that she will not be readmitted to the UK and therefore that she will not be available at trial.

I have contacted both the MPs' urgent query service and the Home Secretary's office directly without having received the courtesy of a reply from either in over a month. If I provide him with the relevant personal details, will the Leader of the House persuade his colleague to expedite this case?

Mark Spencer: I am truly sorry to hear about the plight of the hon. Gentleman's constituent. Of course I will write on his behalf directly to the Home Secretary. There will be Home Office questions in the first week back, but I think this case requires more urgent action, so I will write on his behalf.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Driving licence renewals, driving tests, passports and visas are just some of the essential services in which my constituents in North Ayrshire and Arran face severe delays. Civil service workers in those sectors are doing their best, but the reality is that this Government have failed to plan for a post-lockdown spike in demand. As a result, staff shortages are causing misery for those using and working in those sectors. Will the Leader of the House do two things? First of all, will he apologise for his Government's incompetence? Secondly, will he make a statement setting out how the misery of backlog Britain will be urgently addressed?

Mark Spencer: Of course there are challenges coming out of a global pandemic. There is a huge amount of pressure on Government services. That is why we are addressing those challenges by recruiting more staff and putting more efficient measures in place to drive those departments forward, and huge progress is being made.

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): Just last week I stood in this place and spoke about the tragic murder of Zara Aleena as she walked home through Ilford. I also spoke about a young woman stabbed in the back on 8 July on St Johns Road in my constituency. Today I have to come before this House yet again to speak about another act of senseless violence against a woman in my constituency. Hina Bashir was reported missing from Ilford on 14 July and her body was found in the neighbouring constituency of Upminster just three days later. This is a national epidemic; a woman is killed by a man every three days in the UK. In the light of these crimes, will the Leader of the House find Government time for a debate about the epidemic of violence against women and girls, particularly relating to violence against women from ethnic minority backgrounds, who too often face structural barriers to receiving the help that they need?

Mark Spencer: I am sorry to hear the case that the hon. Gentleman describes. As he will be aware, Home Office questions are on the first day back. The Government are committed to tackling violence against women and girls. That is why we introduced our strategy and we have already invested £100 million of funding. The Home Secretary has made it clear that violence against women and girls is a national policing priority. We are investing £30 million in the safer streets fund and the safety of women at night fund. We have established a new national police lead for violence against women and girls, and, of course, we passed landmark legislation through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. I am sure that there is always more we can do, but in this Home Secretary we have someone committed to tackling this huge challenge.

Points of Order

12.18 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I seek your advice? In the run-up to my debate on English language schools in Westminster Hall this week, my office was contacted numerous times by Home Office officials wanting me to change the title of the debate to make it just about visas. I declined to do so, because my content was wider than that. I also had an email the day before the debate from the departmental Parliamentary Private Secretary, asking for my speech. I had not written it by then, but I did give a list of issues to be outlined.

On the day itself, I was surprised that the body language of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who is usually a very pleasant and reasonable chap, made it clear that he did not want to be there. Then, following my contribution and those by others, he read out a largely pre-prepared statement conforming to the desired title that officials had pushed me to adopt, not to what I had addressed. I was accused of being too narrow and of not focusing on things that I had actually addressed, and the Minister said that the debate was a “missed opportunity”.

Madam Deputy Speaker, is it orderly or normal for civil servants to try to move the goalposts of a Member's chosen subject matter? If someone rolls their eyes at a Member, even before they have opened their mouth, does that not suggest discourtesy, even if Government Members do have other things on their mind—the results of the leadership contest were unfolding while the debate took place. Whoever decided to try to change the terms of the debate, does that not display a concerning disregard for scrutiny?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order. I presume that she informed the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) that she was going to raise this.

Dr Huq *indicated assent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The business to be taken in Westminster Hall is determined by the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Backbench Business Committee or the Petitions Committee, not by Ministers or their officials. While the content of Ministers' responses to debates in Westminster Hall is not a matter for the Chair, I would obviously expect those responses to address the content of the speeches in those debates. If the hon. Lady feels that the Minister's responses to the points she made in the debate were unsatisfactory, I am sure that the Table Office will be able to advise on how best to pursue the matter. I do not know if the Minister wants to make any comments—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster) *indicated dissent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Okay, we will leave it at that. Thank you.

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Last year, the Government launched their national bus strategy and promised that it would be one of the great acts of levelling up. Over this weekend, the biggest cuts to bus services in decades will take place as recovery funding winds down. In South Yorkshire, a third of services will begin to be cut from Sunday. In the north-east, a swathe of cuts are due, and in West Yorkshire 10% of the network is at risk. This follows the Government telling 60% of local authorities in April that they would see no change in transformation funding whatsoever. Given this huge crisis facing the bus sector, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would be grateful if you could advise whether a Government statement will be required, and if not, what avenues I can explore to elicit an explanation from the Government forthwith, with these latest cuts just days away?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for his point of order. He asked whether the Government were likely to make a statement. I am not sure whether this was raised in business questions just now, but I do not think the Leader of the House made reference to any statement and I do not believe that the Speaker's Office has received notification that the Government intend to make a statement today. Government statements are not a matter for the Chair, but I am sure that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard the hon. Member's points, which he has now put very firmly on record.

Channel Crossings, Migration and Asylum

HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We now come to the Select Committee statement. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), representing the Home Affairs Committee, will speak for up to 10 minutes, during which time no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of her statement, I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call Dame Diana Johnson to respond to these in turn. I should emphasise that the questions should be directed to Dame Diana Johnson and not to the relevant Government Minister. Interventions should be questions and should be brief. Those on the Front Bench may also take part in questioning.

12.23 pm

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I would like to start by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for this statement today. On Monday this week, as the Home Affairs Committee report, “Channel crossings, migration and asylum”, was published, the number of people who had made the dangerous journey across the English channel from France to the United Kingdom rose above 15,000 this year. Last year the figure was 28,500, and this year the Home Office predictions suggest that as many as 60,000 people could arrive on our shores on makeshift, leaky dinghies hardly worthy of the name of “boat”, wearing lifejackets more likely to drown them than save them.

In Dover recently, members of my Committee and I saw the arrival of two such vessels crowded mainly with men, but also with women and small children on board these potential death traps. At least 166 people have lost their lives in the channel since the Committee began its inquiry into channel crossings, with 27 of them drowning on a single awful day last November, yet despite the risk of dying, people still come. The day after those 27 people died, 40 more came. Witnesses we spoke to talked of making two, three or four failed journeys from the French coast, turned back by leaking boats or wind and waves, before finally reaching the British coast or being escorted to safety by British vessels, including the Navy and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. Those journeys are fuelled by evil, criminal traffickers trading in human misery. Those who risk their lives, and sometimes those of their small children, are so desperate to come here that they are willing to take any risk.

Stopping those dangerous journeys must be one of the highest priorities of a civilised society, and the Committee supports national and international action to stop the criminal gangs preying on vulnerable people. The Home Office has asked for ideas on how to do that, and our report seeks to provide some clear proposals for a way forward.

Before I set out a few of our key recommendations, I want to thank the staff of the Home Affairs Committee for their sterling work, particularly our Clerks Elizabeth Hunt and David Weir. I also want to thank all the members of the Committee. Our membership has changed quite a few times over the course of the inquiry, including the previous Chair, my right hon. Friend the Member

for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). I also give a very big thank you to all those who contributed by providing evidence and personal testimony to the inquiry.

In the report, we conclude that there is no single magic solution to the problems posed by irregular migration, in a world where millions of people have been displaced from their homes by war, famine, local terrorism and economic necessity. We are clear that detailed, evidence-driven, properly costed and fully tested policy initiatives are by far the most likely to achieve sustainable, incremental change, rather than headline-grabbing initiatives lacking in a rigorous evidence base and with unclear costings. We agree that safe and legal routes for those in search of secure homes are essential to breaking the business model of the criminals who prey on vulnerable people. The UK spends £1.5 billion a year on its asylum system. We house asylum seekers and refugees in hotels at a cost of nearly £5 million a day. We agree with the Home Secretary that the asylum system is broken and unsustainable, but we do not agree that it was those who sought safety by crossing the channel who broke the system.

The Home Office urgently needs to reduce the asylum backlog. The number of people coming to the UK each year is relatively stable—around 48,000 last year—but the time taken to grant asylum or make another determination has steadily risen. We recommend addressing the work in progress caseload of 125,000 as a priority. That means hard, invisible grind; having enough trained staff who remain in their posts long enough to make a difference; effective IT systems; and swifter and better decision making. The most cost-effective way to cut the cost would be to have fewer people in the asylum system, and the most effective way to do that is to get people out of it more quickly through faster decision making; 449 days for the average decision is far too long. No child should wait 550 days—the average time taken—to find out what their future is in the foreign country they have come to.

International co-operation is also needed to tackle what is a worldwide problem. For us, that means better and more co-operation, especially with the French, stepping up joint working. However, we also recognise that the French themselves need to do more. One of the Committee’s key recommendations is to seek a deal with France to process asylum claims to the UK on French soil in reception centres, possibly on a pilot basis, and with a guarantee that those not granted asylum here would remain in France. We already have juxtaposed passport control, so the French are at Dover and the UK authorities at Calais, so such an arrangement does have a precedent, but we accept that it is politically contentious. The Home Secretary has, in the past, suggested that such a plan might draw more migrants to France in search of asylum in the UK. However, we believe that it should be seriously considered as one of a suite of policies, which, together, could make an impact on the current dire situation. It could prevent people from feeling the need to cross the channel unsafely in unseaworthy boats, and it could save lives.

The Committee also recommends seeking closer co-operation with the EU. Brexit meant an end to the Dublin arrangement for returning people to other EU countries when their claims were unsuccessful here. It was not perfect, with fewer returns than successive Governments wanted under that arrangement, but there

are now hardly any such returns. The Minister told us that only five people who had crossed in small boats last year between January and November were returned. The Government's hope of bilateral deals with individual EU countries has clearly not been realised.

Clearly, provision of safe and legal routes for refugees, a realistic recognition that the UK is neither the least nor the most generous host in Europe or in the wider world, and a willingness to co-operate fully with our nearest neighbours by sharing intelligence and equipment to identify and undermine people smuggling criminal organisations may not offer the eye-catching headlines, but they are most likely to work.

I wish to say something about unaccompanied children. The practice of placing unaccompanied children in hotels has resulted in an unknown number of children disappearing either temporarily or, in some cases, permanently. We recommend that the Government confirm urgently who is responsible for safeguarding these children and tell us what they are doing to prevent children, alone and potentially vulnerable, simply vanishing from sight into unknown hands and unknown futures.

We also make recommendations about the need to review the experience and the process that children go through when claiming asylum. Key recommendations include: concerns around age assessments; the right to legal advice; an adult to support a child through the process; and the rules around family reunion to be expanded.

Finally, I turn to Rwanda. We have not yet come to a firm conclusion on that policy. We expect to return to it as and when anyone is relocated to Rwanda. There is, though, yet no evidence that the Rwanda policy is deterring crossings. Last week, according to figures very helpfully published on the Ministry of Defence website, a total of 1,474 people in 39 boats came to the United Kingdom, and the trend is up over the past three weeks. There is also no clear idea about how much this policy will cost, or how many people could be relocated to Rwanda under it. Should it survive its ongoing legal challenges, we will return to it, but it is a very good example of why a fully worked out policy might work better than one that is announced before detailed planning has been done to work out how a policy will work and succeed. That is why the Committee recommends that the Home Office undertakes detailed policy work ahead of announcing such policies and plans.

We are also very mindful of the unusual step of a ministerial direction having to be issued in this case—one of only two in 30 years in the Home Office—as the permanent secretary was not satisfied with the evidence of the deterrent effect of this policy being value for money.

In conclusion, our report is the result of more than two years of evidence gathering in which the numbers crossing the channel irregularly rose from around 2,000 in 2019 towards, as I said, an estimated 60,000 this year. Urgent action is needed to stem this dangerous tide, and I commend the report to the House.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): As one of the members of the Committee who has sat through every evidence session over the very prolonged period of this report, I welcome its findings. I did not disagree with anything the right hon. Lady said until her peroration. May I pick up on just two points? It was, indeed, unfortunate that the Home Secretary

was, yet again, unable to come before our Committee so that we could discuss some of the findings and the Home Office's latest policy.

On the question of Rwanda, as the right hon. Lady has said, the investigation happened well before the Rwanda policy was actually produced, and yet the headlines of the report seemed to focus on the Rwanda scheme not appearing to be working. Can she confirm that we did agree within the report that it is too early to judge in any case, and that there is evidence of people smugglers encouraging potential migrants to get on with the crossing, which has caused something of a spike because of the changes that the Government are bringing in. Therefore, the jury is absolutely out on that, and it should not be construed otherwise.

Secondly, will the right hon. Lady reiterate—I think this was one of the most important parts of the report—our recommendation that there should at least be pilots for the return of better safe and legal routes, including for a limited number of asylum seekers who are more likely to be successful in coming to the UK? That would enable applications to be made in France, or other European countries, but on the strict understanding that if they failed, the French authorities would take action to remove those people, so that they do not just return to the Calais beaches to make another attempt, as happens currently. Those are the two important points I wished to highlight in this otherwise exceedingly welcome report.

Dame Diana Johnson: I welcome the comments from the hon. Member, who is of course the Committee's longest standing member. He is absolutely right that the Rwanda policy came about towards the very end of our deliberations on the issue. He is also right, as I think I said in my speech, that we have not yet come to a conclusion on the Rwanda policy. What we are very clear about, however, is that the evidence for the Rwanda policy has not been forthcoming. We have asked the Home Office to provide modelling and cost estimates, but we have not had any of that. He is absolutely right that we need to wait and see. I quoted the figures to see what has been happening in the past few weeks and months, and at the moment—I understand what he is saying—it does not look as though the policy is having that deterrent effect. I am very willing to concede that. I think the main point we were making was really that the policymaking was poor in this regard.

On the hon. Member's second point, about pilots undertaken on French soil to determine asylum claims there, the Committee absolutely thinks that would be a good way forward; to test out that model, get the evidence and see whether it would work. Of course, that is dependent on the French agreeing to it. Like the hon. Member, we think that is a conversation that should be had with the French.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I thank the right hon. Lady and her Committee for a typically thorough and well-reasoned report. It is an important contribution to this area of policy. Just this morning the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration reported that the Home Office response to dangerous channel crossings is “both ineffective and inefficient, exposing gaps in security procedures and leaving vulnerable migrants at risk.”

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

At the heart of the problem in the Home Office is its basic mechanical inability to process applications, with a backlog of 125,000 and a shortage of staff, when it previously said that it would be employing 1,000 case workers—in fact, at the time of the report that figure was as low as 820. Does she have any view on whether even the figure of 1,000 would be sufficient to meet the current backlog and growing demand?

Dame Diana Johnson: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. I, too, have seen the chief inspector's report, which actually we have been waiting for—it was delayed for some time. The Committee is very concerned about the backlog in the Home Office. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; the figures show that by the end of last year there were supposed to be up to 1,000 case workers, and it has not reached that. We are also aware that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had offered to help the Home Office to triage the backlog, by finding ways of speeding up the process. We think that it would be very useful for the Home Office to take up that good advice. He is absolutely right; unless the Home Office has a workforce that is of the right number and it retains that workforce, because it takes a while for people to be trained up to make good decisions, this problem will carry on, unfortunately.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her Committee's report. I have raised before the appalling human rights record of the Rwandan Government. From recent disclosures in High Court proceedings, it appears that Government officials and diplomats share those concerns and advised the Home Secretary accordingly, including of accusations that refugees are being recruited to conduct armed conflicts in neighbouring countries. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the UK Government, in abdicating their responsibility to refugees whom they propose to send to Rwanda, both damage our reputation—I think the report mentions a significant reputational risk to the UK—and set a terrible example for other countries to follow?

Dame Diana Johnson: The documents that came out of the court case came to light only after our report had been published. We were very much hoping that the Home Secretary would be able to attend the Committee's meeting yesterday. Unfortunately, she was not available. Sadly, she was not available the week before either, even though that was a very long-standing date in the diary. Therefore, we have not had the opportunity to talk to and ask questions of the Home Secretary or Home Office Ministers about what has happened in the last few days. However, members of the Committee are very alive to the issue of human rights and to the concerns of the UNHCR and others, which have been raised with the Committee, and we will return to this issue. As I said, the issue is before the courts and no one has been removed yet, but we will want to follow very closely what happens in the weeks and months to come.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my right hon. Friend and her Committee for their work on this significant issue and for highlighting a lack of coherence and compassion on the part of the Government.

Paragraph 48, in particular, is very significant; it talks about announcements being made prematurely, before issues have been properly worked through. Events at Linton-on-Ouse in North Yorkshire, which I appreciate have been announced since the inquiry, show yet again how the lack of a strategy to deal with the backlog of asylum claims is causing the Government to announce initiatives prematurely. When the Home Secretary does eventually attend the Committee, will my right hon. Friend ensure that she raises the point of Linton-on-Ouse and the fact that there needs to be a coherent strategy rather than initiatives that are more about headlines than resolving the issue?

Dame Diana Johnson: We have pencilled in a date in September when we hope the Home Secretary will be able to join us, and I am certain that we will ask about the process for engaging with communities, local authorities and MPs when the Home Office is making decisions that will be important for local areas. I very much hear what my hon. Friend says. I am pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), is on the Treasury Bench and will have heard that too, because we have had conversations about communications between the Home Office and key local stakeholders about decisions such as where to house asylum seekers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Lady and the Committee for all their hard work and their recommendations. It is clear to all of us here that a lot of effort has been put into the report. As the report states, some 28,500 people came on small boats last year; this year, the figure is estimated to be some 60,000. In terms of public safety, we are all concerned about what more can be done to prevent launches in France and the traumatic impact on the staff who have to deal with them. The right hon. Lady referred to discussions between the United Kingdom and France about what steps can be taken on the French side of the channel to prevent launches in the first place. Can she tell us where those discussions have got to? What are the obstacles? Are the two Governments talking? Are things happening at all?

Dame Diana Johnson: Ministers are probably in a better position than I am to answer the final part of the hon. Gentleman's question—I am not party to those discussions with the French—but he is absolutely right about the importance of co-operation between the UK and France. We recognise that there is already some work going on, but we think it could be stepped up. We are also mindful that the French, at times, have not done as much as they could to stop the launching of these boats. We think that needs to be addressed, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: without co-operation, this will not stop. It is not just the French any more; other countries, such as Belgium, need to be part of these conversations too.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the SNP Front-Bench spokesman.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Lady and the Home Affairs Committee for the work that went into the report. I do not agree with it all—some of it does not go far enough for

me—but I agree with many of the Committee’s findings. In particular, I agree with its call for the Government to prioritise fixing the current system that people are living in now. They broke it; they need to fix it instead of lashing out at those who are languishing in it.

I question the emphasis in the report on deterring people from coming here. We all want to deter people from coming here unsafely, but we rank pretty badly among other equivalent European nations in terms of our responsibility to people exercising their legal right to claim international protection. I would have liked to have seen more emphasis on expanding and increasing the safe and legal routes, to which the right hon. Lady referred, to enable to people come here safely. Given the fact that there is evidence that that would reduce the number of dangerous crossings, does the right hon. Lady see scope for a future piece of work looking specifically at how we could develop more and better safe and legal routes?

Dame Diana Johnson: It is obviously a cross-party report and so had to be agreed by Committee members from all parties. I think we were quite clear about the need for the Government to address and expand safe and legal routes. It is worth mentioning that we are somewhere in the middle of the table: we are not the most generous and we are not the least generous country in taking asylum seekers. That is worth remembering. As I say, the report has cross-party support, and I actually think it is fairly hard-hitting about the situation in the asylum system and in respect of small boat crossings in the channel. I hope we will get a positive response from the Home Office in due course.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Minister.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend on her Committee’s excellent and vital work. The report that we are discussing

is just one of three reports published this week alone that have strongly condemned the Government’s approach to our broken asylum system. The Downer report identified serious failings in the Border Force, and the report published today by the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration describes the Home Office response to the small boats crisis as “both ineffective and inefficient”.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Home Secretary’s failure to attend the Select Committee is essentially an admission that the Government are utterly failing to handle and grip this issue? Does she agree that it is completely unacceptable that this House is not going to have an opportunity to question Ministers about the deeply troubling findings in the damning Neal report by the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration, and that the Government’s sneaking that report out today is a clear attempt to avoid scrutiny, which is completely unacceptable?

Dame Diana Johnson: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and questions. This statement is obviously about the report and the work that we undertook as a Select Committee over the past couple of years. It is fair to say that we were very disappointed that the Home Secretary was not able to come last week or this week to answer questions on a variety of issues. The Home Office will have to respond to our report: it has to do so within eight weeks—I think that is the normal timetable—although in the past that timeframe has been rather elastic and the Home Office has not always responded as quickly as we would have liked. This is an urgent matter, though, and the fact that other reports have come out this week will hopefully enable the Home Office, in crafting its response, to take a view about what is working, what is not working and what more it needs to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for her statement.

Backbench Business

Human Rights Abuses and Corruption: UK Sanctions

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We will now move on to the two remaining debates of the day. Before we start, let me stress that the Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate, in particular, is extremely well subscribed, so we are going to have to impose time limits. In the first debate, we will start with a seven-minute limit, but that may have to go down quickly. Sir Iain Duncan Smith has very courteously suggested that I put a bit of guidance on the screens for the 15 minutes that he has allocated for his opening speech. I hope that throughout the afternoon we will be able to get an equal allotment for participating Back Benchers.

12.50 pm

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered UK sanctions for human rights abuses and corruption.

The UK's Magnitsky sanctions regime has, as many of us will accept, provided the UK Government with an important tool for tackling the most egregious cases of human rights violations and corruption committed around the world, but several problems undermining the effectiveness of our Magnitsky sanctions regime still exist. From a standing start, at a low base, in the first year of the regime the UK made good progress and sanctioned 102 perpetrators for human rights violations and corruption. Strangely, that number has fallen to only six perpetrators in the second year.

Let us contrast that with what has happened in the United States of America, which is a good benchmark. To mark international Human Rights Day and International Anti-Corruption Day in December 2021, the US announced sanctions on 108 perpetrators; 16 countries were targeted, including China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Liberia, Iran, Syria and Ukraine. In the same week, the UK Government announced just one human rights designation under the Magnitsky regime and four designations under the Myanmar country regime—no sanctions were issued for corruption. That is surprising, because there is a lot of evidence out there about corruption and somehow we did not seem to get moving on it.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has said that it recognises that sanctions are most effective when imposed in concert, yet even as it says that the UK fails to keep pace with its allies, particularly the US, which, again, I come back to as a benchmark. The UK has sanctioned only 20% of the perpetrators sanctioned by the US. That is inexplicable; I have no idea what the US knows that we do not know and why it can act faster and more heavily than we can. We are allowing those sanctioned by the US and other jurisdictions to use the UK as a haven to enjoy much of their ill-gotten gains.

The belated lesson we learned from the international response to the Ukraine crisis shows that such co-ordination is possible, but only if there is sincere determination. That must be reflected in the Government's effective use

of these sanctions. In response to the Ukrainian crisis, the FCDO tripled the size of the sanctions taskforce, but that cannot be just for one country. It is surely vital that the increased organisation does not just focus on Russia; there is an awful lot going on around the world where people are getting away with corruption, brutality and criminality.

That brings us to enforcement. The effectiveness of sanctions is too often undermined by a complete lack of enforcement. Before the invasion of Ukraine, the total value of frozen assets in the UK had not changed significantly since the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation's first full year of operations, starting at £12.7 billion in 2017-18 and dropping to £12.2 billion in 2020-21. That does not look to me like an awful lot of increased enforcement, although perhaps somebody knows something that we do not. If we look at the money, we see clearly that there was next to nothing happening.

For many parliamentarians, across all parts of the House, oversight of the Government's use of sanctions has decreased due to amendments made by the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022. I say to the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), who is on the Front Bench, that the UK Government must recommit to reporting to Parliament annually on their use of sanctions and their rationale. On 28 June, the Foreign Secretary told the Foreign Affairs Committee that the FCDO is working with the Home Office and Treasury on confiscating frozen Russian assets. No matter the result of the current leadership race, which I will park for the moment, the Government must surely remain committed to this issue. I want to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister exactly how committed they really are.

The UK has sanctioned over 1,000 individuals connected to the Russia regime, with a total global wealth, I am told, in excess of £150 billion, so we cannot miss this opportunity to finance reparations for the victims of Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine. During the Westminster Hall debate in December last year, members of the all-party parliamentary group on Magnitsky sanctions named 12 individuals and entities involved in some of the most egregious cases of human rights violations across the world. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and I named them to make sure it was clear and that there can be no excuse for the FCDO to suddenly say that it does not know who they are. We went out of our way to make sure it knew, and we have repeated their names consistently. The media have picked this up and repeated them, too. The names are known and these people are known.

There are a number of other cases where the UK also has to take action. All those involved with the all-party parliamentary group will be making recommendations relating to China, Russia, Iran, Sudan, Nicaragua, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bangladesh and Nigeria. We will try to list many of them in the time available, without delaying the House any longer than we have to. I want to run through what has happened in China and why we have so signally failed to deal with the perpetrators of the brutality and crackdown in Xinjiang and Hong Kong—after all, we the guarantors of Hong Kong.

Those sanctioned here in the UK over Xinjiang include Zhu Hailun, former secretary of the political and legal affairs committee of the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region; Wang Junzheng, deputy secretary of the party committee and previous secretary of the political and legal affairs committee; and Wang Mingshan, secretary of the political and legal affairs committee; Chen Mingguo, vice chairman of the Government of the XUAR and the public security bureau of the Xinjiang production construction core. Many Chinese Government officials known to be directly involved in perpetrating abuses in the Uyghur region remain unsanctioned.

Let me compare that with the US, which sanctioned Chen Quanguo, the key architect of all that has been going on in Xinjiang. He is a brutal and ghastly individual who is exercising his power to destroy lives. The US sanctioned the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, a state-owned paramilitary organisation that runs the region's mass coercive labour transfer programme—slavery—which puts at least 1.6 million Uyghurs at risk of slavery in factories and in other locations. The UK sanctioned the XPCC public security bureau, the subsidiary responsible for running the prison camps, but for some strange and peculiar reason not the corporation as a whole. The US also sanctioned Peng Jiarui and Sun Jinlong, both senior officials in XPCC, and Huo LiuJun, the former party secretary for the Xinjiang public security bureau. What is it that the US knows that we do not know?

The EU is also carrying out sanctions at a higher and faster rate than we are. I have four names of people who have been sanctioned by the EU and who remain unsanctioned here, including Zhao Kezhi, Guo Shengkun and Hu Lianhe. They are all sanctioned by the EU, but not by us.

On Hong Kong, we are a guarantor of one country, two systems, a signed international treaty, so we have a unique responsibility. The perpetrators of the crackdown in Hong Kong have arrested peaceful democracy campaigners and others, including even a cardinal, even for opening their mouths and saying anything against the regime. That is a brutal concept that we in this place are meant to stand against. We have still done very little compared to the US. I will leave it to the hon. Member for Rhondda to name them specifically, if he will.

With regard to Hong Kong, 11 people in the Administration have been sanctioned by the US Administration, not one of whom has been sanctioned by the UK Government. What is going on? I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that there is no dodging this. The reality is that we are not doing what we are supposed to do. The UK should sanction these officials because they have undermined the rule of law, dismantled Hong Kong's democracy, cracked down on a free press—a thing we take for granted that is no longer in existence in Hong Kong—and allowed police brutality against protesters. In fact, I discovered quite recently that UK Government money had been going to a British company helping to train the Chinese police force in different methods. I now gather—my hon. Friend might confirm this—that that financing has stopped, but it should not have taken some of us to call for it to be checked and stopped for that to happen.

I want to touch on two other areas, Sudan and Nicaragua, because this is not just about China and Russia. There is more to come, as I say, with names on China. In Sudan, as has been highlighted before, the US

has taken action against the Central Reserve police, who are responsible for the use of excessive and lethal force against protesters. The UK is yet to take action. The Foreign Secretary is committed to looking into this, and I welcome that, but that commitment must yield the force of the UK's sanctions regime.

In Nicaragua, there have long been allegations against the Ortega regime for its use of torture against political opponents. I want to draw attention to one particular individual in this context—Sadrach Zeledón Rocha, mayor of the city of Matagalpa, who was sanctioned by the US for his involvement in violence inflicted against peaceful protesters. We also understand that the FCDO has received detailed evidence of his involvement in the physical torture of and sexual violence against political prisoners.

I say this to my hon. Friend the Minister: we should be a beacon of freedom, decency and anti-corruption in the world. People should look to the UK as the country that sits on a hill and shines its light of freedom everywhere, into every nook and cranny of the dirty, foul dealings of people who use their money and influence, often here in the UK. I ask him to commit the UK Government, at a minimum, to immediately doing all the sanctioning that the US Government have done. They have the evidence and we have the ability to do it. I simply ask that at the end of this debate he says, "Yes, we haven't done enough, but now we are going to do all of it immediately." If he can say that, then he will certainly please us, and he will send hope of freedom to many around the world.

1.3 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and I are tango partners in this—or a tag team, perhaps, depending on which way you want to look at it. I endorse everything he said at the beginning of his speech, but I will start with Iran.

This year, Nazanin Zaghari-Radcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori, two British citizens, were finally allowed to return to the UK following years of detention and serious human rights abuses in Iran. Those responsible for these abuses are yet to be held accountable and they continue to persecute innocent people, holding them hostage for political gain. In September last year, the FCDO received detailed evidence on 10 individuals involved in state hostage taking and related serious human rights violations that we are also investigating in the Foreign Affairs Committee. In December last year, we named three of those perpetrators during a Westminster Hall debate, as has been mentioned. The FCDO has still failed to take any action in relation to those three people, and that is a mystery to me.

In the wake of this inaction, a number of those individuals known to the FCDO played a key role in the ongoing mistreatment of British citizens, including Nazanin—in particular, Ameneh Sadat Zabihipour, a reporter with state-controlled Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, who is known for eliciting forced confessions from prisoners in front of camera during interrogations. This is exactly the opposite of what a free media is all about. I understand that she was present at the airport prior to Nazanin's release, attempting to interview and film her while she was being pressured to confess by the Iranian Government.

[Chris Bryant]

The second person is Hossein Taeb, the former head of the intelligence operation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Under him, the IRGC intelligence ran the notorious Section 2A of Evin prison. He was responsible for the mass arrest and torture of hundreds of prisoners and was the driving force behind the IRGC's hostage taking. I understand that Taeb was instrumental in the continued detention of British citizens, and that his officers enforced the forced, and therefore fake, last-minute confession from Nazanin and subsequently blocked the furlough of other British nationals in defiance of what had been agreed with the United Kingdom.

If the UK had taken action on those individuals last September, or in December when we called for it, they might have thought twice about continuing to abuse British hostages today. As we have seen, Government inaction, I am afraid, always has a cost. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green referred to Hong Kong. How many times have we called for the sanctioning of Carrie Lam? She has been sanctioned by the United States of America, but not by us. We are the country with the closest relationship with Hong Kong. What about Chris Tang, Stephen Lo, John Lee Ka-chiu, Teresa Cheng, Erick Tsang, Xia Baolong, Zhang Xiaoming, Luo Huining, Zheng Yanxiong and Eric Chan? They should all be on the British sanction list, but they are on the US list. It is crazy.

Let me go to Russia—not physically, although I am not sanctioned, oddly enough, but I do not think I would be safe, unlike some other Members. I want to speak about one particular person, who will be known to quite a lot of Members of this House and of the other place. Vladimir Kara-Murza is one of the bravest people I have ever met in politics. He is a British citizen, although originally from Russia. He is currently detained for speaking out against the war in Ukraine. He has been designated as a foreign agent due to his work with international NGOs and his advocacy of Magnitsky sanctions. He is one of the thousands of political prisoners in Russia who have been subject to serious human rights violations. They move him from prison to prison, and nobody has proper access to him.

I have no idea whether the FCDO is taking a proactive enough role in ensuring that Kara-Murza has proper consular support, but I know that the FCDO has received detailed evidence on the following individuals responsible for such persecution. Andrey Yuryevich Lipov, the head of Roskomnadzor—easy for you to say, Madam Deputy Speaker—is the Kremlin's chief censor. He has been instrumental in restricting Russian citizens' access to reliable information about the war in Ukraine and contributed to the arbitrary detention of citizens based on their online activity. He has recently been sanctioned by the EU, but not by the UK.

Konstantin Anatolyevich Chuychenko, the Minister of Justice and a member of the Security Council of Russia, bears ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the foreign agents and undesirable or extremist organisations lists used to suppress opponents and critics of the war in Ukraine. He has been sanctioned by the US and Canada, but not by the UK—there is a theme here.

Then there is Oleg Mikhailovich Sviridenko, the Deputy Minister of Justice under Chuychenko. He is responsible for implementing the foreign agents law. Much like Chuychenko, he plays a key role in the suppression of opponents and critics of Russia's war in Ukraine.

I mention all those names because there is a context: the authoritarian regimes around the world are a serious threat not only to our values in the west, but to our way of life. It is not just about Russia and China, although of course they are often key state actors; it is also, I would argue, about Saudi Arabia.

It is great to be starting a possible trade deal with the Gulf states, but we must ensure that we respect human rights and bring such issues forward throughout the process. After all, how is Saudi Arabia not an authoritarian regime when it executes 81 people in one day and invites a Saudi journalist to an embassy in somebody else's country, kills him and dismembers him on the instructions of the Saudi leadership? We have to be very careful how we tread, because there is no point running away from one authoritarian regime, Russia or China, into the hands of another.

The tentacles of authoritarianism are very lengthy, including the dirty money in the City of London. There were 14 strategic lawsuits against public participation in 2021, but only two in 2019 and 2020, so this is a growing problem in the UK. I warmly welcome the fact that the Ministry of Justice said this week that it will cap costs on lawyers and introduce a three-part test to strike out meritless cases, but we need to go much further. The one thing I would beg of the Minister is to have a proper parliamentary process so we can defend our values and tackle human rights abuses and corruption in authoritarian regimes around the world.

1.10 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I declare an interest as one of only three Members of this House to be sanctioned by both China and Russia. My rather lightweight right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) has been sanctioned only by China.

This is an important issue, and not just to us. It does not come up every day on the doorstep but, when our constituents understand, they feel strongly about it for three reasons. Our constituents expect our trading partners to respect basic human rights, to be transparent about the nature of the goods and services our constituents might buy on the high street, and to be transparent about jobs. We need that greater transparency.

I would like us to go further in legislation on authentication and quality marks to show that goods are produced by countries, regimes and companies that maintain even basic ethical standards, free of slave labour or whatever, just as we increasingly expect to know about the environmental impact and origins of the goods we buy.

Secondly, our constituents expect our taxpayers' money to be used for humanitarian and other purposes, and not to be used to aid corrupt regimes and bodies, as too often happened in the past. Thirdly, our constituents expect us to stand up for the rule of law and freedom of expression that we take for granted in the UK. If we cannot see that in the partners we deal with, we should be critical friends and have difficult conversations with them, however sensitive our relationship might be. It is important to our constituents for all those reasons.

The noble Lord Ahmad, a Foreign Office Minister, said earlier this year:

“By leaving the EU and moving to an independent sanctions policy, the UK has become more agile and has real autonomy to decide how we use sanctions and where it is in our interests to do so.”

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the UK plays a central role in negotiating global sanctions to counter threats to international peace and security, so we have an important, almost unique, position and we need to lead by example.

The Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 is a welcome start, but we are lagging behind in how we use it. I have banged on in this Chamber and in this House for many years about the Chinese communist Government’s abuses, not least in Tibet, where for 63 years, since the invasion of 1959, that peace-loving people have been subject to the most aggressive and hideous abuse and oppression. More than 1 million Tibetan lives have been lost, yet there have been no sanctions against Chinese Government officials. It is only recently, following the publicity on what is happening in Xinjiang, that the fate to which the Tibetans have been subjected for all those years has come to light.

China is effectively asking the UN human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, to bury her highly anticipated report on human rights violations in Xinjiang, which shows the lengths to which China will go not to have this news get out. We have a duty to give a voice to the oppressed living under such regimes.

So what have we done in China? As we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green, there have been limited sanctions because of Xinjiang, against just four Government officials and the Public Security Bureau of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, but, as we mention in every debate, Chen Quanguo—the architect of so much oppression, first in Tibet and now against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang—is still not on our list. The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps is a paramilitary organisation controlling large swathes of the region’s economic production, and it, too, needs to be properly sanctioned. In Hong Kong—where we had that unique historic responsibility—notwithstanding the brutal crackdowns, the undermining of the rule of law and the dismantling of democracy, despite the guarantees we were supposedly given in the Sino-British agreement, no one has been sanctioned by the UK, in contrast to the United States. The list given by my right hon. Friend started with Carrie Lam. Despite all the oppression for which she was responsible, she has never been sanctioned by us, but she has been sanctioned—along with 10 others—by the United States.

There was one very telling bon mot in the Prime Minister’s valedictory comments yesterday. His first piece of advice to his successor was

“stay close to the Americans”.—[*Official Report*, 20 July 2022; Vol. 718, c. 962.]

We have the same interests as America in respect of how we deal with oppressive states. I simply do not understand why we are not mirroring the list of people whom it has rightly found to be in violation of the values that we hold dear, and has therefore sanctioned. I strongly echo the cry of my right hon. Friend: let us have all those people included by our Government as a matter of urgency. It would be a great, speedy achievement on the part of the new Minister if he were to bring that about.

I agree with the recommendations of the all-party parliamentary group on Magnitsky sanctions, and I pay tribute to its members who are present today. We need, very quickly, to increase the number of Magnitsky sanctions imposed by this Government. We need to co-ordinate better and follow the lead of some of our allies who share our values, and then take the lead; we need to resource the FCDO’s scrutiny of some of these people rather better, and we need to act as a global leader. We now have the powers to do that. We have the necessary legislation. It has been a great achievement in the last few years, but it is frustrating that we are not using it properly: that needs to be subject to greater parliamentary oversight. Finally, we need to be bolder in freezing and confiscating, in a speedy fashion—not just securing—the assets of those whom we know to be serial abusers of human rights, and whom we should be sanctioning now.

I urge the Minister to make a name for himself very quickly by taking on board all those recommendations, and everything that he has heard here today.

1.17 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who have done so much on this issue, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing the debate. As has been suggested, it might be polite to call the Magnitsky sanctions a work in progress. This should be an issue that brings all of us together, from all sides, and on which we should be able to reach agreement, but, as we have heard, there is a gap between the rhetoric and the reality in the way in which the sanctions have been implemented thus far. Indeed, in some instances the rhetoric is not even there.

The introduction of Magnitsky sanctions was a positive step in guaranteeing consequences for those around the world who think that they are above the law. It is just unfortunate that the Government have failed to use them to their full potential, or to apply them equally. The horrific scenes that have emerged from Bucha, and many other places in Ukraine, over the last few months are a reminder of our duty to ensure that the people who carry out such atrocities and violations of human rights should be isolated and ultimately brought to justice.

We have heard about the “drop-off” in the general use of Magnitsky sanctions—which are still relatively new—but more broadly, we have seen the Government’s targeted sanctioning of the bankrollers of the invasion of Ukraine become sluggish. In March, the Lord Chancellor and the former Housing Secretary, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), told us that they supported a move from a freeze on assets to pursuing the seizure of assets. They specifically mentioned the seizure of homes belonging to oligarchs to house Ukrainian refugees, but I am afraid we heard no more about that. The Prime Minister said that the aim of the sanctions programme was to “hobble the Russian economy” so that the war became untenable. He also promised that, until Putin responded by withdrawing from Ukraine, he would continue to go further in his efforts. Despite the sanctioning of individuals, I do not think that we have seen that followed through.

[*Andy Slaughter*]

On corruption, I welcome the Lord Chancellor's statement yesterday on the Government's intention to tackle SLAPPs. The measures both to limit costs and to introduce a public interest test and an early strike-out all seem sensible. As always, the devil will be in the detail.

In their response to the call for evidence, the Government recognised:

"Many respondents who reported that they had experienced SLAPPs said that they had been investigating and/or writing about issues of corruption, financial crime and associated issues."

They also said:

"The subject matter of work that sparked SLAPPs was not limited to corruption, however. Other respondents spoke of work on human rights violations, notably at the hands of corporations, and environmental issues as being the subject of SLAPPs."

These powerful people, with access to unlimited resources, have been using SLAPPs to silence criticism and stop the reporting of their shady tactics. The Government are still considering whether to include a penalty for those who have brought forward a SLAPP case. Perhaps where a proven record of corruption can be found, the use of Magnitsky sanctions would be an effective and instant deterrent.

It is important to ensure that the UK applies sanctions on the grounds of both human rights and corruption. There has been a heavy focus on Russian oligarchs, but there are many other atrocities happening around the world. Magnitsky sanctions were used against some of those involved in the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, but Saudi Arabia continues to violate its citizens' human rights as part of its regime, and no further sanctions have been applied.

We have double standards on occupation. We speak out quite rightly against the occupation of Crimea and Donbas, but we say and do much less in relation to the occupation of the Palestinian territories and of Western Sahara. We have already heard about the increasingly urgent situation in Hong Kong, where citizens are detained and imprisoned for simple opposition and free speech in relation to the Chinese regime, but we have done very little other than issue platitudes.

We heard earlier during business questions about the appalling record of the Bahraini regime. There are many such regimes around the world. It is not a coincidence, I am afraid, that we are only willing to speak out, and sometimes act out, against those around the world who are not our friends. We should be able to speak up equally about those countries with which we have traditionally had closer relationships.

In summary, we should do more, we should do it equally and we should also do it quickly. We should not have to rely on journalists like Tom Burgis, Bill Browder and Catherine Belton to do the Government's job for them, and they should not be the victims of much of this oppression. As we go forward, I hope that the Government will be listening and that they will act, particularly by bringing forward early legislation in relation to yesterday's statement. It will not be easy, because public interest defences and cost capping are difficult concepts to put into law. If the Lord Chancellor is still in post at the beginning of September and we have the Bill of Rights, as was promised in today's business statement, I do not want this issue to be

compromised by association with that very controversial and, in my view, unnecessary piece of legislation. Nor do we want to see the anti-SLAPP legislation used to cover for the press barons who would use it to abuse in their own way. Why cannot we have cost capping where claimants as well as defendants are being abused? That is something for the Government to go away and think about.

I welcome very much this debate and I am very grateful to those who secured it. We just need to see some movement from the Government now.

1.24 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I intend to speak only briefly. One of the great privileges of sitting in on a debate such as this is to hear from colleagues who know so much more and have worked so much harder than I on this and have provided real leadership. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), and, indeed, the doubly sanctioned hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton).

If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will briefly break the cross-party unity. I worry that one reason that we have not tackled the sanctions regime nearly as much as we should, which we could easily have done, as he so well illustrated, is that there is still an awful lot of dirty money sloshing around in the City of London and in the London property market, and there are many people there who perhaps do not want that to be tackled. I understand that, but if we are to defend our values, we have to defend them at home as well as abroad. We have heard a menu of likely candidates today against whom we could easily justify bringing in sanctions. There is absolutely no point bringing in the Magnitsky sanctions if we do not then use them. I concur with my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). I welcome the proposals on SLAPPs, and I look forward to any legislation that is required being brought in fairly quickly and having support across the House.

I wish to briefly talk about Mr Bill Browder, of whom I am a huge admirer. I have met him in this House a couple of times. He initiated the whole Magnitsky sanctions debate and the change in the regime. He has been tried in absentia in what is nothing more than a kangaroo court in Russia and been sentenced to ridiculous lengths of time. His commitment to the memory of Sergei Magnitsky and to justice has never been dimmed, and we should pay tribute to Mr Browder and to continue to support him in his work. His book, "Freezing Order", which I have read—all hon. Members should read it—reads like a spy novel, but it is not fiction; it is reality. It is quite astonishing. He talks about businesses and other organisations which are facilitators and live in the west—in the United Kingdom, the European Union—and live and work in the United States. For whatever reason, they are facilitating the people who, as has been demonstrated, are undertaking human rights violations. They are facilitating those people's abuse of our political system to delay, frustrate and put barriers in the way of the search for justice. That facilitation would not be possible in the countries that they come from. Just as I talk about the money sloshing around in the City of London, I say we have to be alive to those

businesses and law companies—my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda has drawn attention to this in previous debates—that are facilitating and supporting the human rights abuses under the cover of our natural commitment to fair justice and to the fact that everyone should be included.

Those companies need to declare themselves. I am very much in favour, as Bill Browder is in his book, of a foreign agents registration Act for the UK. That is necessary to see who these facilitators are. Frankly, at some point, those businesses, law companies and PR companies need to decide which side their bread is buttered on and where their best interests lie.

Chris Bryant: I completely agree that we should have a foreign agents registration Bill. My understanding is that the Government are intending to put that in the middle of the National Security Bill, but only on Report. Is it not vital that we have proper debate on that, with at least two days on the Floor of the House to consider it, because it is a matter of constitutional security?

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend is an expert in matters of procedure. He is also an expert in matters Magnitsky. If he thinks that that is the best way forward, I think it is the best way forward.

I do not wish to detain the House any longer, but I pay tribute to Bill Browder and all those people around him who, in the face of death threats, have continued their search for justice. We owe it to them to support them.

1.29 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on securing this debate and thank the Backbench Business Committee. I will not be taking part in the Sir David Amess Adjournment debate, so I want to place on record the thanks of my party to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to Mr Speaker and the wider team of staff, for all you do to support the House. I hope everybody has a good recess.

It is a sad fact that human rights abuses are taking place everywhere in the world, every day. As an MP elected in 2019, I find the information we get on this subject—the wide variety of places where it is happening and also what we hear from constituents—almost overwhelming. I am very grateful to my constituents in North East Fife for raising such issues with me. Like others, I want to refer to some of the campaigns and issues that have caught my attention.

First, I want to talk about political prisoners in Belarus, where there are currently 1,260 persons classified globally as political prisoners. These include bloggers to business owners, politicians to peaceful protesters—hundreds of people imprisoned in politically motivated persecutions, simply because they have exercised their right to freedom of expression and political participation. Through the #WeStandBYyou solidarity campaign, I am one of a number of godparents to one such political prisoner, and his name is Pavel Drozd. He was arrested on 3 November 2020 for alleged computer hacking and was tried earlier this year—a trial held behind closed doors without any due process. He has been sentenced to three and a half years in a penal colony. We sadly know very little about his welfare because his family,

quite understandably, have distanced themselves from the campaign for his freedom. They are at threat themselves for speaking out, so I do have sympathy with their position.

Will the Minister say what steps the Government are taking to support political prisoners such as Pavel, and to put pressure on the Belarusian Government to free such prisoners and reinstate proper democratic practices? I would also like to invite the Minister, and indeed anybody else in the House as a whole, to join me in solidarity by becoming a godparent. I am happy to send over information to anyone who expresses an interest.

Like others, I would like to talk about Bahrain. I know that it was mentioned this morning and that concern for the plight of prisoners in Bahrain is shared across the House. Indeed, I highlight my early-day motion on the issue and thank Members who have signed it. Dr al-Singace is serving a life sentence for his role in the 2011 pro-democracy uprising in Bahrain. His trial did not meet any of the standards of fairness that we would expect. He has been tortured and denied medical treatment, despite having chronic medical conditions. His work, which was apolitical, has been confiscated and his calls to his family have been stopped. In response to the conditions that he and others are suffering, he has been on hunger strike and has refused to eat solids for over a year. One can only imagine the impact of that on his physical and mental health.

Last year I met with Ali Mushaima, who was on hunger strike outside the Bahraini embassy calling for the release of Dr al-Singace and his own father, Hassan Mushaima, who has also been sentenced to life imprisonment for his role in that uprising. Mr Mushaima is 74 and is in remission from cancer. For the past year he has been held in a medical facility, but the authorities continue to deny him medical care. These are men who are facing life in prison without health care and are being subjected to degrading treatment simply because they believe in democracy.

The Government have continued to hold high-level meetings with Bahraini officials, and Prince Nasser continues to freely attend high-profile events such as Royal Ascot. Just two months ago, it was reported that he met with the Prime Minister. I very much hope those discussions involved highlighting what I have just described. I hope the Minister will join me in denouncing the treatment of Bahraini prisoners, and indeed the anti-democratic rule of a country where freedom of speech and assembly is repressed and the torture of dissenters is widespread.

As I have said, human rights abuses are taking place all the time. As we have seen from the war in Ukraine, where there is the political will for sanctions, then they are applied; but as others have highlighted, for other countries and other places, this Government are strangely reticent. I am conscious that, just last weekend, the “Home of Golf” in my constituency hosted the Open. Golf is not a sport that has been devoid of controversies in this area. It makes it difficult for us to feel that we can make a stand and speak out about the support for potentially repressive regimes if the Government do not do things to support that.

More recently, the situation in Sri Lanka has been at the forefront of everyone’s minds, as the Rajapaksa Government force their country into crisis with unsound economic policies, corruption and draconian police powers. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and

[Wendy Chamberlain]

Surbiton (Ed Davey) recently called in the House for an international arrest warrant to be issued for President Rajapaksa. I reiterate that call and hope that the Minister can respond to that point.

Finally, I want to highlight the fact that the Iranian hostage takers have failed to have any action taken against them through Magnitsky sanctions. We are all grateful for the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Anoosheh Ashoori and Morad Tahbaz in March, but the Government's refusal to use the sanctions regime available to it arguably emboldened their captors. All three went through unthinkably awful experiences before their release that could have been avoided if we had actually taken action. I hope that the Minister will explain to the House and to Nazanin, Anoosheh and Morad why that was not done at the time.

As the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green said in his opening remarks, tools are available within the FCDO. We must properly utilise the taskforce and Parliament must be fully sighted on this. On the last day of term, there is clearly an interest in this topic in the House—please act.

1.36 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): The UK's role as a leader in the protection of human rights is something to be proud of. We are lucky to live in a country where we do not need to worry about having our rights breached or being abused in the worst ways. It is important, however, that we make use of the tools that we have to deter other world leaders from putting minority groups in danger. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) mentioned Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori, and it was a good day when we saw their plane touch down on UK soil at RAF Brize Norton.

Turning to China, the state has persecuted and abused minorities for decades there. The Uyghur people are a prime example. The People's Republic of China has quite openly sought to completely squash a population based on their religion, looking to eradicate them. That campaign has seen the Uyghur tribunal find that the PRC has committed genocide against them. The evidence seen by the tribunal was horrific. It makes for deeply uncomfortable reading, yet the PRC pushed back on the findings—that is unsurprising but galling in the face of the mountains of evidence, because they have so far not faced the necessary consequences for their actions.

The Uyghurs are not the only persecuted minority facing such atrocities in China. It is a country that demands total allegiance to the ruling Chinese Communist party. President Xi Jinping has consolidated his power, asserting himself as the ultimate power in the country in a way that his more recent predecessors did not.

Followers of the religion Falun Gong have also faced a campaign of persecution under the guise of the state's doctrine of atheism. In reality, it was what the ruling CCP saw as a threat to its total dominance—the religion's peaceful teachings were popular and its following grew faster than anticipated. Like the Uyghurs, followers of Falun Gong have been subjected to re-education camps, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, torture and death. They have been violated in the worst ways and are allegedly the main victims of forced organ harvesting in China. It is unthinkable and distressing.

Religion has been at the root of almost all similar campaigns of hatred and oppression for centuries—unacceptably so, but that is a sad truth. I recognise, though, that religion is not always at the heart of these problems. Staying with China as an example, we can look at how they have sought to extend their reach, oppressing what they see as treasonous dissent for any reason. Only a couple of weeks ago, I joined colleagues in Westminster Hall to debate the situation in Hong Kong. The treatment of those with British national overseas status as China tightens its grip on the region has been horrifying to watch, with citizens victimised for wanting to live in a democratic society.

Taiwan is another example of how China is looking to dominate what it sees as China's, even if the Taiwanese people do not. After what we have seen playing out in Ukraine, tensions and anxiety are incredibly high, and it is understandable why. Despite all that, only five Magnitsky sanctions have been designated in China so far. China is not the only country by a long shot that the Government should be looking at closely in this respect. The UK's sanction regime, applied in the right way and swiftly, could have a real and tangible impact, so why are we not utilising it to its full effect?

Keeping pace with our international allies is crucial if sanctions are to have the desired impact. In the first year of legislation being in place, the UK handed out 102 sanctions to perpetrators of corruption and human rights abuses. The next year, it was just six. To date, we have sanctioned only 20% of the individuals that the United States has, as we have heard, and I struggle to understand why progress is so slow. Co-ordination is absolutely essential.

Chris Bryant: Will the hon. Lady add another country, Nigeria, to her list? It is nothing to do with religion in this case, but there was a terrible massacre on 20 October 2020. Tukur Yusuf Buratai and Ganiyu Raji were two of the officers in charge of the shooting on civilians at a protest on that day. Would she support adding them to the sanctions list?

Margaret Ferrier: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention, and I know my friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) often mentions Nigeria. I agree with the hon. Member for Rhondda that a whole host of people should be added to the list. We can see how effective it has been with Russian sanctions.

Co-ordination is essential. Not doing so effectively undermines the very purpose for which the sanctions were created. Like so many colleagues, I am passionate about the protection of human rights. It is not enough to just say that we have the liberty to enjoy them here at home; if the UK wants to be seen as a world leader and an advocate for the oppressed and victimised, we have to do our part in modelling that behaviour for the rest of the world. We have the tools already. Let us use them to build something that will stand the test of time and help those who need it the most.

1.43 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I thank all hon. and right hon. Members for their magnificent and significant contributions. They have covered many of the subject matters. I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief. I was just sitting here writing down

a list, and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) mentioned Nigeria. Nigeria is an area where there has been barbarism towards the humanists. When the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) and I visited Nigeria back in May, we asked the question for him.

There are abuses across the world. There are the Sunnis and the Shi'as in the middle east, the Baha'is in Iran, Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow and Russia, and the Uyghurs and Falun Gong in China. I asked a question in business questions about the issue. The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) mentioned all those people too. We have Hindus in Pakistan, Muslims in India and Buddhists in Tibet. I know the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) is always interested in that issue, and I met some Buddhist people from Tibet this very week on Tuesday morning, and they reiterated the clear issues for them. They were very interested in the kidnapping and disappearance of the Panchen Lama, and the hon. Gentleman knows that case only too well. We have Baptists in Ukraine. Where Russia has taken over, Baptist pastors have gone missing, and we do not know where they are. The churches are destroyed. It is a catalogue of pure evil and wickedness across the world. It is not just one place.

In the short time I have, I will refer to the international ministerial conference that took place just a few weeks ago with 80 countries. It served as a forum where Her Majesty's Government encouraged international co-operation to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief for all. Six pledges were made, four of which are pertinent to today's debate. They were: to raise awareness of the current challenges to FORB issues across the world and of best practice in preventing violations and abuses; to speak out bilaterally, as well as through multilateral institutions; to look for opportunities to work more closely together with international partners to implement practical solutions; and to reinforce global coalitions for collective action.

The hon. Member for Rhondda and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) have spoken out a number of times about freedom of religion or belief, and one of the strongest tools we have is Magnitsky-style sanctions. We want to see them working. We must work with other countries like us to champion the rule of law and equal rights for all members of society. These regulations are vital to protect vulnerable minority communities, to stop perpetrators profiting from these crimes and to punish those responsible. We must not forget that it is often minority religious and belief communities who are the canary in the coal mine.

Chris Bryant: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise the phrase “seamless garment”? It refers to Jesus's robe when it was taken off him and they decided to cast lots for it rather than cut it up. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that human rights are a seamless garment in that we cannot separate one category of human rights from another? Would he therefore also seek to condemn the execution in Iran of Mehrdad Karimpour and Farid Mohammadi for homosexuality in February this year?

Jim Shannon: I certainly would, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman's analogy of the seamless garment. I believe that human rights and religious belief work

together and that when we attack one, we attack the other, so I have absolutely no compunction in agreeing with him on that. I will say that and put it on the record.

During the ministerial conference, numerous violations of freedom of religious belief were highlighted. For those cases, the threshold of evidence needed for Magnitsky sanctions was more than high enough. I want to raise one case in particular. Even though it has already been mentioned in today's debate—the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green has been to the fore in this matter—the situation in Xinjiang deserves special attention, especially as this House, the Home Secretary and our closest allies recognise that there is overwhelming evidence of genocide against Uyghur Muslims.

Since 2003, the Chinese Communist party has sought to eradicate—I use that word on purpose; the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) used it as well—the Uyghur culture from China. For nearly 20 years, there has been a systematic approach to Uyghurs that has led to mass forced labour, forced relocation, the detention of up to 2 million people, arbitrary torture, forced sterilisation, executions and even organ harvesting on a commercial basis. As China commits these crimes, it also seeks to profit from the detention of the Uyghur Muslims, and as the arrests have increased, so has the economic output of the region.

This is where Magnitsky sanctions can make a real difference and where the UK can start to implement its duty to prevent genocide under the 1948 genocide convention. This is exactly the kind of situation the regulations were put in place for. Indeed, in 2020 Her Majesty's Government announced co-ordinated action with the EU, the US and Canada to introduce sanctions on four Chinese Government officials and the public security bureau of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, which runs the detention camps in the region. However, unfortunately and disappointingly, the UK Government have refused to impose sanctions on senior Chinese Government officials who are known to be directly involved in perpetrating the abuses, including the six perpetrators who have been sanctioned under near-identical legislation in the United States of America. This is part of a trend where the UK is getting slower in protecting global human rights. I say this disappointedly and very respectfully to the Minister, who I know has the same level of interest in protecting global human rights as I have. I am proud of our country's commitment to upholding human rights on the world stage and that we are seen as global leaders in this field, but this reputation should not be taken for granted.

In the first year of the UK's Magnitsky sanctions regime, 102 perpetrators were sanctioned for human rights abuses. However, the following year this fell to just six perpetrators. In the same period, the United States sanctioned more than 130 individuals or companies, again under near-identical legislation, when the threshold of evidence was met for both the UK and US regimes. The major question that everybody is asking is: if the American Government can do it, why can't we?

The Government's own impact assessment for the global anti-corruption sanctions legislation stated that the policy envisaged the UK working “more closely with international partners, including the US and Canada”.

Clearly we are failing to keep pace with sanctions designations. This lack of co-ordination not only weakens the impact on perpetrators but encourages sanctioned

[*Jim Shannon*]

individuals to use the UK as a safe haven to profit from corruption or human rights abuses, as many Members have said today. It also sends a message that the UK is unwilling to condemn such behaviour. As of today, the UK has sanctioned only 20% of those sanctioned by the United States. We need to do better. When I and others in this House raise specific questions on sanctions in this Chamber we always get the same response—namely, that it is the policy of the Government not to discuss specific individuals before sanctions are enacted. For goodness' sake, just do them! Just follow what everybody else does. More transparency is needed from the Government and there is need for increased parliamentary oversight.

I will finish with four questions to the Minister, and I am sorry that I seem to be rushing. That is “rushing” as in rushing my words, not as in Russian. I have questions I want to ask the Minister. What steps have the Government taken to co-ordinate or share evidence of abuses with the United States and the other 22 countries with Magnitsky sanctions legislation? Does the Minister agree that Magnitsky-style sanctions can be an appropriate tool to help to prevent genocide and other crimes against humanity? Will the Government expand the sanctions on perpetrators of atrocities in Xinjiang province? Finally, will the Government use evidence presented in the international ministerial conference on freedom of religion or belief, held just a few weeks ago, to enact sanctions on perpetrators of egregious abuses of the rights of religious minorities? I know that the issue is close to the Minister's heart, and we are looking for a substantial response. No pressure, but I want the right answers today.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We now come to the Front Bench contributions.

1.50 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I, too, begin by thanking the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for securing this debate. I also put on record my appreciation for all that they do as co-chairs of the all-party parliamentary group on Magnitsky sanctions. I also thank those who have spoken in this debate—the hon. Members for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), and my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), as well, of course, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

It is essential that we take every opportunity in this House to talk about the plight of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the Rohingya in Myanmar and the Yazidis in Iraq, and that we shine a light on state corruption and abuses of human rights where we see them. That is why the passing of the Magnitsky law in 2020 was so important, putting in place a system whereby meaningful sanctions can be taken against states, institutions and individuals involved in human rights abuses or corrupt practices. It was an extremely important first step, but it was only the first step, because having the law in place and not using it effectively is almost as bad as not having the law there at all. The APPG's report “Stuck In First Gear” makes for depressing reading for those of us who desperately

want to see the United Kingdom lead the way in freezing the assets of, and imposing meaningful sanctions on, individuals and states who commit the most egregious human rights violations.

It appears that having given themselves the power to do something significant and meaningful, the UK Government are becoming increasingly timid in the exercise of that power. As the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West pointed out, from a first-year high of 102 sanctions, there were only six in the following year. As my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife and the hon. Member for Strangford said, in highlighting the ongoing abuses in Bahrain and China, as much as we would all love to believe that things were getting better around the world and the situation had improved so much, we know that it simply has not. Indeed, it could be argued that things are getting much worse. It is therefore extremely disappointing to learn that in the opinion of so many highly respected members of the APPG there is a paucity of ambition when it comes to using the legislation effectively and consistently.

Lord Ahmad said:

“Sanctions work best when multiple countries act together...to send a political signal that such behaviour is intolerable.”

But, as we have heard, when the United States announced sweeping sanctions against 16 countries and many individuals, the UK used the power only once against an individual and on four occasions against the Myanmar regime. Why are the powers not being used in a co-ordinated fashion and in tandem with our democratic allies? Perhaps the Minister could enlighten us as to exactly what was the behaviour that the United States saw at the end of 2021 in China, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Liberia, Syria, Ukraine and Iran that they deemed to be intolerable but which the UK Government presumably found to be tolerable?

Yesterday, I and my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) were in contact with Richard Ratcliffe who, along with his wife Nazanin, has repeatedly called on the Foreign Secretary to use Magnitsky sanctions and whatever other options are available to better protect British nationals who are being illegally or arbitrarily detained overseas. As the hon. Member for Rhondda said—Richard made this point, too—the Foreign Secretary has had in her possession since last September a file containing 10 names of Iran's hostage takers, including three people directly involved in Nazanin's detention and imprisonment. Could the Minister explain why no sanctions have been imposed on any of those Iranian officials, who both we and they know are complicit in the arrest and detention of UK nationals and in human rights abuses against them?

In 2020, the Government's intention was to take a global leadership role on Magnitsky sanctions. No one anywhere in the House would criticise them for that ambition, but to be a global leader we must ensure that our own house is in order. Further to the important points made by the hon. Members for City of Chester and for Hammersmith, we must close the loopholes in the UK's financial system.

Earlier this week, we debated the deteriorating security situation in Nigeria, where endemic corruption is taking that country to the brink of collapse. Next year's presidential elections could be the last chance Nigeria has to prevent

itself from descending into chaos and even, heaven forbid, civil war. But that endemic corruption is not just a problem for Nigeria to solve in isolation. Professor Sadiq Isah Radda, the Nigerian President's anti-corruption tsar, said:

"There are thieves and there are receivers, London is most notorious safe haven for looted funds in the world today. Without safe havens for looted funds, Nigeria and Africa will not be this corrupt. So, for the West to have a moral voice of calling Nigeria or Africa as corrupt, they must shun looted funds by closing safe havens and returning all looted funds to victim countries."

I urge the Minister, in addition to strengthening and imposing meaningful Magnitsky sanctions, to look strongly, closer to home, at the role that financial institutions here in the City of London are playing in facilitating corruption, to the extent that a Commonwealth country could be on the brink of collapse if something is not done very quickly.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The summer Adjournment debate will start at around 2.15 pm, so any Members wishing to take part in that debate should start to head towards the Chamber.

1.57 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) not only for securing this critical debate but for their assiduous leadership on these matters across the House. I also welcome the Minister to his new role. I am delighted that we are engaging in such important discussions before the House rises for the summer, and I thank Members across the House for their thoughtful and valuable contributions to the debate.

Let me begin by reiterating Labour's support for the Magnitsky sanctions regime introduced back in 2020 and acknowledging the constructive nature of interactions between the Government and the Opposition on, for example, the implementation of sanctions on Russia since its illegal and barbarous invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, I have just received a summons to a debate at the start of the new term on sanctions on Belarus.

Where the Government have got it right, we have supported them, but where we believe they should and could have gone further, we must say so. I express my heartfelt condolences to the family of Sergei Magnitsky. If we are to honour his memory, the full force of our sanctions regime must be utilised to root out and condemn human rights abuses worldwide. Across the House, we know that sanctions work only when the UK works multilaterally to hold the perpetrators of abuses to account by leading and drawing on our historic and defining global partnerships, not least with the United States and the European Union. That has rightly been raised by Members across the House today.

The foreign policy of the next Labour Government will be grounded in securing the rights of people across the world and ensuring that Britain plays a crucial international role in advocating for the rule of law and, particularly when it comes to human rights, working with others and not lagging behind. This matters now more than ever, because we stand at a crossroads: a global trend towards authoritarianism and human rights abuses could prevail if we do not utilise every weapon in our diplomatic and legal arsenals to counter it.

Freedom House articulated this clearly in its most recent "Freedom in the World" report, which concluded:

"The present threat to democracy is the product of 16 consecutive years of decline in global freedom...As of today, some 38 percent of the global population live in Not Free countries, the highest proportion since 1997."

There are so many examples to list. Colleagues across the House have done an exceptional job of providing a sense of the dangers in the global picture and how our sanctions regime must match them.

Of course, in Ukraine, Russian forces have committed egregious and heinous abuses in the deliberate targeting of civilian areas, the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war, and the use of mines and explosive equipment to murder innocent people returning to their homes. We are now hearing shocking stories about the forced relocation of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens, including children, into the Russian far east, and the tearing apart of families in a brazen and appalling attempt to undermine and wipe out Ukrainian society.

We have supported the Government's sanctions regime, which is levelled at Putin's inner circle, oligarchs and the profiteers of the regime, but I want to put on the record that the unity between the Government and Opposition on this issue is not uniformity. I had some frank discussions with one of the Minister's predecessors—the right hon. Member for Braintree (James Cleverly), who is now the Secretary of State for Education—when we believed that the broadening of the sanctions regime did not come quickly enough and when there were clear cracks in the system or a lack of resources.

Let me follow up on the issues that I have raised consistently. What is the Government's latest position on the seizure and repurposing, as opposed to merely the freezing, of the assets of those who have been sanctioned? Indeed, are any considerations being given to the repatriation of revenue to support humanitarian and reconstruction efforts in Ukraine?

I have just returned from an extremely useful trip to the western Balkans. It is clear that the situation in that region is very dangerous and fragile. Indeed, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Christian Schmidt, has warned of the real prospect of a return to violence. Many in the House will recall the scale and severity of the human rights abuses committed in both Bosnia and Kosovo, which I visited in the 1990s. Labour will continue to support the Government in levelling sanctions at those throughout the region, such as Milorad Dodik, for their role in inciting tensions recently.

As has been mentioned, we must hold those in Nigeria to account for the appalling crimes that have been committed—not least the shocking events in 2020, when military forces opened fire at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos. The then Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), called on the Nigerian Government to investigate the reports of brutality at the hands of the security forces, yet to date the Government have failed to impose any sanctions in response, despite their having received, as I understand it, detailed evidence from Redress and Nigerian partners that identifies the perpetrators. We have heard in recent days about the shocking sentences handed out to three gay men in northern Nigeria, who were sentenced to be stoned to death. Surely we must take action against those who perpetrate or threaten such horrific abuses.

[Stephen Doughty]

After the military coup in Myanmar, the Government took the welcome decision to implement further sanctions against Burmese military organisations—but that took two months, despite egregious crimes being committed against the population in real time. Is it an issue with our existing sanctions regulations, which need to be modified to cope with crises in real time? Or, as I alluded to earlier, are there often simply too few people at the FCDO and the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation to ensure prompt and consistent responses? I know that the number in the FCDO unit has increased, and I pay tribute to the officials who do such excellent work in this policy area, but we are lagging behind the United States and others in terms of the investment and resources that we put in. The staff numbers at the OFSI are simply not enough. We need to see better co-ordination among the OFSI, the National Crime Agency and other enforcement bodies to ensure a consistent approach.

Let me turn to a fundamental point that a number of Members raised: why is it the case that the UK has sanctioned only 20% of the perpetrators of abuses who have been sanctioned by the United States? I cannot understand how we are so far behind one of our closest allies. According to Redress and the all-party parliamentary group on Magnitsky sanctions, there has been a slowdown in the use of Magnitsky sanctions in recent months. The ramifications are immense.

We have heard about Xinjiang, where the human rights abuses have shocked the world. I pay tribute to those from all parties in the House, many of whom are present, who have been consistent in raising those abuses. However, from the party secretary who has orchestrated the brutal crackdown on the Uyghurs and other religious minorities to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, which runs the mass coercive-labour programmes throughout the region, there have been exemptions that are frankly staggering. Why have the Government held off? What more do they need to see to do the right thing?

Chris Bryant: Another problematic issue with the UK lagging behind others is that sometimes people move their assets in case the sanctions come to them as well. We have seen significant cases, one of which I raised with the Foreign Secretary when she appeared before the Foreign Affairs Committee recently: in the case of Sistema, the individual simply gave half his material goods to his son and managed to escape the sanctions. Why are we so slow?

Stephen Doughty: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend's point, which emphasises the point that I made about acting multilaterally, quickly, urgently and in co-ordination.

We heard a lot from my hon. Friend and others about Hong Kong. The United States have sanctioned at least 11 officials—from Carrie Lam to Chris Tang—for their role in infringing on the rights of the people of Hong Kong. What is the Government's trepidation about this? We can look at Ali Ghanaatkar in Iran or Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo in Sudan; the former was head of interrogations in Evin prison, while the latter is responsible for gross human rights abuses in Darfur. I have not even got time to mention the many examples that we have

heard from across the middle east and the Gulf states. What of Alexander Lebedev—will the Minister clarify? We know that he has been sanctioned by Canada as a former KGB agent and known associate of Putin. Have we sanctioned him, and if not, why not?

We want the Government to make proper and far-reaching use of the Magnitsky regime that we adopted back in 2020, and indeed the country regimes, but that requires ambition, urgency and proper resourcing. The House has made its voice very clear today; there has been complete consistency across the House, as I hope the Minister has heard clearly. The protection and advancement of human rights should be at the heart of any British foreign policy, and I hope that the agreement that the Minister has heard across the House will result in action commensurate with the violations that are unfolding across the world today.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I welcome the Minister to his new role—Rehman Chishti.

2.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Rehman Chishti): This is my first appearance at the Dispatch Box; I do not know whether it will be my last. First, I want to pay real tribute to the work of our brilliant United Kingdom Foreign Office officials, who work day in, day out around the world on advancing the United Kingdom's interests. All in the House will want to join me in paying tribute to them, and specifically their work on sanctions—thank you.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) for securing this important debate. I know from speaking to both of them their commitment and passion about doing everything that we can to stand up for human rights. I pay tribute to the work done by all colleagues in the House to advance human rights, as well as—I look to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—freedom of religion or belief.

I thank the all-party parliamentary group on Magnitsky sanctions for all that it does. Three of the recommendations made through its secretariat, Redress, were considered by the sanctions team at the Foreign Office and designations were made with regard to those specific cases. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Rhondda is suggesting certain figures with his fingers, but the specific numbers have to meet specific criteria.

On what the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) said, yes of course I absolutely pay tribute to Bill Browder, who is an inspiration. He did amazing work on getting the United Kingdom where we need to be on the Magnitsky sanctions. I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), the former Foreign Secretary, for working with Mr Browder on a bipartisan basis to take the agenda forward. I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) for saying that he wants to work together on a bipartisan basis, and I very much look forward to working with him.

We stand in full support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green and all in this House and the other place who have been sanctioned

by foreign Governments. On my left, to the back, is my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who has been doubly sanctioned. I say to all parliamentarians who have been sanctioned that nothing that those foreign Governments do will ever stop Members in this place from speaking up for what is right and proper.

In my new role as the Minister with responsibility for sanctions, I will continue to engage with parliamentarians across the board. Having heard about the different areas around the world that have been highlighted, I can say—and I did say to the team at the Foreign Office when I was first appointed—that we should have regular engagement with Members of Parliament.

Andy Slaughter: That is all very general, but may I ask the Minister about one specific case, which has been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and by the shadow Minister? I refer to the Lekki massacre in Nigeria. We know when and where it happened. A judicial inquiry is taking place. We know who was responsible. We know that people were killed by the military and the police there. Given all that, why have the Government not imposed sanctions in that specific case?

Rehman Chishti: The hon. Gentleman knows, having been a parliamentarian here for many, many years, that as a Minister of the Crown I cannot comment on specific cases. What I can say is that I will take the matter away and ask the Foreign Office officials to look at it. I will also say that when we come back in September we will ensure that we have that meeting and engagement with Foreign Office officials, looking at sanctions, and that if I am the Minister, I will look at this specific issue.

The Government have long recognised the power of sanctions to promote our values and interests, and combat state threats, terrorism, cyber-attacks and chemical weapons. We have demonstrated just how powerful these measures can be. Working closely with our allies, we are introducing the most severe sanctions that Russia has ever faced, to help cripple Putin's war machine. That is a key part of our response, alongside our economic, humanitarian and military assistance for Ukraine and its great, brave people in these difficult, challenging times. Our sanctions include asset freezes on 18 of Russia's major banks, with global assets worth £940 billion. Since Putin's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine almost five months ago, we have sanctioned more than 1,000 individuals and 100 entities.

Chris Bryant: The Minister should bear in mind that he has managed to do that only because we have basically adopted all the EU sanctions, and all the Canadian and American sanctions, and that those run out in a few days, so he is going to have to do them all over again. It will not be the same number by the time we get back in September.

Rehman Chishti: Let us look at what we have done in comparison with partners around the world, as the hon. Gentleman mentions what we have done with regard to other European partners. We have done more than any other country in the sanctions we have put forward as part of the action we have taken against Russia for its illegal invasion in Ukraine.

Chris Bryant: That's not true!

Rehman Chishti: The hon. Gentleman says that that is not true. I am very happy to have that conversation with him and officials, but my understanding is that for the number of sanctions we have applied in connection with Putin's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, the figures are about 1,000 individuals and 100 entities. In my understanding, that is the largest number of any international partner in the world.

Stephen Doughty: I asked the Minister a very specific question. Canada has sanctioned Alexander Lebedev, so will he confirm whether or not the UK has done so?

Rehman Chishti: I can ask my officials to look at that specific point and come back to the hon. Gentleman on it.

The UK has designated more individuals than any other G7 member, demonstrating our leadership in this field. We also brought forward emergency legislation so that we could respond even more swiftly and effectively. We now have a significantly expanded sanctions directorate within the FCDO to take forward these measures. I visited it this week, where I was impressed by the incredibly hard work everyone is putting in to deliver our objectives. Let me be clear that these measures are working. Sanctions imposed by the UK and our international partners are having deep and damaging consequences for Putin's ability to wage war.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green asked about greater collaboration with the US as we move forward on sanctions designations. I will be in the US next week to speak to counterparts, looking at sanctions and how we can work together even more in the coming months and years on this point. That may not be quite what he wanted me to say, but it shows our commitment to work with our international partners. Having come into office 10 days ago, I will be in the US next week meeting counterparts about this specific, important issue.

Meanwhile, we continue to impose sanctions in support of human rights and democracy elsewhere in the world, using our geographic regimes. That includes measures cutting off arms flows to the military in Myanmar, targeting those supporting the Assad regime in Syria, and bearing down on politicians who undermine the hard-won peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In recent years, we have boosted the tools at our disposal through our independent sanctions framework. We launched our global human rights sanctions regime in 2020 and our global anti-corruption sanctions regime the following year.

Our global human rights sanctions regime helps us hold to account those involved in serious human rights violations or abuses—including torture, slavery and forced labour—by imposing targeted asset freezes and travel bans. Since the regime was launched, we have designated 81 individuals and entities. We have used it to stand up for the rights of citizens in countries ranging from Russia to Belarus, Venezuela, Pakistan, The Gambia and North Korea. The hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) mentioned Belarus. Only yesterday, the other place approved the Republic of Belarus (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2022, which will come back to this House in September, allowing for further debate.

[Rehman Chishty]

China and Hong Kong have been mentioned by parliamentarians across the House. We have taken robust action to hold China to account for its appalling human rights violations in Xinjiang, including systematic restrictions on religious practice. On that point, I thank the hon. Member for Strangford for the amazing work of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, which he chairs. As a former special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, and having worked with my US counterpart, Sam Brownback, the US ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, to set up the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance—it had 26 member states at the time—I totally understand what such partnership working and collaboration can do to advance interests that are important to both our great countries.

Last year, we imposed unprecedented joint sanctions against those responsible for enforcing China's oppressive policies in Xinjiang. We took that action alongside 29 other countries, demonstrating the strength of international resolve. We have also led international efforts to hold China to account at the United Nations, taken measures to tackle forced labour in supply chains, funded research to expose China's actions, and consistently raised our concerns at the highest level.

On Hong Kong, we continue to challenge China for breaching its legally binding commitments under the joint declaration. We have called out its conduct on the world stage. Together with our G7 partners, we have condemned the steady erosion of political and civil rights. We have also opened our doors to the people of Hong Kong through a new immigration path for British nationals overseas, with over 120,000 applications. Moreover, we have suspended the UK-Hong Kong extradition treaty indefinitely, and extended to Hong Kong the arms embargo applied to mainland China since 1989, as updated in 1998.

Although it would not be appropriate for me to speculate about future possible designations, we remain committed to working with partners to hold China to account, and not only China. We remain committed to working with international partners, whether our friends in Canada, our friends in Australia, who apply a similar system of sanctions, or the EU. We will work together, hand in hand, to ensure that everything that can be done is being done to hold those perpetrators to account for serious human rights violations. That is a top priority for this Government.

Our global anti-corruption sanctions regime targets those involved in bribery and misappropriation, stopping them freely entering the United Kingdom and using it as a safe haven for dirty money. The hon. Members for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) talked about how we can address the issue of dirty money coming into the United Kingdom. That is also a key priority for the Government. In just over a year, we have designated 27 people, including Ajay, Atul and Rajesh Gupta and their associate Salim Essa, who were at the heart of long-running corruption that caused significant damage to South Africa's economy.

I conclude by reflecting on the words of Winston Churchill:

“It is wonderful what great strides can be made when there is a resolute purpose behind them.”—[*Official Report*, 7 May 1947; Vol. 437, c. 455.]

The United Kingdom Government have demonstrated our vision and purpose by taking significant steps on this issue. Of course we can do more, and we will do more. The Government will work with parliamentarians to do all we can to ensure that serious human rights violators are brought to account.

Again, I thank the hon. Member for Rhondda and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green for all they have done. I look forward to working with them when Parliament returns in September. I go to the United States next week, so this timely debate enables me to say to my US counterparts how important this issue is not just for Congress but for Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Before I call Sir Iain Duncan Smith, I want to tell everyone that there will be a six-minute limit on speeches in the summer Adjournment debate.

2.21 pm

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: I start by thanking Redress, which has been hugely influential and important. Without its data, we would not have been able to have this debate today.

My hon. Friend the Minister must not take this personally, but this is not good enough—I am sorry. He set out a very laudable list of people and countries, but the fact remains that we have sanctioned only 20% of what the US has sanctioned. There is no answer yet as to why the US knows more than we do, and why we have not asked it for what it knows that we do not know. As we go into recess, the Government now have a few weeks to get this sorted out and to come back with a list of all the people they will sanction just to get us level with the US. I would like to see us sanction more, but there we are.

I draw the House's attention to the reality in Xinjiang, where the Uyghurs are being decimated. It is the crime of all crimes: genocide. How have we not sanctioned the architects of this brutal, foul crime? Will my hon. Friend please go back to his office and say, “Get the names of those the Americans have sanctioned, and let us now sanction them immediately.”

We should stand for freedom, human rights and the rule of law, which are features of what we do here. If we cannot spell out to the world that we will not allow these acts of brutality and corruption to take place anywhere in the world, and even in London, we are not worth that title. I believe we are, so can we please come back in September and sanction everyone we can?

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered UK sanctions for human rights abuses and corruption.

Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): As I will not be in the Chair at the end of this debate, which is a great shame, I wish a very good recess to everybody here and to all the staff—from the cleaners to the Clerks and all our own staff—who do amazing work to keep parliamentary democracy going in this country. Have a great recess.

It is an honour for me to introduce the first ever Sir David Amess summer Adjournment. If David were still alive today, he would be here, and in the six-minute time limit he would have raised 35 issues, at least. We remember Sir David and his family with fondness today.

2.24 pm

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to lead the first Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment debate ahead of the summer recess. It has been and, having been recently re-elected, continues to be a great privilege to chair the Backbench Business Committee since 2015.

Like many colleagues across the House, I will pay tribute to Sir David Amess, a distinguished and respected Member who served on the Backbench Business Committee between 2012 and 2015. Those of us who worked closely with Sir David will know how passionately he felt about Back-Bench issues, and it is entirely fitting that today's debate and future debates of this kind will carry his name. While we must not forget the tragic circumstances that led to his death, it is right that we remember his positive impact on this House and how enthusiastically he represented his constituents in both Basildon and Southend West throughout his parliamentary career. Like Sir David, I seek to represent the constituents of my hometown of Gateshead in this House and, frankly, to anyone anywhere who will listen.

Last week, it was with some dismay, but not with any great surprise, that I read research published by End Child Poverty in conjunction with the North East Child Poverty Commission. It found that 38% of children across the north-east are growing up poor. In my constituency, that rises to 42%—over four in 10 children living in poverty. The north-east is no stranger to child poverty, but we now have another unenviable award in having the highest rate of child poverty in the UK. The reasons are many, not least the stripping back of the social security safety net, which has worsened poverty across my constituency, the effective £20 cut to universal credit, the two-child cap on universal credit, and the failure to increase payments in line with inflation for much of the past decade.

The apparent attitude across Departments seems to be to spend more effort looking for reasons not to give a positive response than actually tackling vital issues. In addition, we have seen over a decade of cuts to local authority budgets. Perhaps coincidentally, some areas with the greatest deprivation, such as Gateshead, have been subjected to proportionally much greater funding reductions. My own authority in Gateshead has seen its annual budget reduced by £170 million since 2010, even before increased population, greater levels of need and inflation are taken into account. That is £170 million a year extracted from my authority's budget since 2010.

This Government's funding model gives vague initiative funding which councils can bid for, only to find that much of the pot wends its way to favoured areas in, I am afraid to say, a pork barrel process. Even if some of that funding finds its way to us, it does relatively little to combat more than a decade of service cuts. Cuts to adult social care, children's social care, youth services, early intervention proposals, special educational needs and family support all contribute to the situation we now face. Many families are in crisis.

The current cost of living crisis for many households in Gateshead is just acidic icing on an already bitter cake. Many families in Gateshead have spent a decade living from one week to the next, shaving ever more from their weekly shop, depriving themselves of food so they can feed their families, and going to bed early on winter evenings to save heating their homes. That is absolutely shameful and unsustainable. The fact that over 40% of children in my constituency live in poverty is unforgivable.

Gateshead is proud of taking an active role in Government resettlement schemes for families from Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. These additional people are all being welcomed, but it is already a relatively poor community. While I welcome the wraparound support offered as part of those schemes, I draw the House's attention to the hundreds of legitimate refugees from around the world outside these schemes who reside in Gateshead, many of whom are stuck in the Home Office processing backlog.

I want to raise the case of a lad called Victor—I call him a lad, but he is now over 60—who has been living in my constituency since 2006. Originally from Russia, Victor arrived in the UK after fleeing Russia and Putin due to his public criticism of the Russian regime—free speech is something we talk about so much in this House. Victor applied to the Home Office and has spent much of the last 16 years waiting for decisions. He still does not have leave to remain. Having spent much of his recent life in Gateshead, supported briefly by the Home Office and, after that, compassionately by Gateshead Council, sustaining him on just £30 a week, Victor is no further forward after 16 years.

The Home Office continues to refuse to grant him the right to stay in the UK, but at the same time recognises that Russia is not a safe place to deport him to, especially for those who are critical of the regime. It is not right that people like Victor, who come to the UK with a legitimate right to apply for asylum here, are left in limbo, not to say abject poverty, unable to work, unable to settle here and unable to build a home for fear of removal, yet left for nearly two decades in no man's land. The recent illegal and brutal invasion of Ukraine by Putin has thrown into stark relief the systematic suppression of human rights, civil liberties and freedom of speech in Russia. The circumstances in Russia were never good, but they have changed for the worse. Let Victor stay in Gateshead.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call the Father of the House, Sir Peter Bottomley.

2.30 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I, too, thank the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee for giving us the name of this debate. On this Thursday

[Sir Peter Bottomley]

a year ago, David Amess finished his speech with the words, “make Southend a city”, and that has happened, at great cost to him.

The previous debate was about Sergei Magnitsky, Bill Browder and others. Nine years after Sergei Magnitsky was killed, Bill Browder was arrested in Madrid on a Russian order. I pay tribute to the then Foreign Secretary, now the Prime Minister, who, within hours, took a call, took action, and got him released. That is one of the examples of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, acting fast and effectively and, on behalf of Bill Browder, I am grateful for it. International action can work.

I want to refer back to the exchanges we had this morning on the national holocaust memorial. When David Amess and I were first elected, if the Government lost a High Court case they paid attention. They have lost two on this.

I ask the Government to read the specification issued by the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, a Government agency, in September 2015. There was no suggestion then that Parliament had to be the place where the memorial was put.

As I described earlier, the acceptable areas included the whole of Regents Park, Hyde Park, out into Spitalfields, and down to the Imperial War Museum. Between September 2015 and January 2016, it became an accomplished fact that it could only go in Victoria Tower Gardens. I asked questions about this when it was first mentioned in Downing Street or in whatever was then the responsible Ministry, but there was no answer at all. That is a cover-up.

No Department wanted to have responsibility for this project. In the National Audit Office report issued on 6 July this year, that is spelled out in polite language. I hope that the Public Accounts Committee will ask the NAO why it did not compare the specification in September 2015 with what is on offer now, which is a third of the size but still far too big for Victoria Tower Gardens. I encourage the Government to look at this, as though from the beginning, to see how soon we can have a memorial of an appropriate type in the appropriate place, and have the learning centre and spend most of the money on education. Those are the tests that the House ought to agree on.

A week ago, I raised with the Prime Minister the question of planning inspectors doing incompatible things in relation to Chatsmore Farm on land north of Goring station in my constituency. He said that I would be able to talk to the relevant Minister. The relevant Minister took 17 minutes to resign.

I would therefore be grateful if my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House could arrange for a substitute to talk to me, and at the same time get together the Department for Transport and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities over planning assumptions on traffic. The A27 is in my constituency and beyond. In my constituency, nothing is happening; beyond, in Arundel, the Department for Transport will not take account of the planned houses that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is forcing on Arun District Council.

We cannot have two Departments working on incompatible figures, especially when the result is a loss to the local community. Will the Minister ask those two Departments to pay attention to a letter from Karl Roberts of the directorate of growth at Arun District Council, and get this sorted out? It ought to be fairly simple: the higher figure should be taken into account when a national road is going through a local area.

On Chatsmore Farm, I still wait to hear that the Government will accept that we cannot allow one planning inspector to say that houses can be built on a protected area, when it was protected before and will be protected again when a second inspector finishes his examination of a council’s plan. It is wrong that any developer should be able to get away with that. If they do, in every field, every vineyard, every nursery and every golf club in my constituency and in other people’s constituencies in England, the same thing will happen. It has to be stopped. If land is available and suitable for housing, fine, but if it should be protected and for some technical reason it is not for a short period of time, then protection is needed.

I turn to the curiosity of environmental networks, including the Conservative Environment Network, trying to ask a Secretary of State to talk about the Drax power station and whether burning wood that has been transported across the Atlantic is in any way defensible in terms of climate change.

My understanding is that the Secretary of State has had 30 meetings or more with Drax, while letters from a number of MPs over the last year still have not produced a meeting. Is there some reason why the Secretary of State is not meeting me and others? Is it because the Government have not developed a policy, or that they realise they do have a policy but it is indefensible? Anything ought to be able to stand up in a discussion with colleagues, so I repeat my request for that to happen.

I want to finish by saying that Members of Parliament obviously have the job of supporting their party when in government—I do that with enthusiasm—but when I am in the Chamber arguing for my constituents, I want the Government to pay attention.

My final point is one of simple justice. My constituent David Parker lost his money because the Financial Conduct Authority and the courts made mistakes. The judge in the case told the Lord Chancellor please to sort it out and give him the money that the court cannot order. I do not want to hear any Secretary of State say that we will not ask how we could do that if we chose to. For someone to say, as was indicated to me, that they will not even ask how we could do that, is an injustice.

Our job in Parliament, whether we are lawyers or not, is to bring justice and law together. Ministers need to be imaginative in making sure that my constituent David Parker gets his money.

2.36 pm

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I want to raise a number of issues in the Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment debate. One is the issue of passport delays, which is affecting many of our constituents.

Yesterday, at the Home Affairs Committee, the head of HM Passport Office acknowledged that there was a backlog of over 500,000, despite constant reassurances

from the Government Front Bench that passport applications were being dealt with within 10 weeks. The backlog is having a real effect on people's ability to travel not just on holiday but to family funerals and so on. That is unacceptable. I was the last passports Minister in the last Labour Government, so I know there is a predictable upsurge in demand—we saw it after the banking crisis—and it could have been predicted. It reflects some of the challenges raised by a drop in staffing numbers and without enough of a plan to increase them in time. The Passport Office has always been very good at going with the ebb and flow, so the situation is shocking. I hope that in the few weeks of the summer recess, the Government will get a grip of the issue to ensure that, even if many people are, sadly, still unable to go away on holiday or to visit family, it will be sorted by the autumn.

Another key issue in the Home Office—there are so many—is immigration. I am one of the top six customers, if you like, as a Member of Parliament on immigration issues in the Home Office. There is delay, inaction, inaccuracy and lives being wrecked all over the place. The Syria resettlement scheme was, as the Public Accounts Committee highlighted, run quite well, and we have now had the Afghanistan and Ukraine resettlement schemes, but all of them have knocked out the normal day-to-day work done to support family visas and other immigration cases. I have people living in limbo, unable to get on with their lives, their children unable to go on school trips or to universities. A woman wrote to me just today, hoping that her partner would be able to come here as she is due to give birth in Homerton Hospital. She has been told that the 12-week wait for a family visa has now been extended to 24, blowing out their careful planning to make sure they could be settled and together as a family for the important occasion of the birth of their first child. That is just one example out of many of where lives have been wrecked.

On the Afghanistan resettlement scheme, the Syrian resettlement model was well-worn and worked pretty well. The Public Accounts Committee gave it a fairly good thumbs up—although there are always issues on which we want to see improvements—so there was a blueprint in place, yet in a hotel in Old Street in my constituency, Afghan families and individuals have been stuck since last August, unable to move on. We are getting to the one-year anniversary—not a birthday we want to celebrate. While of course we all recognise the challenge and vital importance of supporting our Ukrainian neighbours in their need, the excuses coming out of the Home Office—“We are dealing with these issues, but we have delays because of Ukraine”—are just not acceptable. This is the British Home Office. It should be able to deal with more than one issue at a time. However, we are repeatedly seeing a version of whack-a-mole, in which an issue arises and everyone is shipped over to deal with that issue while other people wait in the queue. These people are stuck, they are living in limbo, and, as I have said, they are suffering devastating consequences. It is a litany of poor communication and delay, and it is having a huge impact on people's lives.

I have been an immigration Minister, and if someone does not qualify to be in the UK that is fine, but many people who do qualify are sitting in limbo as they wait to renew a leave to remain application which is very unlikely to be refused. What a poor welcome to our country—a country that is built on the shoulders of

many migrants. Indeed, we have a candidate for its leadership whose parents entered the UK from another country, and have created a life and a potential new Prime Minister. We should be doing much more to welcome these people.

I do not lay all this on the staff. There have been staff cuts in the Home Office, and indeed across the civil service. Civil service staffing fell to its lowest ever level before 2016 and, although there has been an increase since then, largely connected with Brexit and trade issues, the Government's proposal to remove 20%, 30% or 40% of officials from Departments poses a real challenge. The Government need to be clear about the consequences of those potential cuts.

Climate change is obviously a huge issue for us all, and I am very concerned about the Government's repeated failure on home insulation, which is an issue in my constituency and across the country. We have seen a number of failed projects, but the Government now have an opportunity to kick-start the economy. I make this plea now in particular because by the time we return in September we will have a new Prime Minister to hear how we can create jobs, growth and opportunity for people by ensuring that we can get that insulation into people's homes. Emissions from properties constitute 19% of total emissions, and that needs to be tackled, but it will not be tackled unless we get this right.

As the Public Accounts Committee pointed out in a report published a while ago, the Government have plans for electric vehicles but no real plans for a charging structure. How are people going to make the leap into buying electric vehicles unless they can be sure that they can charge them?

These are small but clear examples of the need for us to turn the challenge of achieving net zero into something that is manageable, meaningful and affordable for the people who need to make those moves in order for us to achieve it. This cannot be done to people; they have to be empowered to do it, and the Government are not helping in that regard. They are missing a real opportunity to drive green jobs, growth and investment.

Finally, I want to reiterate my concern about people living in flats in my constituency. I declare an interest, in that I live with a communal heating system and with cladding—although that is fast being removed from my building by the developer, which, happily, is not charging my neighbours and me.

Communal and district heating is not covered by the energy price cap. Let me give some of the worst examples of what is happening in my constituency. One constituent faces a 600% increase in his gas bill. Another has a well-paid job but is still struggling, with energy prices rising by 400%. In a third case, the increase is over 100%. It is very difficult to absorb such prices during the current cost of living crisis. The Government have said that they will change this eventually, but they need to provide support now for people with communal heating systems, who are really struggling.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. The winding-up speeches will begin at about 4.30 pm, so please remember to come back to the Chamber to witness the impossible task of the Front Benchers responding to this debate.

2.43 pm

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier), the redoubtable Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, on which I also serve. I entirely empathise with her points about passport delays.

Let me begin by thanking Mr Speaker, the Leader of the House and the House authorities for very kindly naming this debate in memory of my great friend Sir David Amess, who remains sorely missed across this House, not least by me. This was already known unofficially as the Sir David Amess debate because of the inimitable style in which he conducted it, but it is wonderful to know that what was unofficial is now official, and I simply say thank you.

Before the House adjourns for the summer recess, I wish to raise a mere four issues. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Anna Firth), who now represents part of the new city of Southend, has been campaigning hard for the release of Government funding to help expand capacity at Southend Hospital. I—along with my hon. Friends the Members for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) and for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), have been supporting her in her campaign. I was delighted to hear only this morning that she has apparently been successful in her efforts, and that the funding is now very close indeed to being released. This sum, totalling over £7 million, will pave the way for a much-needed expansion in capacity, so I hope it will go some way to help ease the considerable pressures on Southend Hospital and the ambulance service. I think that Sir David Amess would have welcomed this crucial funding, too, and, knowing him, I think he would immediately have asked for more.

Secondly, I very much welcome the fact that Rochford District Council has recently announced that it will reopen the popular Mill Hall arts and community centre in the heart of Rayleigh in September. This has been an issue of considerable concern to many of my constituents, and I thank the council, led by Councillor Simon Wootton, for doing the right thing. In the longer term, I understand that the council is now looking at plans to materially refurbish the Mill Hall, and perhaps even extend the building slightly in order to provide some new facilities. Only yesterday, the council began a community engagement programme to invite interested parties to bid to run the Mill Hall in the future. I very much hope that the council will also launch a further detailed consultation once the refurbishment plans have evolved, so that all of my constituents in and around Rayleigh can have their say, as this is an issue that really matters in the town.

Thirdly, I turn to the Home Office's initial proposals to house cross-channel asylum seekers at the Chichester Hotel near Wickford. I have received a considerable number of emails about this plan from very concerned constituents. Let me put firmly on the record my strong opposition to these misguided proposals. Many constituents have raised worries about the hotel's conditions, previous cancellations of events there without proper reimbursement, and, most alarmingly, staff redundancies with little or no notice. There have also been worrying allegations, including by former staff, concerning irregularities in the payment of tax and national insurance by the hotel management.

I have attempted via my office to contact the owners of the Chichester Hotel on multiple occasions to seek urgent answers to those very alarming suggestions, yet they continue to ignore requests for clarity and answers from me, as the locally elected MP, and, indeed, from the local and now even national press. Given all of that, I have requested an urgent meeting next week with the Minister for Immigration, in which I will seek to ascertain the exact details of these initial proposals, alongside taking the opportunity, in my usual understated manner, to raise my objections face to face.

We must tackle the vile industry of people trafficking across the channel. It is a form of moral blackmail and has led to many sad deaths already. In the medium term, I believe that we must use the arrangements with Rwanda to break the business model of these awful human traffickers, in which case accommodation such as that at the Chichester would no longer be required.

Fourthly, Sangster Court is a sheltered housing unit in Rayleigh, run—allegedly, at least—by Notting Hill Genesis. This housing association has frequently increased the charges that the elderly residents have to pay, even once charging one resident 79p for depreciation on a communal sofa. This is why some people now refer to the building as “Gangster Court” instead. On top of this, Notting Hill Genesis has consistently had a poor maintenance record. For example, it recently left the building's communal TV aerial broken for three weeks, despite frequently milking the residents of ever-increasing charges. I can only express the hope that Notting Hill Genesis will soon be overtaken by a larger and more professional housing association that will do a much better job for my constituents.

Finally, it is a great pleasure to see the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) at the Dispatch Box. I think he knows already that I got married recently to a wonderful girl called Olivia, and what Mrs Francois wants to know is: can he promise me, all of Sir David's friends and colleagues and this House that this will now be known as the Sir David Amess debate forever, because I think that that is the answer we would like to hear?

2.49 pm

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Like everyone, I think, I am very pleased to be speaking in the Sir David Amess debate. We were both regular contributors to whingeing gits afternoons before each recess—that is the name that we used to refer to these debates. Although we were regulars—the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) referred to this—I might get in, like the right hon. Gentleman, four or five issues, David would get well into double figures. If I tried to match his batting average, we would probably still be sat here on 5 September when Parliament returns. He was brilliant. He was also one of my neighbours at one time as well.

I want to mention one or two local issues. The first is the planned rebuild of Whipps Cross Hospital in my constituency. This has been promised for some years. It was one of those announced by the Prime Minister some time ago, but the finance has not come through from the Treasury. There has been no explanation for this. The demolition of some of the buildings at Whipps Cross has already commenced, so, as Members can imagine, Barts NHS Health Trust is in a fairly tricky situation.

Let me move on now to the actual plans, which have been in place for some time, but, hopefully, will be changed. I support the construction of a new hospital, but the original plans set out that the number of beds will be cut by 50. In the light of covid, the idea that we can cut hospital bed numbers, which has always been questionable, today seems to be barking mad. The trust has given a very vague undertaking that the bed numbers will be maintained at the level they are at now, but, as I say, that has been very vague and very carefully worded, and I will hold the trust to it.

There is also the plan to break up the Margaret Centre at the hospital, which is an end-of life care centre and is one of the best in the country—I think I can say that with some confidence. I have had emails and letters from people whose relatives have died in the Margaret Centre, all of them praising it, and now the plan is to break up that centre. It will fail. It will backfire. The trust needs to address it now and reverse that decision as soon as possible.

The second issue is that of overflying, which is a big issue in my constituency and for many others in east and south London. The planes that I am talking about go to and from City of London airport. The overflying has been an issue, I think, since the time I was elected, or very soon after. It started to be raised with me, and I then raised it with successive Mayors of London and with Government Ministers. Now City of London airport wants to increase the number of planes flying over east London from 6.5 million to 9 million. That is a huge increase. It involves getting rid of the present curfew, so there will be flights on Saturday afternoons and evenings and an increase in flights in the early morning and late evening. That will make life difficult for the people I represent, but there is also a question, which we are all talking about, of whether, particularly after the extreme weather that we have witnessed recently, we can just keep sticking more and more planes up in the sky, spreading toxic fumes over the country. That has to be, at very best, deeply questionable.

The next issue is not actually a constituency matter. I was the MP for Hornchurch until 2005 when I was ejected—I am not bitter or anything. In my then constituency was the village of Wennington. Members will have all read in the news about the fire that raged through Wennington. I have very happy memories of Wennington and my heart goes out to the people who live there.

My successor in Hornchurch was James Brokenshire. I know that if James were alive today he would be talking about Wennington as well, even though the constituency of Hornchurch was broken up by the Boundary Commission, so James was the last MP for Hornchurch. The MP now is my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas). I know that he has been run ragged by dealing with the after-effects of the fire and by the fire in Dagenham as well.

The last issue I want to raise is, again, not a constituency matter, but it is something that should really affect us all. I am talking about the grooming gangs in Telford, which have been across the news in the past few days and weeks. We have had cases all over the country. This happens again and again. It is the same pattern: a case is raised, ignored, raised, ignored and, eventually, there is an investigation. That leads to people being jailed, but we have years of rape, abuse, sexual exploitation of young girls and it not being addressed. I am bringing

this up now because I want to pay tribute to the first person who raised this, which was more than 20 years ago, and that was my mum. She was the MP for Keighley at the time, and she discovered that this was going on because seven women walked into her advice surgery and started talking about it; their daughters were the victims. Again, there was the usual pattern: she raised it with social services and the police and was ignored, ignored, ignored. She then went public and, to their—hopefully—eternal shame, certain figures in the Labour party attacked her for being a racist. Although a number of figures did not support her, one did: the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for the point that he is making. My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore) is still dealing with some of these issues today. What the mum of the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) did back then is so important—thank you very much.

John Cryer: I am grateful for that intervention. I was going to mention the hon. Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore), because I have talked to him about this issue, and it is very much in his mind. He has raised it again and again, as have many MPs, but I wanted to pay tribute to my mum because she happens to have been one of the first people who raised it.

David Blunkett is owed our eternal gratitude, because he ensured that the law was changed so that six men could be sent to prison for crimes of rape, exploitation and underage sex. I suspect that if it were not for David, who is now in another place, that court case could have collapsed, as could future court cases. I will not name any of the people responsible, but the people—sadly, from my party—who lined up to attack my mum and smear her as a racist and for doing the British National party's job for it should hang their heads in shame.

2.56 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I have just emerged from conducting a leadership contest in Parliament before we rise for the summer recess. Had you not been elevated to your current position, Mr Deputy Speaker, no doubt you would have been alongside me carrying out that process. I am very relieved that, as per usual, we have delivered on time and within budget, with two candidates going forward to the country.

I will start with a number of subjects relating to Transport for London. We still have an extension to the current arrangements under which the Government have provided £5 billion to TfL to keep it going, but we still have no long-term agreement. It appears that the Labour Mayor of London refuses to do what is required, which is to make economies and produce more revenue for TfL. He refuses to take any action on fares, pensions and some of the rather bizarre working arrangements that exist for TfL. We are seeing the effect of that. During the recent heatwave, services were being reduced even before we got to the state where, when temperatures reached 25°, services were cancelled or altered. The Mayor is now proposing a managed decline of bus services in London, which will damage the system still further. It is clear that the Government need to reach an agreement with the Labour Mayor of London to ensure that we have a long-term arrangement.

[Bob Blackman]

As Members who regularly attend these debates will know, I always raise Stanmore station.

Dame Meg Hillier: As a fellow London MP, I want to be clear with the hon. Member: no one wants to see buses cut. Is he asking the Government for more money for London to make sure that we backfill the loss of fares as a result of covid? That will mean that the buses do not have to be cut. The Government's funding is causing the problem, so is he asking for more money?

Bob Blackman: Clearly, Transport for London finances need to be put on a proper footing, and the capital funding that will be required is the most important aspect for the long term. The suggestion at the moment is that Crossrail will be the last investment in London for a very long time. That is the principal concern.

As I was saying, the Mayor of London wanted to build tower blocks all over Stanmore station car park. I am pleased to say that Harrow Council—then under Labour control—rejected that planning application. The Mayor called it in and the developer has now pulled out because they cannot make the financial scheme work, so it is in a state of limbo. He also suffered defeat on Canons Park station. Once again, he wanted to build tower blocks in the car park but was defeated at the planning committee. They are not content and have come back with another proposal for Queensbury station car park, again, for tower blocks on the car park. There is a trend, and it is not providing any new homes for anyone, because the plans will constantly be stalled and prevented by the local authorities concerned.

I am pleased that the new Conservative regime in Harrow has made a great start following the elections in May, with the pledges that were made to the electorate being honoured already. One hour of free parking outside shops will be implemented from 1 August, in record time. There will be a ban on tall buildings in Harrow, so we will no longer see buildings above six storeys built. Tower blocks end up, I am afraid, as ghettos and in the social discontent that we regularly suffer in London. The council is also combating fly-tipping, with the introduction in September of free bulky waste collections from homes. Those are all new initiatives.

I must declare an interest: my wife was elected to the council to represent the good voters of Edgware. She topped the poll in that ward, which was historically a safe Labour seat. She is now in charge of trying to sort out customer contact—Harrow Council's email traffic and its telephone system. I wish her well in that regard, because the system has been dreadful; people wait on the phone for 45 minutes and then they get cut off. I am certain that that is all going to change.

Let me turn to some of the problems we are suffering in the constituency. I very much echo what the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) said about passports. Even people who have paid for the priority service are not getting the service within the promised timeframe. That is scandalous. There seems to be a lack of co-ordination and communication, because the Home Office says one thing to constituents and another thing to my office. That cannot be right. Yesterday, at the hub in Portcullis House, staffers waited up to four hours to see someone.

It just cannot go on like this. We have even had delays with applications for biometric cards. One constituent has been stuck in Turkey since Christmas; they are still waiting and cannot get home to be with their family. That must change.

There are still 12,000 Afghan refugees stuck in hotels. We have one case of an 11-year-old boy who was unfortunately put on a plane to France instead of the UK. He is still in France and has not been reunited with his family. The bureaucracy is a nightmare. We need to get that resolved. I have just had an excellent briefing from my new friends in Harrow Council—the officers—on what we are doing on Ukrainian refugees. I will be writing to the Minister concerned with a lot of proposals for what needs to happen and change.

I had the pleasure on Monday of meeting former Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel. One thing about Israel is that they love elections. The one thing I hope they never inflict on us is their voting system, because we would perennially be in elections here. It was a great pleasure to meet ex-Prime Minister Netanyahu. I wish him well and I hope that Likud is returned to power in the forthcoming election.

The Javed Khan tobacco control review was published recently. Unfortunately, because of the current position in the Government, we are not seeing any movement on that. I hope that the Government will come forward speedily and implement the review's recommendations without too much delay.

I shall be spending the summer in the constituency. I am delighted to say that I have had a record number of applications for work experience with me—no fewer than 56. Those people will be out on the streets with me, meeting the voters.

Finally, I trust that now we have a new Deputy Leader of the House, he will implement without delay the business of the House Committee that he pledged to introduce a long time ago.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Carolyn Harris.

3.4 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Diolch, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I join those who have already spoken in saying what an honour it is to participate in this Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate? I liked David a lot. He was a gentleman who earned respect across the House and an MP whose support for his community was unwavering, and his integrity and principle are greatly missed in this place. Our paths crossed, as mine often does with Conservative Members, because I truly believe that success comes from working cross party.

Everything I have achieved in the past seven years has been through cross-party working, and I count many people on the Benches opposite as friends. I have no doubt that many of them are as disappointed as I am that long awaited and important legislation has been sidelined because of internal issues in the Conservative party. In their 2019 manifesto, the Conservatives committed to

“legislate to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online”.

Unfortunately, this week's greatly anticipated White Paper on gambling did not transpire. The call for evidence on the gambling review closed 16 months ago and the

publication of the White Paper has now been postponed four times, initially due to covid, then a change in Minister and now because of their internal party situation. There are now just two candidates remaining in the battle for the Conservative leadership, both of whom stood for Parliament on the 2019 Tory manifesto. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that they believed in the pledges that their party made and, along with their leader at the time, were committed to the urgent and long overdue need for gambling reform.

I have spoken many times about why this is so urgent; why we need online stake limits and affordability checks; why gambling advertising, particularly on premier league football shirts, needs to be curbed to protect children and those most vulnerable to harm; why we need a statutory levy to ensure that those in the industry who cause the most suffering make the biggest contributions towards research, education, and treatment; and why we need an independent ombudsman to guarantee that those who seek redress are supported in their cases against multi-million pound global organisations. I have lost count of the number of times that I have had to defend myself against those who say I am anti-gambling or a prohibitionist. That could not be further from the truth. I am not anti-gambling, but I am anti-harm, anti-exploitation and anti the vultures who prey on the most vulnerable and are responsible for untold heartache.

On menopause—my favourite subject—I welcomed most of the women’s health strategy announced this week. But it lacked proposals that would have been most welcome in connection with menopause care. I was pleased to welcome a commitment to improving the training for doctors of the future, but that is little consolation to women who are struggling now to get a diagnosis and medication. I am delighted that doctors of the future will be trained to identify the menopause, but we cannot wait another seven years—we desperately need an urgent pathway for women to get the proper treatment and resources that they need now.

I was also pleased to see the strategy officially set out plans for the single annual prescription prepayment charge, which came about as a result of my private Member’s Bill last year. Again, my delight is tinged with frustration that women are having to wait 18 months. England is the only part of the United Kingdom that charges women for hormone replacement therapy, and that needs to be remedied as a matter of urgency. There was no mention of a much-needed public awareness campaign to ensure that more women are alert to the symptoms and are given the confidence to seek the support they need, nor of a national formulary to end the postcode lottery not just in the availability of HRT, but also its quality. All women should have access to quality body-identical HRT. No woman should have an inferior product because of where she lives.

Finally, I come to my summer scheme to feed children. I want to put on record how pleased I am by the generosity of organisations in my constituency, such as Coastal Housing, Mecca Bingo, Hygrove Homes, Gowerton Golf Range and Admiral Insurance, and my gratitude to my team as we will spend the next six weeks making sandwiches, packing lunches and delivering them to children across my constituency who otherwise might not be fed during the summer holidays.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We will stick to six minutes for Martin Vickers, but then we will have to reduce the limit to five minutes to get everyone in.

3.9 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for that extra minute. I add my words of tribute to Sir David Amess and his work in this House. This event is not the same without him. He is sadly missed.

I will not detain the House for too long—hopefully not for the full six minutes—but I have two particular issues relating to rail. The first is a constituency matter concerning the services provided by TransPennine Express. The most important service between Cleethorpes, Grimsby and the rest of the country is provided by what should be an hourly train between Cleethorpes and, until recently, Manchester Airport. The service to the airport was curtailed as a result of congestion in the Manchester area. The change is, to put it mildly, inconvenient for passengers and represents a loss of revenue for the rail company. I hope that it can be resolved in the fairly near future. As I said, the service should be hourly, but cancellations frequently stretch that to three or four hours. Staff at Grimsby Town station told me of one recent occasion of six hours without a train. That is quite simply not good enough.

I want to highlight this appalling set of circumstances. I frequently meet the TransPennine Express management, and I recognise the difficulties, but I was told in May that we would be almost back to normal from the start of the summer timetable in mid-May. Some months ago, an amended timetable was printed, which I was told would provide certainty; it has done the exact opposite. The situation is unsatisfactory, and I hope that the Department for Transport will side with the passengers on this one. I do recognise, as I said, that TransPennine Express has had difficulties, and it is doing its best to overcome them. My job is to speak up for my constituents, and they are getting an absolutely appalling service. If the only solution for DFT is to reconsider whether the franchise should be withdrawn, then that is the action that needs taking.

Hopefully, LNER is going to provide a direct service from next May between Cleethorpes and London, via Market Rasen in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh). That is in the draft timetable, but I know there have been difficulties at Market Rasen.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a notable champion, for giving way. This is a really difficult issue. We have been campaigning for years to get a direct service from Grimsby and Cleethorpes, through Market Rasen and Lincoln, and on to London. This is a population of a quarter of a million with no direct service. Unbelievably, LNER is now saying that it will provide the train, but it will not stop in my constituency. It is absurd. Apparently, the train is too long. I have been in many trains where an announcement says, “You have to go to the first four carriages because the platform is a bit short,” but for ridiculous health and safety reasons, LNER is threatening not to stop in my constituency. It is an outrage, and I hope the Minister is listening and will do something about it for once.

Martin Vickers: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. He is absolutely right, but can I return to TransPennine Express and the appalling service that it is providing?

This is not just about passengers at the main stations, such as Cleethorpes, Grimsby and Scunthorpe, because little information is provided at intermediate stations such as Habrough and Barnetby. Local taxi drivers tell me time and again that they receive calls from stranded passengers. Even at the major interchange in Doncaster, there are no TransPennine Express staff to direct people to taxis or buses, and there is a notable lack of information.

Moving on to another rail issue, the taxpayer contributes an enormous amount of money to support this country's rail system, but—I know the Rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), shares this concern, because I have had numerous conversations with her about this—train companies are losing revenue because of the noticeable lack of ticket inspections. Up and down the country, there are many barriers at main railway stations such as King's Cross, and they are frequently open, so people can wander in and out and get on trains without anybody checking their ticket.

I have frequently travelled from King's Cross to Grimsby or Cleethorpes on two services—the London North Eastern Railway service to Doncaster and, hopefully, the TransPennine from Doncaster, although that is usually after two or three hours' wait—and they are frequently not inspected. Last week, LNER did inspect my ticket, but the inspector did not clip it, scribble on it or anything. It was not inspected on the TransPennine service, so I could use it again this week and nobody would be the wiser. I am sure that Members from all parties could confirm that this happens. The point is that this is, to a great extent, a taxpayer-funded service and the companies are not doing all they can to ensure that they maximise their revenue.

I have one other complaint against the Government—of which I am a great supporter, of course. The Deputy Leader of the House will be well aware that an issue frequently raised at business questions is replies to Members' letters. Two or three weeks ago, I received a letter from a Minister at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that said, "Thank you for your letter of 6 August 2021." I rather hope that the electronic signature on that letter was a sign that the Minister had never seen it, because I hope that if he or she had seen it they would have at least drawn my attention to that and apologised. The timeframe is not good enough, and it is not good enough that we receive letters with electronic signatures, because we have absolutely no idea whether the Minister has ever been made aware of the issue we have raised.

With that, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish you and the Deputy Leader of the House a happy summer holiday.

3.16 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I, too, pay tribute to Sir David Amess for the work that he did in Parliament. I hope that our Parliament continues to do justice to his memory.

I wish to continue in the vein of the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) as we approach the summer recess. I am sure that during the recess many Members will reflect on the Government's performance. Time will

not permit me to go into great detail, but I would like to cover one or two key points that are causing much frustration not only to me and my staff but, I am sure, to many other Members in the House.

A key priority for all Members of this House is dealing with constituency casework on behalf of the people we serve. Over the past few years, our country has faced the most difficult of times and my office, like those of many others, has seen a considerable increase in the numbers of people seeking assistance. Delays in responses really hamper our work and cause frustration for our staff. From delays at the Passport Office to long waits for driving tests, backlog Britain reaches far and wide. Indeed, the delays have now spread to Ministers' private offices, with considerable delays across multiple Government Departments.

In one urgent case, I waited 59 working days for a reply from the Department for Work and Pensions; in another, I waited 58 working days for a response from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. One constituent has suffered as a result of an error at the DWP whereby his details were mistaken with those of a family member. His benefits have been stopped and attempts to resolve matters have been unsuccessful. I wrote to the Secretary of State on 23 May and am still awaiting a response. I have even resorted to using parliamentary questions to try to break the logjam.

Such delays are on top of the eye-watering delays at Her Majesty's Passport Office, UK Visas and Immigration and the DVLA. The excessive waiting times across multiple Departments not only add to the backlog and the frustration of the British people but could be seen to impede the work of Members of Parliament. Many Members have consistently raised the delays, and have done so more frequently in recent months. I have raised the issue, too, and hope that the Deputy Leader of the House agrees that they are unacceptable. If so, when he responds, will he outline what action the Government could take to address such disrespectful behaviour? If he would take a suggestion from the Opposition Benches, I would say that the wrong-headed decision to sack 91,000 hard-working civil servants will only exacerbate the incredible delays.

In the time I have left to speak, I wish to raise one more issue, which is HS2. The Government have designated the scheme as an England and Wales project, even though it has no positive impact for Wales. In fact, the evidence suggests it has a negative impact. Designating it as an England and Wales scheme means that Wales is not entitled to consequential funding, which in this case could be as much as £4.2 billion. The cross-party Welsh Affairs Committee and the leader of the Welsh Conservatives have also raised this issue. I have to ask how anyone in Government can continue to justify this position, which is surely untenable. I hope the Deputy Leader of the House can offer some positive comments this afternoon.

3.20 pm

Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con): I welcome the Deputy Leader of the House to his place. It is an honour to speak in this summer Adjournment debate.

I will take Members on a quick tour around Mid Sussex, as this is my first chance to do so as a Back Bencher for some time. Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope you will indulge me as I talk about my predecessor, who, if

the rumours are true, may be in the other place very soon. I asked Sir Nicholas's long-time agent, Ginny, to remind me of her time with him and to give me some tips. One message was, "If you ever order scampi and chips, you'd better make sure you get some spare scampi. And always have a spoon to share dessert, because he will never order his own but he will definitely want some of yours."

When I first stood as a candidate, I asked Sir Nicholas to give me some tips on how it might work, and he said, "Mimsy, be careful. There are some very clever girls on the candidates list. I mean some of them are lawyers and barristers, and everything." He was nothing but charming and incredibly supportive. One of his favourite things was Fridays in the constituency, which we all absolutely love—it is my favourite experience, too.

Sir Nicholas's surgeries were hysterical, not surprisingly, and he was impeccable in supporting jobs, schools, businesses, country pursuits and, of course, the South of England show in nearby Ardingly. He also supported the Haywards Heath bike ride and the Mid Sussex marathon weekend, which I founded. He was a brilliant supporter from day one. We wish him incredibly well.

Finally, when Sir Nicholas was on his rather famous diet, he found tuna flakes. He found little pots of them in Portcullis House and it was life changing: "I have never experienced these things, these tuna flakes"—that is what Ginny told me. It is a pleasure to follow him and to speak about my constituency.

In my gallops around Mid Sussex, on Zoom and Teams over the last few years, and when giving out covid certificates, I have met and had conversations with about 300 groups, businesses, organisations, churches, schools and shops.

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): As my hon. Friend mentions businesses, and given her role over the past few years, I want to thank her for supporting my local jobcentre in Watford and, in particular, for supporting the launch of the self-employed mentoring scheme.

Mims Davies: I thank my hon. Friend for saying that.

It was a pride and joy to be at the DWP for the last three years. I saw 163,000 young people going into their first job, and I opened more than 150 youth hubs and 200 new jobcentres to address the covid impact. It was remarkable to see just this week that 2 million women have gone back to work since 2010, which is very positive. Jobcentres can give important support to the self-employed, and my hon. Friend does important work mentoring and supporting people in his constituency.

The hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier), who has now left the Chamber, mentioned support for resettled Afghans and Ukrainians and getting them into work. Jobcentres are at the heart of this, helping people to get a fulfilling career, whether they are resettling, a veteran, over 50 or have been affected by the pandemic.

On jobs, it was exciting to see the University of Sussex research facilities come to Haywards Heath, with Universal Quantum Ltd. I will be having my latest bounce back business breakfast at CAE in September. Boeing, also based in Burgess Hill, was here in Parliament just this week. I have some amazing charities in my patch, including Group Strep B Support, which was also in Parliament this week.

I am sure we are all going to enjoy our summer as we go to visit many of our businesses. Without the welcome back fund or the cultural recovery fund, some of them simply would not be there. For example, the support for Borde Hill in my constituency and the Orion cinema in Burgess Hill has been crucial. However, I must raise a couple of issues. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities needs to help shovel-ready regeneration projects get their money and get things out the door. We have been waiting since 2011 for a new town centre in Burgess Hill and people are getting fed up. There have been two planning permissions and we are ready to go. I really hope the new application coming forward will help to support our beleaguered high street.

We need a new Clair Hall—it has been delivering vaccinations, but we need a cultural centre back in Mid Sussex. We also need a running track and much more support for sports pavilions and other areas, where we absolutely have the participation but we do not have the funding matching what is needed. May I follow the Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), in linking transportation and planning issues? We are delivering homes in Mid Sussex, in the right places, where possible, through a local plan, but we are being ridden roughshod over by the Planning Inspectorate on neighbourhood plans and that is unacceptable. Our constituents are fed up. They are doing their bit when it comes to housing and they want Government to listen.

I wish the House a very happy summer, and I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

3.26 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, wish to pay tribute to Sir David Amess and the indelible mark he left on this place. His family called for a legacy of kindness and love across Parliament. I think we still have some way to go on that journey, but he was never afraid to speak truth to power, which I trust I will do today. It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies). I, too, will be picking up on the issue of housing in my speech.

Normally, we enter the summer with relief, but this year it is different. We have chaos across Government and across the country. The scale and depth of the multiple crises is weighing heavy on my constituents: it is taking five years to see an NHS dentist; GPs are under unbelievable stress and struggling with demand, with appointments now being issued for 16 August, with nothing before; we have the elective surgery backlog; we have the mental health crisis—I do not know where to begin there—covid is, yet again, dangerously on the rise; children's social care is unable to meet demand; children are in dilapidated schools; we have the courts backlog; we have the passport backlog; we have the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency backlog; we have the visa backlog; we have a climate crisis; we have an economic crisis of inflation at 9.4% today; and we have a cost of living crisis. After 12 years, this is what the Tories have given our country. We are in meltdown, not just because of the temperature, but because of the temperature of what is coming out of the policies of this Government. It is left to us as constituency MPs to pick up the pieces.

[*Rachael Maskell*]

Today, however, I want to focus on the biggest crisis facing York: the housing crisis. Having spent weeks on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill Committee, it is clear that the Government are yet to get to grips with the housing crisis and the solutions that are needed. My amendments have focused on addressing the lack of community voice in planning and matching need to what is being delivered in housing. It does a disservice for Government because, as they set these targets, if they are building not to need but to the market, they are unable to deliver also.

My city should be the very best place to live. We know its assets. People visit it and it is a wonderful city, with amazing people living there, but it is rapidly turning into a complete nightmare. The Airbnb market is surging in York. Short-term holiday lets are moving up at a rapid pace. Just a couple of weeks ago, we had 1,999; today we have 2,068. The number is rising rapidly as people are seeing the opportunity to make money out of my city. We have a rise in second homes and empty homes, but I wish to focus on the issue of Airbnbs and what is happening across the housing economy. We are seeing an extraction economy, instead of an investment economy—housing, money and opportunity extracted from my constituents, instead of investment in housing, people and communities for the long term.

This issue needs to be addressed urgently. It is disrupting the economy. We are unable to recruit to the care sector or to local jobs. It is undermining local businesses, such as B&Bs and guest houses. It is having a significant economic impact, but it is also hollowing out rural communities. Some places have only one place to let, but in York the Airbnb and short-term holiday lets market is turning family streets into party streets, and I can tell the House that it is not pleasant when there is a hen do next door every single weekend.

Section 21 notices are being issued at such an alarming rate that my constituents are being forced out of the city because there is nowhere else for them to live. Instead of getting an average—and it is high—£945 per calendar month for renting a property, landlords can make £700 over a weekend. Cash buyers, mainly from London and the south-east, are buying up swathes of housing in York in order to make money, but not to provide the housing that we desperately need. We have a real crisis in social housing and affordable housing. Couples who have saved for their first deposit are not getting the opportunity to buy because cash buyers are putting down up to £70,000 in addition for each property. The York Central development, which should be transformative for my city, risks becoming Airbnb central, with 2,500 units being built but probably not lived in by people from my local community.

We need the Government to get a grip. I will be bringing forward a Bill in December, and I trust that the Government will get behind it, because we need to license these properties and ensure that we have local homes for local people.

3.31 pm

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, because I am a trustee of one of the charities that I will mention. I also want to say thank you to all the staff,

to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and to everyone across the House for the incredible work they do. Of course, I want to pay tribute to Sir David, who is still hugely missed by us all.

I also want to thank my community in Watford. Across my town we have such an incredible wealth of community volunteers and supporters. Our charities include is One Vision, with Enoch and Harjit, who are friends and colleagues when it comes to working for the local community; Small Acts of Kindness; Goods for Good; Hand on Heart; Sewa Day; New Hope, which is a fabulous homelessness charity; the Peace Hospice; the Salvation Army; and the Rotary Club, with the most magnificent lady called Actar, who is an incredible force for good.

There are also the volunteers who are working to deliver my mental health first aid initiative, which aims to train 1,000 mental health first-aiders across Watford. The team at Watford and West Herts chamber of commerce have helped deliver almost half of that target, which I am incredibly proud of and very grateful to them for.

When I talk about mental health, of course I cannot fail to mention health services. My biggest ask of the past two and a half years, since being elected, is to get Watford General Hospital rebuilt and to have the shovel in the ground as soon as possible—as I told the Prime Minister recently, during Prime Minister's questions, I will even go and buy the shovel myself. That brings me to an important point about frontline services.

Earlier today, during business questions, I said that I would love to have a debate to say thank you to all our frontline emergency services. We have seen them do so much over the past week in response to fires, but just last week in my constituency, in the Meriden ward, there was an awful fire at the Abbey View tower block. Had the frontline services not got there as quickly as they did, the situation could have been a lot worse. Thankfully, there were no fatalities or serious injuries.

I am so proud to be able to support our local services, and that includes our police. I have been working with the local police and crime commissioner to make sure we get a new Watford police station, which will be coming later this year. I look forward to cutting the ribbon—I hope I will not get into trouble with the police through that act of vandalism.

On work with veterans, huge respect and thanks are due to Luther Blissett, the former Watford Football Club legend and England player, his partner Lauren, Liz and Norman, who have been working with veterans in Watford for a long time now. They have been setting up the former players club through which they are creating a tailor-made organisation. I say "tailor" because of the impact Graham Taylor has had and the inspiration he has been in creating Forces Reunited, which I believe will be launched today as a forces' forum to help veterans.

There are lots of things I would like to cover about infrastructure. I am doing work to look at bus and train infrastructure, and also, as I have mentioned in this place before, to fix Woodmere Avenue, which is an absolute nightmare. The width restriction scratches very many cars and has become almost legendary in the challenges that it has brought to local residents. I hope there is some movement to get that sorted.

Over the past two years, I have seen how we have all come together to work together from an inter-faith perspective. The inter-faith community across Watford

is truly incredible. At places like the Peace Garden where we are close to nature, all the different faiths across Watford come together for the good of our community. That ties into the environmental message and how we are trying to tackle waste in Watford. I set up my Dean's green team, and I am very grateful to the young people who have been involved to help to make it a success. We have lots more to do, but listening to young people about the environment is critical.

Mims Davies: My hon. Friend makes a really important point about environmentalism. I presume that the green team does litter-picking and other interventions. When young people want to help their environment, that is one of the most positive things that they can do. They really benefit when we visit schools and then follow up with a litter-pick, as I have seen in my own constituency, because they have seen that direct action in their community.

Dean Russell: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. Absolutely—we are planning litter-picks and all sorts of things, but also looking at how we can tackle waste and food waste across the area, especially with organisations such as Random Café doing amazing work.

Culture is at the heart of our community. We have the “Harry Potter” studio tours, but also Leavesden studios, which makes what would be Hollywood movies but are Watford movies. During the pandemic, I worked with Tom Cruise's team to open up the global film industry. That is a story for another time, but I was very proud to be able to do that from Watford and Leavesden studios. Watford culture is incredible. On the High Street we have places such as the Pump House theatre, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary and has the Watford Fringe coming up later this year. Please do all buy tickets; there are some fabulous acts. We also have the Electric Umbrella doing cultural work with people with disabilities. I recently pushed a yellow piano up the High Street to promote its work and support it. The Watford Workshop works with people with disabilities as well to support them. We have fantastic clubs such as the Deaf Club, which also celebrated its 50th anniversary a few months ago, and I was proud to be there.

A few weeks ago in this place, I presented a petition to save the local Pryzm nightclub. The night-time economy is absolutely critical, and we need to support it. I was very pleased that last week we had the Second Reading of my private Member's Bill to make sure that workers could keep their tips in hospitality and elsewhere.

Thank you to all, have a fantastic summer, and I look forward to seeing you back in September.

3.38 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): It is very touching to see today's summer Adjournment debate bearing the name of our late colleague, who always stole the show in these debates. The renaming of the debate is a fitting tribute.

Much of January was spent on tenterhooks, and Russian forces finally invaded Ukraine in February. This produced a mountain of new casework for my office. My team and I have had some successes, such as in the case of Natalia, a 15-year-old Ukrainian girl. Last month I was able to visit her and her aunt in their new home in Hamilton. It was emotional but a wonderful reminder of the impact of what we do in this place on real lives.

Another humbling experience was taking through a private Member's Bill in the previous Session. I was incredibly proud to see it gain Royal Assent just before Prorogation in May, becoming the Pension Schemes (Conversion of Guaranteed Minimum Pensions) Act 2022. I once again place on record my gratitude to the team at the Department for Work and Pensions, who provided such excellent support.

The cost of living crisis is the biggest challenge the UK faces right now. Like many colleagues, I have spent many hours in debates and question sessions raising fuel prices, household energy bills and affordability of food to highlight some of the biggest concerns that my constituents have. It is a shame that we will break for recess without having lined up other support for the autumn and winter months. I hope that work will continue in Government Departments so that new measures can be presented swiftly in September.

On another challenge this term, just the word “passport” elicits a visceral reaction from Members and staffers alike. I am very proud of my team, who have managed to secure a positive result in every case they have handled so far. There is some valid criticism that the crisis could have been foreseen and planned for, but I have to say that some of our cases have received excellent support.

Mims Davies: The hon. Lady's comments are a pertinent reminder of the work of our caseworkers. I am sure you will agree, Mr Deputy Speaker, that this has been an incredibly hard period, with the challenges including covid grants, business reopening and passports. We have had over 60 cases. It has been very challenging, and we must thank all of our casework teams, because their work matters so much to our constituents.

Margaret Ferrier: I could not agree more. The staffers are the people behind us as we do our jobs. I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention.

One of the greatest things about this job is the variety. No two days are ever the same. I feel so honoured to represent my constituents during debates on topics such as animal welfare, which so many contact me about, the child maintenance service and energy prices. I feel honoured to make sure that their voice is heard when legislation is scrutinised and during important announcements covering crucial policy such as immigration and asylum, defence, and community access to cash, and to do casework helping people with their driving licences, visas and community projects. It is so important to me that every email that a constituent writes is read and, where possible, that that information is translated into action on their behalf.

It has been an absolute pleasure to see at first hand the brilliant community spirit in my constituency. People have really pulled together. I want to give honourable mentions to the community councils in my constituency—Rutherglen, Burnside, Cambuslang, Halfway, Blantyre, Hillhouse and Meikle Earnock—which take so much pride in their communities and work to support them.

I also give my deepest thanks to all staff here in Parliament, who do so much to make sure that we are all supported. We could not function without you all. Thanks also to my staff: Kim, Gillian, Laura, Lynne, Natalie and John.

[Margaret Ferrier]

What has struck me most this term is how difficult a time it is in politics in the UK and in the world. Colleagues, staff and constituents are all feeling the pressure. That is why it is so important that we are able to work together, across these Benches, for the benefit of our constituents. On any given day, this Chamber is full of people with strong political beliefs. Naturally, we will not all agree on everything, and in some cases we may not all agree on much at all.

I put on the record my thanks to a number of Ministers, because they have genuinely endeavoured to help me in some of the most complex cases that my team have been dealing with. Although it is tempting to take all the credit, I have to acknowledge that those cases would likely not have been resolved without their input. I am glad that they have on occasion sought to work across these Benches. Only this week, the Home Secretary and her officials assisted me and my team in resolving a complicated case. I put my thanks to them on the record.

We need to see more such collaboration next term. Some might disagree, but regardless of our political differences, we are all here for the same reason, and that is to help our constituents, and I am always willing to work with whoever I need to in order to get the right resolution.

3.43 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I arise with Sir David Amess's smile, cheek and kindness very much in my heart, and hoping to drive the reason why all of us come here, which is love of constituency, love of country and love of that sense of duty and what we can achieve in this place.

I love Rutland, Melton, the Vale and Harborough villages. I represent 180 villages and three towns. We are the place where rugby was truly invented. They used to tackle a solid wooden beer barrel over different fields. The priest from Rugby School came over, saw the game being played and took it back to the school, where it was then supposedly invented. We are also where Sir David Attenborough discovered his love of fossils. Members are all very welcome to come fossil searching in my constituency. It is where those involved in the gunpowder plot had some of their meetings, in Stoke Dry. I have taken no inspiration from them myself, of course. It is also the home of Stilton and pork pie and Rutland bitter and so many other great foods and drinks of this country. It is home to Belvoir castle, where "The Crown" was filmed. It is also home to an ichthyosaur—the greatest discovery of what is not a dinosaur but many people believed was a dinosaur over the centuries. It is the home of the Rutland mosaic, which has changed our view and understanding of Roman Britain, and of the Hallaton hoard, which has changed our understanding of iron age Britain. It is also the place where the phrase "paint the town red" comes from.

There is nowhere quite like the Rutland, Melton, The Vale and Harborough villages, and I am truly blessed to be able to live and raise my children there, but we do have some pressing problems. Rurality is at the core of the issues that I am going to raise today and of the pressures that we face. The first is transport. The A1 goes up the east of my constituency and it is one of the worst accident hotspots in the country. We urgently

need it to be made into a full motorway, and we need safety improvements up and down the stretch from Peterborough to Blyth to reduce the number of casualties and deaths. Some parents in my constituency are lobbying me on graduated driving licences, because of the deaths of young children. The understanding is that introducing graduated driving licences would give new learners a little bit longer to gain the confidence they need to reduce accidents.

The A52 has an accident hotspot outside the village of Bottesford at the Belvoir junction. This is a real problem, but Highways England says that it cannot put in place the improvements we need at the junction because there are not enough accidents. I would argue—I ask the Deputy Leader of the House to put a letter in to the Transport Secretary about this—that we should take into account the rurality of villages when we calculate these things. If this same dangerous junction were outside Loughborough or a more dangerous area, there would be significantly more accidents. Rurality should be factored into these calculations, because how rural somewhere is can hide just how dangerous a junction is. I have also been meeting constituents recently about the Rutland TT in Thorpe Satchville and Twyford. They are concerned about noise pollution. I am really keen for the Government to do more to tackle this as it is a blight on our rural areas.

Turning to crime, a few years ago I secured the creation of the first ever Rutland rural crime team across Leicestershire and Rutland and they are doing a fantastic job of reassuring residents. I am pleased to be able to meet them so often. I have also managed to secure more than £500,000-worth of CCTV across Melton, Oakham and Uppingham, and we are now looking at where we can put them to support people. When I talk to my police, however, their main concern is vehicles. I have urged our police and crime commissioner to provide more vehicles for Rutland and Melton. It is not acceptable to give us cast-offs from Leicester city that have done many miles and cannot race down the long stretches of road that we have. I have more than 460 square miles in my constituency, and we cannot be getting second-hand vehicles if we are to protect our communities.

When it comes to rural health, my GP surgery in Melton serves over 40,000 people. One surgery for 40,000 people is unacceptable. It is driving down health rates and people are not getting the care and support they need. We urgently need a new GP practice in Melton. Also, there is not one dental practice in the whole of those 460 square miles that is taking on pregnant women or children, which they are legally required to do. The Government must step forward and do something about dentistry. Concerningly, our practice in Oakham was recently found to be inadequate, and we must also look at what we can do about that.

When it comes to the economy, we need more fair funding for Rutland and Leicestershire. Leicestershire is the worst funded county council and Rutland the worst funded unitary authority in the country. We need a social mobility grant to look at those areas that have the worst social mobility in the country. Turning briefly to Mallard Pass, I have spoken a great deal about the attempt to build a 2,100-acre solar plant in my constituency using a company that has been found guilty of being complicit in Uyghur slave labour. We must do something to tackle that.

I do not have time to raise the many other things that I would like to raise, so I will wrap up by saying an enormous thank you to my team: Lisa, Helena, Harry and Alex—I think that is everyone; I am having a moment of stupidity. Lisa, Helena, Harry, Emma and Alex, I love you all very much but I am clearly having a moment and losing my mind. I thank you for all you do and the difference you make for constituents every single day.

3.49 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am very pleased to speak in this debate. I am also pleased that it is called the Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment debate. I have probably taken part in every one of these debates since I came here in 2010, and Sir David would sit there where the hon. Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) is sitting now and he would tell us many, many things in a rush of words—just as I do, but he would do it better. In the five minutes that he had he would tell us about all the many things that he wanted to get done. Listening to him was something I particularly enjoyed.

I want to talk about something those in this House may or may not know about: the Orange parade we have every year on 12 July. I want to say how proud I am to walk on 12 July. This year, we walked in my home village of Greyabbey. As Ulster Scots, we called it the Great Greba 12th and it was, and I stand here taking pride in that. I am a member of the Kircubbin LOL 1900, true blues. I am also a past master and a master in the House of Commons lodge, which sits here. I want to take the time just to say what it is really all about and why it is so important not just to me but to a five-year-old in Belfast and to an 18-year-old from Londonderry.

It is a family day designed to remember and celebrate the victory of religious freedom for all in this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The battles in the then Ireland were not the story of the troubles, but the history of this nation: the glorious revolution that is taught in history classes throughout the United Kingdom. The celebration of wearing the Orange sash in honour of King William of Orange by parading the streets reminds us all that having religious freedom is worthy of the historic bloodshed and worth celebrating.

My parliamentary aide had coffee with my mum, who was 91 years old on 14 July, before enjoying the parade with her six and seven-year-old girls. They felt happiness as the men and women they knew walked past with their heads held high. They enjoyed the pipe bands from Scotland, the accordion bands from Portaferry and the silver bands that accompanied the lodges. As they share their packed lunch with friends made on the day, the community comes together in the open air and celebrates a tradition that is as meaningful today as it was when the first Orange lodge was formed in a rural village in Loughgall in the late 1700s to commemorate the battle of the Boyne in 1690.

I am so thankful that the Orange Order did what it sought to do for hundreds of years and led by example during covid. It promoted the 12th at home in 2020, and in 2021 it advocated for public safety and asked for a localised 12th in small areas. It could have done no more, yet the BBC this year declined to give it the coverage it once had. The parade was carried out by tens of thousands of participants, and watched by

hundreds of thousands more, with decency and order in the most part, even when there were some attacks on occasions from nationalist bands against children. In the face of adversity, they marched with pride. I am very thankful to GB news, which stepped into the breach, and my former party leader Dame Arlene Foster, who ably explained and highlighted the positive aspects of this family event.

What does it mean to be an Orangeman in Ulster? It means the opportunity to provide a welcoming environment for a street party enjoyed by hundreds of thousands in the Province, and to feel a part of the community no matter the political persuasion. It means being part of a community with members from Canada to Australia, New Zealand to Togo, and Ghana to Nigeria, people who believe that our history and the battles fought then can still provide lessons today. It means being allowed to continue the privilege of peacefully and respectfully walking traditional routes because the message matters. It means being part of a family day out, meeting those we see daily and those we see rarely, and enjoying laughter and friendship. It means standing on the shoulders of the Ulster Division who fought in the battle of the Somme in 1916. They wore the sash with pride on the battlefield, a rallying cry as they fought for the continued freedom, liberty and democratic process that we enjoy today. It means the opportunity to teach my grandchildren—I have five, with a sixth on the way—how their ancestors fought and died to ensure that every religion had a place in this nation.

On the banners as we march, they say “Civil and religious liberty for all”. We mean that and we act that out. It means so much more than you may ever see in the media, which focus only on the negative. To some of us, it is the foundation of who we are: the children of God, the children of Northern Ireland and the Union, and the children of our fathers who are unashamed of our heritage of faith, family and religious freedom for all.

I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the other Deputy Speakers, Mr Speaker and all colleagues in this Chamber for their friendship and comradeship over the last year. I thank my constituents, whom I have the privilege to serve as the hon. Member for Strangford, and all my staff, who really make my job much easier.

3.54 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): It is a privilege and an honour to speak in the first Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate. David always exuded such joy and compassion, and it was difficult not to smile whenever you saw him. I am sure we all miss him.

I will begin by highlighting a particularly significant issue in my constituency, which I have raised many times in the Chamber: the M49 junction, which would link the motorway directly to the Severnside enterprise and distribution area. The area is home to GKN, Amazon, Tesco, Royal Mail and many other companies. When completed, the junction will not only help to bring thousands of new jobs to the area but help to reduce heavy goods traffic and pollution in small surrounding villages such as Pilning and Easter Compton.

It seems remarkable to me that the project was started without the means to complete it and connect it to the link road. There is essentially a 160 metre-long privately

[Jack Lopresti]

owned strip of land between the newly built motorway junction and the road connecting it to the distribution centre. How was £50 million of taxpayers' money spent on a motorway junction without the land to connect it up to the link road?

Since 2019, I have had meetings with the Secretary of State for Transport, roads Ministers, South Gloucestershire Council, Highways England and the West of England Combined Authority, but we still seem no closer to getting the project completed and connecting the road to the motorway. I will continue to meet Ministers, South Gloucestershire Council and Highways England, and I will urge them all to get a grip of the situation and get the project completed as quickly as possible.

I turn to the bid for local levelling-up funding to regenerate world war one Hangar 16U, an exciting and substantial project by developer YTL located alongside the Brabazon and Charlton Hayes mixed-use developments. The restoration and reuse of that historic building will achieve the following aims. First, it will secure the restoration of a world war one hangar that contributes significantly to the unique and important heritage of the area, making the building accessible to all. Secondly, it will support the wider regeneration aims of the north fringe masterplan, which in turn will address issues of deprivation in some of the nearby communities of Patchway and Filton.

Thirdly, the project will support visitor and tourist attractions while meeting the needs of existing and newly emerging communities. Fourthly, it is in a highly accessible location by foot, cycle and public transport. Fifthly, its community focus supports community cohesion and wellbeing. Having always supported the evolving north fringe development area, I have no doubt that when it is completed, it will be a truly fantastic place to live, work, visit and be entertained. I look forward to the result of the funding bid and very much hope that Ministers will look favourably upon it.

As well as its historic links with aviation, demonstrated fantastically by the Aerospace Bristol museum and science, technology, engineering and maths learning centre—home to the last Concorde to land at Filton airfield, where the British Concordes were designed and built—my constituency in the south-west of England is at the centre of the largest aerospace cluster in Europe. There are 800 companies and 57,000 people in the south-west working in the aerospace supply chain for companies such as Airbus, Rolls-Royce, GKN and Leonardo.

The Farnborough international air show is taking place this week. Not only does it serve as a showcase for the UK's aerospace sector, but it is a great platform for exports. The UK's aerospace sector represents more than 110,000 jobs. In my constituency of Filton and Bradley Stoke, more than 20,000 jobs are directly dependent on the aerospace and defence sectors, with many more involved in the broader supply chain. In 2019, the aerospace sector contributed £34 billion to UK exports. It was good to see my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister supporting the air show on Monday.

This week, the Government announced £155 million of joint industry and Government funding, through the Aerospace Technology Institute, to help the industry invest in the technology of tomorrow, such as solar cells

that can be used in electrically powered aircraft, low-weight electric motors, and the extra high-performance wing led by Airbus. Of course, we also look forward to increasing activity in the space sector.

Let me conclude by thanking you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the staff who look after us here. I hope everybody manages to take some time out and get some rest, recuperation and quality time with loved ones over the summer.

3.58 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): While the media's focus may be on the comings and goings in Westminster, local community groups make a huge difference to the lives of people in Dudley South week in, week out. The last recess covered the platinum jubilee celebrations, and it was a real pleasure to join the events at Oakfield community centre in Brierley Hill, St Mary's church in Kingswinford and the Dudley Hindu Cultural Association to mark the incredible service that Her Majesty has given during seven decades as our Queen.

We are fortunate in having many amazing community organisations in Dudley. I shall not try to match Sir David, but I would like to mention just a few I have encountered in recent weeks. Harry's Café is run by the Top Church Training charity and helps disadvantaged jobseekers into work in catering and hospitality, as well as providing free food packages and online cooking classes. There is also Kingswinford British Legion, who I supported over Armed Forces Weekend as they raised funds to help ex-service personnel and their families.

As a former scout, it was a pleasure to join Dudley District Scouts to thank leaders and volunteers for everything they do to make sure that local young people have opportunities that otherwise just would not be available. It was a privilege to meet and support Stuart Bratt, whose Tough Enough to Care charity tackles male suicides by encouraging men to be open about mental health. The £80,000 lottery funding it has received will allow it to do even more to support even more people, and we want more local good causes in Dudley to get funding. That is why I organised a national lottery funding workshop last week. I thank Sinead from the National Lottery Community Fund for explaining to dozens of local groups how they can get funding and give themselves the best chance to succeed and do more for our community.

As we look forward to the Commonwealth games coming to Birmingham, it was great that Stuart was one of the local heroes, as well as Jennie Bimson and Councillor Shaz Saleem, taking part in the Queen's baton relay; I look forward to it coming to Brierley Hill on Sunday evening. One of the baton bearers is from Pens Meadow School. I was pleased to see its amazing new forest school, which is an exceptional facility for its special needs pupils aged three to 19. I am delighted that Dudley Council has committed the funding for a new school building that will allow them to combine their two sites into one, providing better education and care on a single site for vulnerable pupils.

I also thank Dudley Council's cabinet for blocking plans to build on precious green spaces at Lapwood Avenue, Bryce Road, Severn Drive and Bent Street. I hope that the Association of Black Country Authorities will also safeguard green-belt sites at Holbeache and

the Kingswinford triangle when it meets next week, and that the Government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill will further strengthen green-belt protection.

Our green spaces are important to us in the Black Country, and it was heartbreaking to see large fires at the Fens Pool nature reserve and Ridgehill Woods during this week's extreme temperatures. Disgracefully, some of them might even have been started deliberately. I join our community in sending a big thank you to everybody from West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service for their bravery in fighting and containing those fires.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as you know, last week marked Black Country Day—the anniversary of Newcomen's engine. We are proud of our industrial heritage and it was wonderful to join pupils from Brierley Hill Primary School at Brierley Hill library as they unveiled the displays on our local history that they had created for the public to enjoy. It is now a decade since Gracie Sheppard designed the Black Country flag, which has become one of the biggest selling and most recognisable regional flags in the country. She designed it as a 12-year-old at a local school and it is now literally seen around the world—whether at The Ashes, the Indy 500 or Glastonbury.

Alicia Kearns: My hon. Friend rightly raised the importance of local flags. Leicestershire was the only county in the country without a flag until last year, when I secured the first ever flag for Leicestershire. It flies proudly outside Parliament this very day. I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising the importance of flags, given their pride of place and the message that they send of unity in our communities.

Mike Wood: My hon. Friend is proud of her local area and flies her flag proudly.

As we look at the ongoing Conservative leadership contest, I shall be pressing whoever wins to keep levelling up right at the centre of their agenda, and to make sure that my constituents in Dudley South can have opportunities every bit as good as those enjoyed in other parts of the country. Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish you and all the staff of the House a very happy and, I hope, restful and peaceful summer.

4.4 pm

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood), and an honour to be participating in the first Sir David Amess Adjournment debate. This is a very fitting tribute indeed for a great champion and an enthusiast for the format. He was someone to whom service of his constituents, his party and his country was of the utmost importance. There is so much inspiration for us newer Members in his example. I welcome his successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Anna Firth), to her place today. I also welcome five other Members who have joined us since last summer. A few of them came in on the back of by-elections that were quite painful for my party, but it is important that we remember the people who sent us here, and by-elections are a way to do that, and perhaps they have given this party a wake-up call over the past year as well.

I have spent the past few weeks trying to argue for a clean start in Government, but I think we also need a clean start in Parliament when we come back. When we

come back, we will have a new Prime Minister, and that is an opportunity for us all to reflect on the way that we conduct ourselves in this Chamber and in the estate more widely. I have come to feel that Parliament is perhaps suffering from a bout of long covid of its own—some bad habits that are antithetical to the good working of this place as well as contrary to some long-standing culture and practice. Some of these things have taken hold and are not serving ourselves, our constituents or the reputation of this House well.

If I have the time, I want to cover four particular points: the debate itself; the tone in which we speak to each other; standards; and the culture around the estate. Some of it is a hangover literally from covid. The new intake of 2019 participated in debates where there was no back and forth. We were basically recording clips from the comfort of our own living rooms. The May 2020 report of the Procedure Committee, on which I now sit but did not at the time of the report, said that “debates have become recitals of prepared texts rather than lively exchanges of view.”

I wholeheartedly concur, and I fear that this tendency has been slower to depart than some of the other arrangements that we had during covid.

Although it is of course vital that our constituents can see what we do here, I do not think that it is necessarily wise that what we do here is simply for our constituents to see—whether it is on our Facebook pages or on Twitter, the echo chamber for the retweets and likes. I will, of course, concede that today's debate is a noble exception and that we should all go for it in the way that Sir David used to do. But that is not really what we are here for. We are legislators. We are here to scrutinise legislation. We are here to hold the Government to account, whether we are supporters of the Government or members of the Opposition. We are not here to make viral clips only tangentially related to the legislation that we are supposed to be considering. I think that all of us, including me, probably need to do a little bit better. What we need is genuine debate. We should refer to previous speakers in the debate. We should take interventions—I am willing to take one now—and we should take on and win arguments with other people.

We also need a clean start on tone in September. During the confidence debate, there were flashpoints. I do realise that the past few months have been tough and fraught, and that is just on the Conservative side of the Chamber. The temperature has literally risen over these past few days, but what we say in this place really matters. We should all remain moderate and collegiate. We should argue and disagree with each other, but in good faith and with good humour and respect. We should set an example. We heard only the other day in points of order from my hon. Friends the Members for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford), for Wolverhampton North East (Jane Stevenson) and for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) that if that tone gets out into the country, it could be really, really damaging. It could threaten our security and it could threaten our families, so we must set an example in this place.

I will touch on standards briefly, because I made my views known on this in the debate that we had after the Owen Paterson affair. We cannot have one rule for us and another for everybody else. We must do better.

We need a clean start on estate culture. There have been exposés in the papers about staffers getting drunk and sleeping in offices, to say nothing of the behaviour

[Aaron Bell]

of some MPs that has been well documented recently. We really must address that when we come back in September. We must have a clean start.

On the Speaker's Commission, which is part of the solution, I am not at all convinced that the right solution is for MPs not to employ their own staff. Some may have noticed that, over the past few months, my support for the Prime Minister has been open to question. If, for example, my staff had been employed by the Conservative party, they would have faced a huge conflict of interest; they owe their job to the Conservative party, but they owe their judgment to me. Who would they be beholden to? There would be an unacceptable conflict. I have discussed this with my staff, and I know that they would have found it extremely difficult to navigate these past few months had their loyalty been split. It is not a small concern to them. They need to know who they are working for and whose interests they are employed to pursue—obviously our constituents, but ourselves as Members as well.

Moreover, that would not fundamentally solve the issue of the worst behaviour of MPs towards their staff, other Members' staff, Clerks, House staff and so on. What we need to do is grapple with bad behaviour and stamp it out. No human resources policy in the world can mitigate some of the terrible behaviours that we have seen reported about former Members of this House.

Finally, because it is Sir David's debate, we need a clean start in Newcastle as well. We need levelling up. We need the money coming through from the towns fund. We need to clean up the antisocial behaviour. Most of all, as I have said in this debate previously, we need to clean up that landfill at Walleys quarry. [Interruption.] We need to stop the stink—thank you very much. We need a clean start in Parliament, in Newcastle and in the country.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I am afraid that I have to reduce the time limit to four minutes.

4.9 pm

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the powerful and thoughtful contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell). I start by raising a number of issues on all things rail. We know that rail numbers are down by a fifth since the pandemic, and yet the Government persist in building High Speed 2, a topic on which I have spoken in opposition on multiple occasions since my election to this House. Indeed, it is good to see my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) on the Front Bench. He was with me in the Lobby the other day when we voted against HS2 going further north.

The reality on the ground, accepting that the thing is being built, is that HS2 Ltd continues to be anything but a good neighbour. I have spoken in the Transport Committee, in this Chamber and in Westminster Hall giving countless examples of where HS2 is making people's lives a misery. It is bringing in HGV movements through villages where they simply should not be going. It is closing roads at a moment's notice. It is not dealing with landowners in a fair or proportionate way when it

takes their land. The latest complaint to reach me over the past 24 hours is about land that HS2 has taken but done nothing with, where poisonous weeds such as ragwort are being allowed to take hold and bleed across as seed moves into land where cattle, sheep and other animals can be affected by it. HS2 has been apprised of that time and time again, and yet it has done nothing. I urge the Government to clamp down on HS2 Ltd and ensure that it becomes the good neighbour it purports to be.

Likewise, the construction of East West Rail continues to be a nightmare for my constituents. It is the railway we want—it will bring greater connectivity to Buckinghamshire with a new station at Winslow—but its construction brings similar misery to that of High Speed 2. It looks as though East West Rail will launch with entirely diesel rolling stock, to boot. I urge the Government to reconsider that urgently and to look at hybrid options, hydrogen or a newer, greener technology. It is simply preposterous in this day and age for a new railway to be built with diesel-only stock.

Likewise, I urge the Government to give us some clarity, because there has been some speculation in recent days that perhaps the whole of East West Rail will not be completed, and that the part that goes beyond Bletchley towards Cambridge may not be built. This House needs urgent clarity on that when we return in the autumn.

Moving on to a planning matter, the Ministry of Justice had proposed building a mega-prison in my constituency adjacent to HMP Grendon and HMP Springhill, on land that it partially owns but that also involves the compulsory purchase of a farm. Buckinghamshire Council's strategic sites committee wisely rejected the proposal. It was not a technical rejection at planning; the proposal in fact breached policies BE1, BE2, I2, NE1, NE4, NE5 and S1 of the local plan, as well as paragraphs 7, 8, 57, 58, 99, 105, 174, 180 and section 16 of the national planning policy framework. It was by no means a technical refusal, yet unfortunately the Ministry of Justice is seeking to appeal that and to cost taxpayers probably hundreds of thousands of pounds in legal fees. It is simply not right or fair that that project continues to hang over my constituency and the villages of Edgcott, Grendon Underwood, Steeple Claydon and others around. I urge the Government to reconsider and to pull that appeal.

4.13 pm

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): I join colleagues in paying tribute to the fact that this debate is called the Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate. It is a fitting tribute to him and a fitting reminder to us that however good or entertaining we think our speeches are this afternoon, none of them will be as good as the one he would have given were he with us.

The first thing I want to talk about is a man called Merv. He is an 86-year-old man in my constituency who lost his wife after 56 years of marriage in 2014, meaning he was on his own. Thanks to a fantastic local organisation called the Didcot Good Neighbour Scheme, run by a fantastic woman called Sandy Sparrowhawk, I have been matched with him to go round and see him every week, which I have been doing since last September. It is supposed to be for him, but it is the highlight of my week, because whatever is going on here—heaven knows

lots of things go on here—when I go to have my cup of tea with him on a Friday after all my visits, he never fails to cheer me up with his stories of being in the Army and of driving coaches.

He is a great football fan—a misguided Chelsea supporter—and we have a real laugh. We now know that loneliness affects not just mental health but physical health, and it only takes up a small amount of my time. I would encourage everyone here and outside to do it, because it makes a huge difference to both people.

I have passed up no opportunity since my maiden speech to raise the infrastructure issues in my constituency. We still need Grove station reopened, we still need the A34 and A420 improved, and we still need more GP surgeries. The two districts I cover are in the top 10 areas for house building relative to their size, and we have not had any new GP surgeries. I hope what we can do through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is get to a position where we start to put this infrastructure in first, rather than promising it after the houses have been built, because it never arrives. The other thing I hope we might do with that Bill is require new houses to be built to the latest environmental standards set by Government, rather than the one that existed when planning permission was granted, often five or six years earlier. We are building thousands of houses that we know will need retrofitting.

While on the subject of the environment, I am currently the lead sponsor of the Local Electricity Bill, which now has 309 MPs supporting it. If Members are not yet backing it, please do so. People argue whether to have fracking or nuclear or oil and gas or onshore wind, but they do not argue about having more community energy, with local communities able to sell it to local people. That would help to achieve our net zero goals and promote competition while offering vast environmental benefits.

Finally, when we come back, we will understandably focus on the economy, the cost of living and Ukraine, but there are two other issues that I hope will receive some focus. One is the reform of public services. We all get too many complaints about visas, driving licences, passports and planning applications. It is not just that it takes too long to get a response, but that the response is not human enough. The second is an increased focus on social mobility. It is a decades-long problem, but we slightly lost focus during covid, which made it harder. We all need to do more if background is to be no barrier to people achieving their potential.

4.17 pm

Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con): I will use the limited time available to outline some of the many challenges that this House and the next Prime Minister must face when we return from the summer recess. The No.1 issue facing the country is inflation, which hit 9.4% in June—the highest in 40 years—and is expected to climb even further. It strips away the value of the pound in our pocket, hitting every aspect of our economy. People's savings are eroded, pushing home ownership out of reach, and the value of pensions that people have worked long and hard for is reduced. Our export market is made less competitive, limiting investment, jobs and growth. I am particularly concerned about those on fixed and lower incomes, because their real-term take-home pay is getting hit the most.

We all know what is driving this pressure: rising demand in China and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, compounded by covid and disruption to global supply chains. As a result, the energy price cap is due to rise 65% in October, taking typical bills to around £3,240 a year, with another rise in January. I welcome the Government's package of measures to mitigate those price rises, with a third of households each set to receive £1,200, but tough choices lie ahead. It is incumbent on Members across the House to be honest with the public and with ourselves.

During the recent heatwave, many reflected on the similarities with 1976—not just the weather, industrial strife, nationalist demands for a referendum, a prime ministerial resignation, a leadership contest, and energy prices soaring following conflict, but the real risk of a wage/price spiral and stagflation. At the same time, our fiscal room for manoeuvre is increasingly small. Quantitative easing and pump priming the housing market are no longer viable options, if indeed they ever were.

Moreover, we are facing a demographic crunch, with an ageing population and fewer people of working age. That means that the demands of the state grow, while raising tax revenue becomes more and more difficult. If we are not careful, we will end up with Scandinavian levels of taxation for Mediterranean levels of public services.

Now is not the time for telling people what they want to hear; we must put pragmatism ahead of ideology. We need a functioning state, not an ever smaller one. I encourage any Members who disagree with that to talk to their constituents and to check their inboxes. They will find that those inboxes are full of emails from people who are struggling to get driving licences or passports, or whose GP appointments or routine medical procedures have been delayed. This requires hard-headed, mature judgment and grown-up politics, not pandering to nostalgia.

I am also increasingly alarmed about the failure of investigative policing. According to a recent report, police have failed to solve a single burglary in nearly half the country's neighbourhoods over the past three years. Other police forces have been found to have wilfully neglected to investigate reports of child abuse and grooming gangs for fear of stoking racial tensions, and we learn of botched murder investigations due to officers' homophobia. Meanwhile, mild-mannered comedians are being investigated for telling jokes. In Britain, policing is by consent, and it is dangerous for democracy and the rule of law when this trust breaks down. The next Prime Minister urgently needs a plan to rebuild investigative policing and confidence in our police. That, too, will require serious, pragmatic leadership and a willingness to face facts and level with the British people.

We are facing high inflation, anaemic growth, disrupted supply chains, a dysfunctional energy market, a demographic crunch, alarming shifts in climate, a national child exploitation scandal, national security threats at home and abroad, an increasingly divided society, and declining trust in our politics. On a brighter note, however, rain is forecast for the weekend.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, all my colleagues, and all the amazing staff in this place. I also thank my own amazing staff, both here and in the constituency. Since I was elected two and a half years ago, we have

[Robert Largan]

taken up more than 40,000 individual cases and responded to more than 75,000 emails. They do an amazing job, and I am proud to have them working for me. Have a lovely summer, everyone.

4.21 pm

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): It is an honour to speak in this debate, in which Sir David delivered so many legendary performances. I can only do my very best to emulate him, so here goes.

Sir David's dedication to putting people before politics lives on in Southend West. I have now helped more than 100 constituents at my regular surgeries. My No. 1 priority is to make Southend safer, and I am pleased that three new CCTV cameras have been installed in Old Leigh; but, more important, I campaigned for and secured portable knife detection poles for our police ahead of the summer, and I am delighted to say that they arrived last week.

Our local hospital is vital to our community, and I want to thank everyone who works in our NHS. I abseiled down the hospital tower for charity earlier this year. I am delighted that much-needed enabling capital funding to expand our A&E department is now imminent. We also have 111 new ambulance staff and 11 new ambulances.

Mr Francois: May I just congratulate my hon. Friend on her brilliant campaign to help secure about £7 million for Southend Hospital? Well done!

Anna Firth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his intervention, and for his support in the securing of that funding.

Community pharmacies are the unsung heroes of our NHS, and Belfairs Pharmacy is a shining example.

As for transport, C2c's performance continues to be a concern, especially the broken ticket machines: contactless payments are imperative. I am pleased that Chalkwell Station is being upgraded, and that there will soon be new lifts to make it accessible to everyone. I have been battling unjustified cuts in our bus services, and will continue to campaign to see routes reinstated. Speeding is a big issue locally, and with the results of my online survey, I intend to ensure that new safety measures are introduced. However, I will not sleep easy in my bed in Leigh-on-Sea until night flights are eliminated from my constituency.

I have already visited 22 of the 30 schools in Southend West, and was delighted to give certificates to every school and every primary school child to celebrate the platinum jubilee. Tomorrow I will be holding a welcome tea party for Ukrainian refugees in Southend, and I was proud to help Chalkwell Lifeguards to secure funds for a new eco-engine for one of its rescue craft.

Now that we are a city, Southend must become the UK City of Culture in 2029. Leigh Folk Festival moved to a new home this year in Leigh Library Gardens, which was a fabulous event. My charity funding fair in Belfairs enabled several local charities to obtain much-needed grants. Driver Shields UK Ltd has been given the Queen's award for enterprise and is a fine example of the talent in Southend.

I have hosted six fantastic work experience students this summer. I thank Maddie, Molly, Matilda, Sean, Shannon and Andriy for all their hard work.

I attended countless fantastic jubilee events last month. Southend West really did Her Majesty proud and showed the county how to party.

Following the tradition started by Sir David, there will be a centenarian tea party in Southend West in September.

Volunteers are the backbone of our local community. I thank especially HARP, Havens, the Leigh Lions, the Royal British Legion and the Carli Lansley Foundation, among many others, for the great work that they do. I also thank our local Conservative councillors and the amazing clergy for their hard work for our community.

Our thoughts and prayers are with my constituent Hollie and her son Archie in their brave fight.

I am super excited to attend the first game of the new season at Southend United. I am sure that the Shrimpers will be on top form this year.

The inspirational Music Man Project, which was so beloved of Sir David, will go to Broadway. Who knows what its amazing founder David Stanley will set his sights on next.

Local charity Prost8 is improving the lives of men diagnosed with prostate cancer in Southend.

I thank those from the Tamil association for their hard work and for letting me not come last on their sports day.

Having never previously bowled a wood in my life, I am now an expert, having opened the outdoor bowls season at Chalkwell, Belfairs and Essex bowls clubs. I am hoping to improve my wrist action before next season.

Finally, I wish all colleagues, House staff and my wonderful team a very happy, healthy and enjoyable recess. I intend to spend the summer eating my own body weight in our delicious Rossi's ice cream. My final exhortation must be to the Deputy Leader of the House: make Southend the UK city of culture in 2029!

4.27 pm

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the new Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) and a true honour to speak in this debate dedicated to our wonderful late colleague, Sir David. When I entered Parliament he showed me so much love and affection because I became the next Conservative MP for Hyndburn after his best friend, and godfather to two of his beloved children, the late Ken Hargreaves.

Before I talk about Hyndburn, I would like to read a quick excerpt from David's eulogy to Ken that describes the cheeky relationship they shared. It is about a joke that David played on Ken. He said:

"I had thought that we had the same views on pornography, thinking there should be less of it, but one evening I observed Ken dashing into a lobby to vote. The lobby was fairly empty and when he came through he asked me what he had voted for not knowing himself. 'More pornography' I replied. 'Oh eck' said he."

What shines through in his eulogy is a clear understanding of how they became such great friends. Every word that he attributed to Ken could be attributed to Sir David. He concluded as follows:

“Ken was undoubtedly an inspirational character, a man of the highest integrity and generous to a fault. The nearest thing to a saint that I have ever met and he was certainly a political saint if we excuse his voting record on pornography! So I share with everyone in this Church the pain and grief of our loss, but this is a celebration of a very great life and let us be cheered in the certain knowledge that if anyone deserved to go to heaven Ken did and that is where he is now.”

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Will the hon. Member join me in thanking the Government for dealing with the issue of extreme unction when it came to Sir David and setting up a commission to look at third-party access to crime scenes? They did that and it is now part of the guidance issued for all police forces throughout the country. I am grateful to the Government for that.

Sara Britcliffe: I share the hon. Gentleman’s gratitude for that. That the Government acted quite swiftly on the issue was key and put us all at ease after such a tragic incident.

Now on to Hyndburn and Haslingden, my fantastic home. We have some really exciting projects coming forward in Hyndburn and Haslingden. We are putting forward our £20 million levelling-up fund bid, which could bring back the life that Accrington town centre needs and that everybody knew and loved. That is something we are putting forward.

Lancashire County Council is putting forward a £50 million bid, and much of that money will be spent on Hyndburn to improve transport and our local roads, and to create the community hubs that we need. The shared prosperity fund will help to support businesses across Hyndburn and Haslingden, and promote our culture and heritage, which is desperately needed. We have some beautiful architecture: it just needs a little bit of tummy loving care. We also need to make sure that some of the shared prosperity fund is spent on Haslingden market hall, which I have pushed for. We have received funding for Clayton community hub, which is now the heart of the boxing club.

Lancashire is now home to the national cyber security centre, which is a £5 billion project bringing more than 3,000 jobs to the heart of Lancashire, and we now need to make sure that young people get the skills they need to feed into those jobs. We are looking at access for all at our local railway station. Work is already going ahead at Accrington, which is key, but we are now looking at Church and Oswaldtwistle, and Rishton. We need more frequent rail services to Manchester from Accrington, and I am working on that.

Accrington and Rossendale College became an institute of technology and received funding from the Department for Education, and received a grade of outstanding from Ofsted this year, which is a credit to Amanda Melton. She has just retired from teaching, but she was really keen in that.

We need funding for transport infrastructure, more frequent rail services and measures to improve pollution and congestion on our local roads. We also need to tackle speed, which is a key issue for local residents, and I am working with our fantastic police and crime commissioner, Andrew Snowden, to achieve that. We also need to look at our parks and green spaces and see investment in Victoria park in Haslingden. Hyndburn Council has just bought 88 acres of land in Oswaldtwistle to create a country park, which will be a fantastic asset. We have also created a BMX track—

Aaron Bell: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sara Britcliffe: I have to carry on.

Floral displays are needed across all of my beautiful market towns—Great Harwood, Oswaldtwistle, Haslingden and Rishton—not just in Accrington town centre. I will spend my summer in my home of Hyndburn and Haslingden, knocking on doors and speaking to what I believe to be the best constituents in the country. I am looking forward to having that break and connecting with local voters and speaking to them about the matters that mean most to them.

4.32 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to participate in this debate. I mean no disrespect to the hon. Member for Southend West (Anna Firth), but when I see “Southend West” on the annunciator, I very much think of the brilliant campaigning Member of Parliament, David Amess, and it is fitting that the debate is named after him. Only fairly recently, animal welfare, an issue about which Sir David was very passionate, was back on the statute book, and that law was very appropriate. Thinking back to his many achievements in getting legislation through, there was also the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000, which redefined public policy in tackling fuel poverty in the UK. That is a pertinent issue now, as we face the cost of living crisis.

One phrase I keep hearing, but I do not really like, is that people have a choice of whether to heat or eat. I do not like that phrase because there are still far too many people who do not even have that choice. When they go to a food bank, they are looking not just for food but for a fuel voucher. The reality is that too many people are still in poverty across our islands. It has been a surprise to me that that has not yet featured as an issue in the Conservative party leadership contest.

The contest can be entertaining for those of us watching from the outside. Indeed, one of the leadership candidates appeared to suggest that Darlington was in Scotland, and that was a surprise to both the people of Scotland and the people of Darlington.

I should welcome the Deputy Leader of the House to his place. I am told that researchers are discovering that he is one of the first Members of Parliament to have been elevated to the Front Bench who has seen his contributions in *Hansard* drop sharply. I think that is because of his many contributions from the Back Benches. I wish him well in his glittering career on the Front Bench, which I will be watching with interest.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Establishment stooge!

Chris Stephens: He may very well become an establishment stooge, but I will be watching his glittering career from the safety, in the years ahead, of an independent Scotland. He and I both follow the NFL and American football passionately, and he will be aware of the brand and logo of my team, the Raiders, which is “Commitment to Excellence”. If only the Government had a commitment to excellence; I am thinking here that so many Members from across the House have mentioned issues with the Passport Office and the problems our constituents have. I am genuinely trying to be helpful when I reiterate the call I made during business questions. If Ministers and officials have regular updates, either virtually or through

[Chris Stephens]

a conference call with Members from across the House so that we can address some of the systematic problems that exist at the Passport Office, it would be really helpful for everyone across the House.

I wish to raise a couple of other issues of concern. A number of Members talked about the tone of debates, and they were right to do so. There now seems to be a debate about the size of the state going on. I am very concerned that the Government seem to be pressing ahead with 91,000 civil service job cuts, and Departments are being asked to put forward proposals for staff cuts of 20%, 30% and 40%. Departments are being asked, “What would the Department look like? What could it not do?” That is the wrong approach.

David Linden: Does my hon. Friend, like me, see the contradiction on the part of the Government? They talk about cutting tax and therefore having fewer resources to resource our public services with. How does that add up with the idea of levelling up? The two of those things are mutually exclusive, are they not?

Chris Stephens: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. The fact that the Government also want to close government offices—in some towns and cities, public sector offices are the largest employer—also goes against that. I am also concerned about the increasing anti-trade union rhetoric we have heard recently and this way of legislating in haste. I am thinking in particular about the attempt to bring in agency workers to bust strikes. Agencies themselves do not support that legislation, so I have no idea why the Government went ahead with it.

I want to pay tribute to every constituency office and constituency staff member across these islands, but I must pay particular tribute to the No. 1 team, who find themselves in Glasgow South West. I refer of course to Justina, Dominique, Linsey, Raz, Alistair, Keith, Greg and my new office manager, Scott McFarlane, who takes over from the great Roza Salih. I was delighted that she was elected as the first refugee councillor in Scotland in the May council elections, representing the Greater Pollok ward. I pay particular tribute to all community groups, particularly those in Glasgow South West, which will be running summer programmes, looking after the elderly, looking after young people and addressing food poverty. That just leaves me to wish everyone a good summer. To quote Alice Cooper, “School’s out for summer”.

4.38 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): As Mr Deputy Speaker said earlier, it is a bit of an impossible task to try to wind up these debates. Before I begin, may I put on record my thanks to the Speaker’s Office and to everyone who works in this place, from the police officers, the security guards, the wonderful Doorkeepers, the Clerks, the unseen Committees such as the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, through to the catering, cleaning, *Hansard* and IT staff, who keep the whole parliamentary estate ticking over day in, day out. We are very grateful to them. As the hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies) mentioned, we are also grateful to our constituency staff and teams. That allows me to thank my team and the excellent Sarah Banwell, who won Labour caseworker of the year from Prospect this year—I wanted to give her a little mention too.

It is a pleasure to respond to today’s Adjournment debate on behalf of the shadow Leader of the House team and it is also a real honour to speak in a debate dedicated to our late colleague Sir David Amess. We all know that there is no doubt that he would have been in the Chamber today, speaking up for his beloved Southend. As a regular myself, I used to look on in awe at his contributions. He owned this debate. It was a masterclass. The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) seemed to do a good job of mentioning as many issues as he did. The hon. Member for Southend West (Anna Firth) made her contribution, which Sir David Amess would have been extremely proud of. His legacy will live on both inside and outside Parliament.

I welcome the Deputy Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), to his place. In one of my first contributions in this role—I was a bit lonely because I had no one to shadow, so I am pleased that he has come along—I reflected on how my appearance at the Dispatch Box would give hope to late developers everywhere, and the same can be said for him. Over the years, he has forged a reputation as a stickler for parliamentary protocol, often to the chagrin of his own party, and he is no stranger to the rough and tumble of this place.

My former neighbour and friend in Newport West, the late, great Paul Flynn, enjoyed regular verbal jousts with the hon. Gentleman in this Chamber, and it is a shame that their spells on the Front Bench never coincided. The hon. Gentleman once commented that Paul was his inspiration for running for Parliament, having been a constituent of his for some years as a travel agent in Newport. With characteristic good humour, Paul noted that he would carry for life the burden of being responsible for the hon. Gentleman’s parliamentary career, so I am sure he would be delighted to see his unlikely protégé elevated to his new place on the Front Bench today. Some would say that the Deputy Leader of the House must be a glutton for punishment to step into the role with a Government who are crumbling all around him, but that is nothing new to him—after all, he once stood as the Conservative candidate in Islwyn, where Tory voters are a rarer breed than costed policies from his party leadership candidates.

End-of-term Adjournment debates are a valued opportunity, like Thursday’s business questions, to raise a whole range of issues. Today we have heard some great contributions from Members across the House on issues that are close to their hearts. Home Office delays were mentioned by, among others, my hon. Friends the Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones), for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) and for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) and the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). I very much recognise the experiences they talked about, with constituents left in limbo and delays to day-to-day family visas. It is no fault of the civil servants; there is a failure to cope and plan, and a lack of resources. I, too, have Afghan interpreters’ families still living in bridging hotels for far too long, and it is not good enough.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) mentioned James Brokenshire. It is good that we also remember him today, as well as his mother, Ann Cryer, for her legacy through her work in campaigning on sexual exploitation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) mentioned that the gambling White Paper has been delayed four times and that we need gambling

reform. She is quite right. Her comments are very much based on her experiences in Swansea East and her expertise on this issue. I hope that Ministers heed her calls to get on with this. I also congratulate her on her work on the menopause; she has done so much to make sure that this area gets the attention it needs. Not least, she managed to get both of us into *Hello* magazine.

The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) talked about rail, giving me the opportunity to agree that we need greater rail investment from this Government, particularly in my corner of south-east Wales, where we have 11% of the rail network and 2% of rail enhancement funding. I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney about consequential funding for HS2 for Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) spoke very well about the cost of living crisis, backlog Britain and NHS delays, as well as the housing crisis and the need for investment in housing and communities, with her call for local homes for local people.

In acknowledging the contribution of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), let me say how pleased we all were to see him get called very early in business questions today—a special end-of-term treat for him and for us all.

The hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) spoke about the importance of aerospace to our economy. Being in a neighbouring constituency, I agree with that, because many jobs in Newport East, too, are dependent on aerospace as people commute to his constituency.

It is the time of year for end-of-school reports and if we apply the same metric to this Government, the conclusion could only be: “Must do better”. One of the barometers by which to measure the Government’s performance is the timeliness of responses to inquiries from MPs across the House. Even on that basic criteria, the Government are failing dismally, as my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney mentioned in business questions and during this debate.

Aaron Bell: The Procedure Committee has been conducting its usual work on this matter and a report should be out tomorrow.

Jessica Morden: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention. I shall look at that with great interest as Members are very interested in this issue. Multiple Departments have a dire record on written parliamentary questions, particularly in relation to COP26 and the Department of Health and Social Care. The record on named day questions is not much better either.

The picture is not much brighter on general written correspondence. The most recent data shows that only 16% of MPs’ and peers’ letters on COP26 were responded to within the timescale set, with the Government Equalities Office and the Department of Health and Social Care faring only slightly better. That bleeds through to MP hotlines, which have been unreliable for some time. The Home Office said that it needs a recovery plan to support its hotline to return to acceptable service standards, and it is preparing that. However, the Home Office is not the only Department in need of a recovery plan. The recent chaos at the Passport Office shows how badly the Government need to improve. The passport issue was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for

Hackney South and Shoreditch, the hon. Member for Harrow East and my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. We thank the civil servants, including those in the Newport passport office, who work so hard. I also put on record our thanks to all those who have come to work in Portcullis House.

I am running out of time, but I will mention another group who are being let down by the Government: the victims of the contaminated blood scandal. Ministers have had more than enough time to respond to Sir Robert Francis’s report, which recommends interim payments for victims now and the full inclusion of family members who lost loved ones in a future compensation framework. That would be a final recognition of the suffering of families such as my constituents, the Smiths, who lost their seven-year-old son, Colin, after he received infected blood products from a prison in Arkansas. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) is absolutely right that the Government must get on with this.

I am pleased, however, that progress is being made on the Social Security (Special Rules for End of Life) Bill, which will finally scrap the hated six-month rule. Much thanks is due to charities such as the Motor Neurone Disease Association and Marie Curie, which helped me with a ten-minute rule Bill on this issue. I am glad that the social security Bill will come through the House in September and I know that it will get cross-party backing.

Alicia Kearns: Will any aspect of that end of life Bill address assisted dying? The House is united on the fact that there should be a debate on that issue. For too long, Parliament has not had a say on such a vital issue, which the public wants us to discuss.

Jessica Morden: I am sure that the Deputy Leader of the House will address that issue.

Finally, I wish everybody a happy recess. We will all be working in our constituencies through the summer, but I hope that staff get a break.

4.48 pm

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Peter Bone): It is a pleasure to follow the shadow Deputy Leader of the House. I did live in Newport West and that is exactly what Paul Flynn said. She was a little unkind to me about Islwyn, where I had the best Conservative result ever—I lost by only 36,000 votes.

It is a pleasure to sum up this really important debate, which is one of the few occasions when Members can bring up whatever they like on many different occasions during their speech. It is also the Sir David Amess Summer Adjournment debate and I wish to start with the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Anna Firth). I did not expect to get emotional at this stage, but I am a Southend West boy; I grew up there and Sir David was a great friend. Many years ago, I was waiting to be considered as the next Member of Parliament for Southend West. I was in a little room outside Iveagh Hall, waiting for my turn to go and convince the members that I should be the person for Southend West. There was some chap in there before me, and he had them roaring with laughter. And he got a standing ovation at the end. That was, of course, Sir David Amess.

[Mr Peter Bone]

One year ago almost to the day, Sir David spoke in this debate and raised 15 points in three minutes. His last eight words were

“of course, we must make Southend a city.”—[*Official Report*, 22 July 2021; Vol. 699, c. 1212.]

That is exactly what happened. I hope Sir David is looking down on us today and smiling with pleasure, especially at his replacement, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West. I wrote rapidly to note everything she said, and she mentioned the CCTV in Old Leigh. Gosh, that is where I spent my teenage years, and thank goodness they did not have CCTV then.

My hon. Friend mentioned hospital funding, and I used to live right by the general hospital. It is amazing if she absented down that. I declare an interest, as my sister used to work there and I am grateful that it got the £7 million as part of the hospital upgrades we are seeing across the country. My local hospital has also received money, and I will be going to see it tomorrow.

I note that we have not made party political points today, which is what is so special about this debate. My hon. Friend mentioned Chalkwell station and, as a little boy, I remember being scared to go up the station steps because I thought I would fall through. Apparently the rail service is still as bad as it was when I lived there—c2c needs to improve.

My hon. Friend mentioned so many other things. I hope Southend United still play at Roots Hall. Rossi ice cream is the best in the United Kingdom. She mentioned Havens hospice, where my mother unfortunately died, but it is a great hospice.

As my hon. Friend mentioned at the end, closest to David's heart was the Music Man Project, which is the most amazing charity. I am so pleased it is going to Broadway, and my sister's daughter will be part of that. It is a great charity that helps disabled people to sing. It is the most amazing thing to see. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making 40 requests in five minutes, which beats Sir David's average.

It will be impossible to reply to everyone. I made notes and, where Members raised important issues, I will ensure that I write to the relevant Minister to get a response. Several themes came through; one was the Passport Office and another was visas. The Home Office will have heard those remarks about the Passport Office, which also came up at business questions. The hub in Portcullis House has helped enormously. I can say that 98% of passports arrive within 10 weeks, but all we ever hear about are the 2% that do not. I hope the Home Office has been listening, because the issue was mentioned by Members on both sides of the House.

The hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) made an interesting point about the visa situation. When Ukraine happened, we demanded that the Home Office took action. It brought people in, but the numbers have now fallen back. I do not blame the Home Office for that, but I understand the issue. The issue of Afghan refugees in hotels also needs to be addressed, and I am sure that the Home Office will have listened to that point.

Another theme that came across from a number of Members, I think on both sides of the House, was the business of unanswered parliamentary letters and questions. As the Leader of the House has said on many occasions,

that is not acceptable. Departments respond at different rates. I am not quite sure how one Department is so good at doing it and another is not. I hope that I am allowed to say that I am about to do a grand tour of Whitehall during the recess. I am going to go to each Department and discuss with them, among other things, how they help us in Parliament. I will bring up the issue of questions, and I will ask them how they respond and how quickly. I shall also have the figures myself, so I shall be able to point out that MPs are not happy and that Departments have to improve. To be fair, some Departments are very good at responding. We just need to raise the game there.

Let me turn to some of the points that were brought up by individuals, starting with the Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley). I listened to what he said about the holocaust memorial. There was an urgent question today and there was a difference of views in the House, but he made very important comments, and I hope that they will be listened to. I was shocked to hear that a number of Ministers were apparently not willing to meet the Father of the House. If that is true, I will arrange to make sure that those meetings take place.

Sir Peter Bottomley: I am sure the Ministers are willing; it just has not happened.

Mr Bone: I will make sure that it happens, then. The Father of the House also brought up an individual case. If he lets me have the details of that, I will pass them on.

The hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) brought up a number of issues, including child poverty, which he has raised before. Obviously, I could say, “Look, we've done £36 billion” or whatever, but that does not actually mean anything, does it? I think Members across the House welcome the levelling-up commitment but want to see that turn into real money and real action. I am sure that Ministers will have heard that.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about the Afghan resettlement scheme. [*Interruption.*] Let me see what I have done wrong. [*Interruption.*] I have not done anything wrong quite yet. Actually, to be honest, Madam Deputy Speaker, they want to shut me up before I say anything else I will get in trouble for—that is the truth.

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, all Members and everyone who works here—it is a fantastic place; it is the home of democracy—and I wish everyone a happy and safe recess.

4.58 pm

Ian Mearns: I thank the Deputy Leader of the House. It is a tough gig, answering this debate.

This has been an historic first Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate. I thank Members across the House for taking part and raising a wide range of issues. I am sure that the letter writers in the offices of the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House will be busy for a few days following today's contributions.

Finally, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish you and every Member of this House, House staff, all those working across the parliamentary estate, and all staff in constituency offices across the country, a restful, enjoyable and well deserved summer recess.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Thank you. This has been an excellent debate—quite a contrast to the rest of the week—and a fitting remembrance of our dear friend Sir David. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Yesterday in this House I raised on point of order that images of my wife and two children have been used this week in paid-for Facebook adverts by the Rother Valley Labour party.

Today my office received this message from a constituent:

“I’ve arrived at work to 4 people being asked to leave the carpark”—

this was outside the Dinnington Tesco in my constituency—with

“a petition to remove Alex Stafford.”

She then says that she was shown an image of

“Alex, the wife and kids”.

Let me be clear about what has been reported by several constituents. The Rother Valley Labour party is using images featuring my wife and two young children, one of whom is only seven months old, to drum up anger and sentiment against me and my family.

On top of this, a former Rother Valley Labour councillor said today on a Rother Valley Facebook page:

“Stafford made the mistake of posting family images on Facebook...he is only in a hole because he dug it himself...he is happy for his family to stand metaphorically in the road on a busy bus route.”

He is stating that my wife and my two children are fair game because they feature on Facebook. What sort of level of politics have we sunk to when children are being used to attack other politicians and to whip up hatred?

I am again calling on the leader of the Labour party, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), and the Labour Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Tynemouth (Sir Alan Campbell), to immediately suspend all the Rother Valley Labour party members involved, and to speak to me tonight

about these incidents, which I can only see as being designed to create anger and hatred against my family. I am also calling on my fellow Rotherham borough MPs—the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) and the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion)—to condemn the use of pictures of my family in party political attacks.

This is not “campaigning”, as some have suggested. These are pictures of my young children, being used to whip up anger and hatred, and being shown to people in order to create an environment of intimidation. This needs to stop before we have another horrific incident.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I took the point of order that he made yesterday on the same subject, and I appreciate that matters have deteriorated since yesterday. As I said to the hon. Gentleman and to the House yesterday, I have to be very careful in dealing with these matters here in public in the Chamber, because this really is a matter of security. I have made sure that our security team here at the House of Commons will give the hon. Gentleman every assistance that they possibly can, because these matters are taken very seriously.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned various Members of this House. I appreciate that he was, of course, not criticising them, but having mentioned them, I hope he will give them notice, if he has not already done so—[*Interruption.*] I am grateful to him for confirming that he has already done so. I appreciate that he was not criticising any Member of this House, but merely drawing the matter to their attention. I repeat that these are matters that are taken very seriously.

Business without Debate

USE OF THE CHAMBER (UNITED KINGDOM YOUTH PARLIAMENT)

Ordered,

That this House agrees that the UK Youth Parliament shall be allowed to meet once a year in the Chamber of this House for the remainder of this Parliament.—(*Mr Bone.*)

No-fault Benefit Debts

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(David Morris.)

5.3 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I am very grateful to have secured this debate, particularly as the last item of business before we rise for the summer recess. Before moving on to the substance of the debate, I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone in the House, especially the staff, a very happy, peaceful and restful break.

A number of organisations have been incredibly helpful in briefing me for this debate, including StepChange, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Salvation Army and my local citizens advice bureaux in Easterhouse, Parkhead and Bridgeton.

Other than housing and asylum, benefits and social security issues make up the largest cohort of my constituency casework. In the five years that I have served in this House, I have seen endless problems with the social security system, which too often is found wanting when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable in our communities.

The issue I want to hone in on today is no-fault benefit debts. That is not to say that there are not other aspects of our social security system that could do with repair, but in the interests of time I will confine my remarks solely to no-fault benefit debts. I am particularly appreciative of my colleagues in the Child Poverty Action Group, whose early warning system flagged this matter up.

Let us look at a particular case study that brings a human angle to the issue, rather than focusing on dry regulations, as can often be the case. Jess and Mark have a benefit debt of £600 because they were accidentally paid too much universal credit. The Department for Work and Pensions has acknowledged that it made a mistake when it worked out their entitlement, but it is asking for the money back, and Jess and Mark are legally obliged to pay it. Since they do not have the £600—they thought it was theirs, so they have spent it on essentials for themselves and their two children—the DWP is recovering the debt by taking £80 a month off their universal credit. Jess's and Mark's income was already low, and now they simply do not have enough to live on.

Unfortunately, this issue is becoming a more common concern. There are a few more case studies I would like to draw the House's attention to. One claimant with a mental health condition has been left with an overpayment because he was accidentally given too much help towards his rent—that is, the wrong local housing allowance rate was applied; he had his young son staying with him but only the minority of the time. He could not have been expected to spot that pretty technical error.

A lone parent of a 10-year-old with disabilities was overpaid UC through no fault of her own—she received the severely disabled child element of UC when she should have received the disabled child element only. Again, she could not have been expected to spot that; but again, she is liable to repay the difference. A bereaved claimant with diabetes and osteoarthritis was overpaid UC when the DWP failed to act on information that she herself had given them about a private pension she had

inherited from her late husband. She is now paying back the overpayment at £48 a month. As of April this year, she still had another 17 months of that left to go.

No matter how an overpayment of universal credit happened, the Department for Work and Pensions can ask for it back, even when somebody has done nothing wrong and indeed has done everything that could reasonably have been expected of them.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing this important issue forward. He has outlined some cases; I had a similar case, and I commiserate with his constituents. Does he not agree that when someone has done all they can to be open and honest and there is clearly no fault for which they can be responsible, the stress of debt repayments on a household can be crippling? There must be a compassionate clause that can be used to override the computer systems. I think that is what the hon. Gentleman is asking for; it is certainly what I would ask for.

David Linden: I thank the hon. Gentleman. When I and the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) visited his constituency office on holiday during the Easter break, I saw at first hand how hard he works for his constituents; there were piles of casework all around him that day. His intervention is born of the fact that he is a hard-working constituency MP and can see the reality of this issue. He is right to call for that special clause.

Speaking about the rule before the introduction of universal credit, the then Employment Minister, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), said:

“The practical reality is that we do not have to recover money from people where official error has been made, and we do not intend, in many cases, to recover money where official error has been made.”—[*Official Report, Welfare Reform Public Bill Committee*, 19 May 2011; c. 1019.]

Yet the DWP almost always asks for the money back now. Overpaid claimants can ask the DWP to waive recovery, but only about 10 waiver requests were successful in 2020-21, set against 337,000 new overpayments caused by DWP mistakes in the same period. The DWP openly asserts that it will abandon recovery only in “exceptional” cases.

When the DWP insists on recovering a no-fault debt, it has the power to make large deductions from somebody's future universal credit payments—up to 15% of their standard allowance. To be clear for those watching today's proceedings at home, I should say that the standard allowance is the amount that the Government believe a person needs to live on, so reducing it by 15% certainly causes hardship. The Government have already suspended energy companies from that, so why on earth are they doing it?

All this is out of line with basic ideas about fairness and fault. The rules about recovering overpayments are very different from what they were for the legacy benefits and tax credits that the universal credit system replaces.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I thank my hon. Friend for securing the debate. There is another issue here—this goes back to fairness—about the case law on the overpayment of wages, where there is an error in law and an error in fact. Perhaps that is something the Department should reconsider.

David Linden: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who not only has a close interest in this issue from a constituency point of view but serves on the Work and Pensions Committee and has seen it at first hand. He makes a valid point, and it is on the record.

The new system is leading to financial hardship and debt, and it is likely to have long-term consequences for the health and wellbeing of adult claimants and their children.

One less obvious consequence of the rules is the potential for a decline in the quality of DWP decision making. Now that overpayments can be claimed back, it is possible that decision makers will not feel the same pressure to get decisions right first time. If that is the case, it will have consequences for DWP debt figures.

I have a number of recommendations to put to the Minister, who I have enormous respect for, and who I know to be somebody who listens, especially to those of us who have a significant constituency case load of DWP matters. First, I would like to see the Government change the rules so that no-fault universal credit debts are non-recoverable. That was the position for legacy benefits, for a good reason.

Secondly, the Department should ensure that decision makers are trained on the updated “Benefit overpayment recovery guide” and that recovery decisions truly take into account the list of factors in paragraph 8.4, including the circumstances of a debt and the conduct of the individual. Although that guidance changed in February 2022, we have not seen any changes in actual decision making.

Thirdly, I would like to see the Minister change DWP policy so that no deductions are made while someone is waiting for the outcome of a waiver request or appeal. Again, much of this was standard practice for the older benefits and tax credits.

Lastly, the Minister should set a 5%—not 15%—maximum for Government debt deductions, bringing them in line with deductions for other kinds of debt.

I have outlined how these issues are adversely impacting my constituents, and indeed people right across these islands. Not only that; I have also outlined some practical solutions that I think could alleviate the immense difficulty that the state is unnecessarily inflicting on those we represent. It is clear that these issues are occurring more and more, and it would be an abdication of responsibility for me, as a legislator, not to flag them up to the Government as a concern. But it would be even more of an abdication of responsibility on the part of the Government not to act to resolve them. I look forward to giving the floor to the Minister, who I am sure will be keen to work with me and our constituents to help resolve these issues.

5.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (David Rutley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) on securing the debate. It is always a pleasure to follow the Deputy Leader of the House, who was responding to the Sir David Amess summer Adjournment debate—even the fact that the debate has been named after him is very moving.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow East on his tenacity and assiduous approach to these issues and many others in this space. Of course, today he has been rewarded with the last Adjournment debate

before the summer recess, which shows not only his keen interest but his dedication. I have always valued our exchanges, because he raises important issues and I try to respond as best I can. I do not doubt his sincerity in these matters.

The Department for Work and Pensions plays a pivotal role every day, including through paying benefits to millions of households in a timely and accurate way, providing the vital welfare safety net that people need. In addition, where people are able to work, work coaches in our jobcentre network help our claimants into sustainable employment all across the United Kingdom.

The universal credit system rose to the challenge of the pandemic admirably. The DWP redeployed staff, harnessing the agility of the system to process benefit claims remotely, and paid over 3 million households. Incredibly and crucially, we kept payment timeliness at very high levels during that time of genuinely global disruption. To illustrate the strength of our welfare system, despite the challenges I have laid out, the statistics from the 2022 financial year show that universal credit official error overpayments were at their lowest recorded level of just 0.7%, having fallen for the third year in a row. Despite the record low levels of official error, which I am proud to be able to set out, I want to assure the hon. Gentleman and other Members that we are absolutely committed to improving further on that record. The good news is that as a percentage, we are on a downward trajectory and we want to go even further. Not only do we run extensive checks to rule out fraud, but we also have a series of internal checks in place that allow us to correct errors pre payment and to learn from any errors we do make to minimise the risk of reoccurrence.

As Members may be aware, under section 105 of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, any overpayment of universal credit, new style jobseeker’s allowance or employment and support allowance in excess of entitlement is recoverable. This includes overpayments arising as a result of official error. The approach ensures fairness for the taxpayer and that claimants receive the appropriate amount of support given their circumstances. The Department seeks to recover benefit overpayments as quickly and efficiently as possible, including prescribed official error debt, but it is committed to doing so without causing undue financial hardship. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who also deserves a medal today for his assiduousness and tenacity, should be cognisant of that fact. He used the word compassion. We try to lean into that important word through the process we embark on. We do not abandon people in financial difficulty, and we will always work with and support any individual who deserves our help.

We understand the difficulties claimants can face, which is why we have taken action and lowered the standard cap on deductions from universal credit twice in recent years, from 40% to 30% in October 2019, and then to 25% in April 2021. I am sure Members, particularly those who follow these matters, will appreciate that in April this year a temporary change was introduced, so that for 12 months only benefit claimants themselves can ask the DWP to pay their ongoing energy bills directly from their benefit or alter any existing arrangement. This ensures that claimants have greater autonomy over their benefit award at a time when energy prices are at a record high. Deductions are taken in priority order, which means that higher priority deductions such as

[David Rutley]

utility payments are taken first, with debt only taking up the remainder of the overall cap. Where a person feels they cannot afford the proposed rate of recovery and the debt has not arisen as a result of fraud, they are encouraged to contact us.

David Linden: I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. One issue, which came up in a call I had yesterday with StepChange and a number of other advice lines and organisations, is that when people try to get through to the Department to that specific team, it is incredibly difficult to do so. I am not asking for a miracle at the Dispatch Box, but can he go back to the Department and consider whether it could be made easier for people to get in touch with the Department when they face such financial hardship?

David Rutley: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I will take it away for sure and follow it up. I have replied to StepChange recently in its correspondence with me, or I am about to do so, on those very same issues. He makes a good point and I will genuinely follow up on that.

The Department is then able to work with individuals, reviewing their financial circumstances and, in most instances, agreeing a temporary reduction in their rate of repayment. We have recently extended the time period, from 12 months to 18 months, before any reduced debt repayments are reviewed. To ensure people can get in touch, we are automating processes, freeing up debt management staff time to respond to customer calls and provide timely support. Again, I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point and will follow up on it. We also have a rapid response team in place to help manage calls at peak times.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for the specific recommendations he made. He mentioned the distinction between legacy benefit official error debt and universal credit official error debt. Because of existing legislation, he is right in saying that the Department writes off legacy benefit official error debt, but, as hon. Members will know, Parliament voted to end legacy benefits and to make universal credit the welfare system of the future. The intention is that the vast majority of working age claimants will move to universal credit by 2024, and a long-standing part of the universal credit system is that official error debt is recoverable. The 2012 welfare reform changes were designed to ensure that claimants took ownership of all aspects of their claim, including the accuracy of their payments. I reassure the hon. Member that I understand the points that he has raised and that, as a Department, we recognise that official error can cause disruption to our claimants, which is why minimising these occurrences is a major focus.

The Department maintains vigorous control of the official error via its quality assurance framework, which provides an assurance that the necessary quality controls are in place. Additionally, an independent quality and assurance team checks transactions conducted within DWP benefits, and this insight informs training requirements, infrastructure improvements and risk management processes. A senior stakeholder group, comprising directors, oversees the quality agenda. I am confident about the approach that our Department is

taking. We are minimising the occurrence of official error, and also recovering payments where this unfortunately does occur. We need to balance our duty to the taxpayer with the need to deal with customers sensitively and appropriately. In that context, we do not think it is unreasonable that all overpayments are repayable.

The hon. Member also asked that we ensure that decision makers are involved in determining whether overpayments should be repaid. We are trained to take account of the factors listed in the benefit overpayment recovery guide. I can give the hon. Member a very clear assurance that this is the case, and also that regular refresher sessions are undertaken. The guidance to which the hon. Member refers was updated to give further clarity on some of the factors that have always been considered relevant when deciding whether to grant a waiver, as well as the evidence that should be provided to support an application. I am confident that this guide will make it clearer from the outset what evidence should be supplied in support of a request for waiver. We, of course, recognise the importance of doing all that we can to safeguard the welfare of claimants who have incurred debt. Our debt management agents are trained how to recognise signs of vulnerability, which is a critical point, and how best to support those customers.

My Department also has a network of advanced customer support leads to provide additional support to our most vulnerable customers. We are working in partnership with the Money Adviser Network, which offers free, independent and impartial money and debt advice, to routinely refer indebted customers to their service. In addition, the guidance to all universal credit agents is being reviewed to ensure that cases that may be appropriate for consideration of waiver are duly identified and referred to the waiver team for consideration.

Recovery of benefit debt must be balanced against the claimant's social obligation to repay the money they owe to the Exchequer or the taxpayer. In April 2021, we reduced the cap on standard deductions to 25%, as I have explained, and at the same time we doubled the new claim advance award period to 24 months. This provided all new universal credit claimants with greater flexibility over how they received their advance. Such changes have helped hundreds of thousands of UC claimants retain more of their award in any given month. Some people have advocated for a reduction of the maximum deduction rate for the Government debt, as the hon. Member has done today. However, the limits that we currently have in place strike the right balance between managing the social obligations while supporting claimants with debt. To be clear, reducing the threshold further would risk key payments, including child maintenance, not being fulfilled. I think that those points need to be considered, notwithstanding the concerns that he has raised.

In addition, through the universal credit system, the recovery of universal credit and tax credit overpayments can be taken up to a maximum of 15% of the standard universal credit allowance, although this can be higher where a claimant has earnings. As I have said already, we understand and take seriously the impact that the recovery of overpayments can cause. However, reducing the 15% cap would extend the length of time until claimants return to their full UC award, and there is already a significant amount of support that is available for claimants repaying these overpayments.

Claimants can already contact the debt management to agree an affordable rate of repayment. There is no minimum amount that a person is expected to repay; they can pay an amount less than 5% if that is all they are able to afford. That is an important consideration.

Moving on to the last of the hon. Gentleman's points—I have taken them in a slightly different order—the Department can waive benefit debt in exceptional circumstances, but waivers are generally granted only in truly exceptional circumstances where it can be clearly demonstrated that a person's circumstances will improve only by waiving the debt. Such requests are rare, and there would normally need to be specific and compelling grounds for a waiver, such as when the recovery of the debt was causing either long-standing financial hardship or welfare issues for the debtor and their family. Waivers are granted at the discretion of the Secretary of State.

As a number of requests is low, we do not normally feel it is necessary to stop recovery during the waiver process. When a request is received, it usually follows a discussion with the claimant regarding recovery of the debt, and that discussion often already results in a reduction or could involve a suspension in recovery, so there are other factors we can consider in the journey of the individual claimant. Further along in the process, we do not suspend recovery of an overpayment during the appeal process because, in legislation, anything paid in excess of entitlement is recoverable, and there is no right of appeal against the recoverability of the overpayment. The Department is responsible for ensuring fairness to the taxpayer because, as I stated earlier, overpayment is effectively debt that is owed to the taxpayer.

It is also worth highlighting that other measures are in place to support people struggling with debt, such as the breathing space scheme, which I think we may have mentioned in previous debates. The hon. Gentleman knows about it, so I will not prolong this point. Let us use all the tools that are available. In Scotland, the debt arrangement scheme provides similar support to that available in England.

We recognise that people are facing serious challenges in Glasgow, in Scotland and across the United Kingdom and much of the world, and I think even the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that we have put a significant package on the table. We have had similar debates, so I know he feels that it is not quite enough, but it is substantial none the less, now totalling £37 billion. We as Members have a duty to communicate and reassure people that a package of support is being made available to them. The £326 means-tested cost of living payment has gone out to nearly all eligible benefit claimants, but others will receive the first of those instalments by the end of the month. Claimants will get a second payment to get up to £650 well before Christmas, which will be vital for their budgeting at that time of year. The £150 disability cost of living payment will be made available

in September. The energy bills support scheme will also provide £400 for all who have a domestic electricity contract. Of course, pensioners will receive—I know the hon. Gentleman has strong views on the support available—£300 on top of their winter fuel payment.

Whatever our views on the different approaches to supporting people in poverty and those facing financial challenges, a significant amount of support is available. I will be doing all I can to help to communicate that, and I am sure he will do the same with his constituents. I want to put it on the record that, through the programme of support that will be put in place, 8 million low-income households in the United Kingdom will receive a package of support of around £1,200, which will be of significant help in these challenging times.

Of course, additional funds will be made available through the household support fund in England. There is similar support in Scotland; I have learned from previous debates that it does not total £79 billion in Scotland—that is for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales—but it is £41 million in Scotland. I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has taught me that lesson in previous debates. None the less, further funds have been put in place to help people with the cost of essentials.

To conclude, I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that the Government are taking a considered and balanced approach to the recovery of debt. We are not overlooking, and will not overlook, anyone who needs our help and is struggling during these times of financial uncertainty. Equally, we will always strive to be both fair and equitable to people who are paying back the debts that they owe. We will continue to recover debt where the law allows, but we will also try to set recovery plans that are sustainable for the individual. If people are concerned about their benefit debt, I encourage them to contact the Department to discuss the help and support that might be available to them.

I thank the staff for their amazing work this year and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your support throughout the year and in similar debates. I wish the hon. Gentleman and other Members present a good recess. I wish to pass on my huge thanks to the officials at DWP who have provided me with a huge amount of support over recent months. It is much appreciated and they do sterling work.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): As we approach the final Question before the summer, I join the Minister and everyone in the Chamber in wishing all Members and everyone who helps, supports and looks after us so well in the House a most peaceful and refreshing summer.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 21 July 2022

[DR RUPA HUQ *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Agricultural and County Shows

1.40 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): Given the unseasonably warm weather, I am happy to give my blanket permission for everyone to remove their jackets. The convention is that you have to go through me, but you can all have it off, as it were.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Just the jackets.

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): Just the jackets! I call Richard Holden to move the motion.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the importance of agricultural and county shows to rural Britain.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Huq. Thank you for stepping in today. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing the debate, and Members—I know many cannot be here—from all parties across the House and all parts of the United Kingdom for coming to support it, including the Members who have in their constituencies the Royal Highland Show, the Royal Welsh Show, which happened in recent days, and the Balmoral Show, which is run by the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society.

Britain has a long and proud tradition of agricultural and county shows. The 350 that take place a year fuel economic activity in our rural communities, and provide incalculable value to the societies that they celebrate. They showcase the very best of farming—a sector that contributes about £115 billion a year to the economy.

One reason I am so keen to talk about the subject is that the first show in England, I am reliably informed, took place in 1763 in my patch of North West Durham, in the town in Wolsingham. Since then, the shows have become central to the social fabric and economy of the parishes, villages and towns of North West Durham, and they have become wildly popular in modern Britain, with over 7 million people attending them annually. Agricultural shows span the length and breadth of North West Durham. They range from some of the largest fairs, such as the Wolsingham Show, which attracts tens of thousands of visitors to the town every year, to smaller ones, such as the historic Stanhope Show, which is over 180 years old. The very smallest, such as the Blanchland and Hunstanworth Show, right up in the north Pennines, celebrate some of the most rural parishes.

County Durham has a rich history of farming, stretching back thousands of years. The Normans enclosed large areas of it as the County Palatine of Durham back in the early middle ages. Around that time, some of the land in the rural north Pennines was cleared for farms,

for mining and particularly for small-scale cattle raising and sheep farming on the hills. In the 19th century, people in Weardale often subsidised their work in the mines with smallholdings and subsistence farming.

Today, for places across County Durham and across the country, county shows still provide a strong link between that rich agricultural history and present day society. Although agriculture has fundamentally changed over the centuries, and county shows have evolved as well, the shows are still unique points at which our towns and villages can come together. Agricultural shows provide people with a unique opportunity to celebrate what makes our local rural communities so special. They incorporate a huge range of rural activities, such as dry stone walling, which I tried my hand at last year at the Weardale Show in St John's Chapel, and sheep shearing, which I know many hon. Members are always keen to take part in.

Despite the huge diversity in attractions, animals and events on display, what the shows have in common is the local pride that they instil in people and in the small local communities they serve. I am thinking particularly of the fact that cattle are still very much at the heart of even the larger shows in my constituency, such as the Wolsingham Show. Having the winners paraded around the ground is very much the highlight of the day, even with the much broader attractions that are now on offer.

These shows enrich our local communities. They help to reinforce social cohesion, and are an invaluable asset to modern Britain. Unfortunately, as we have all seen, over the last couple of years covid put a stop to some of them. I was at the Eastgate Sheep Show back in May, which was able to go ahead for the first time since my election as an MP in 2019. This year, I hope to see people return en masse to our county and agricultural shows, to help our communities rediscover their social benefits. We all took those benefits for granted not that long ago, but we now realise just how important they are. I look forward to visiting the Weardale Show in St John's Chapel, the Wolsingham Show and the Stanhope Show later in the summer.

Farms are intrinsic to the identity and image of rural Britain. Without them there would be no such green and pleasant land that we all enjoy. They play a really important part in ensuring that our rural communities are connected to our local towns. While farming practices have changed, meaning that we do not need huge proportions of the population working the ground and the land anymore, farms provide a symbol for many people in those small towns and villages, and a real connection with the land that feeds our nation and other nations across the world.

I would welcome any Member coming to visit my patch this summer. British tourism is incredibly important, and it is not just the agricultural shows themselves that are the driver. They also provide a real anchor for many other rural activities, particularly rural pubs, which I am a keen supporter of, as a member of the all-party parliamentary beer group, and the hospitality trade, which in so much of rural Britain was also hammered during the covid pandemic. I urge anybody thinking of travelling around the country this summer to anchor it with a rural show, and to spend some time in those rural villages too.

In the modern era, farms are at the frontier of so many environmental measures, with farmers committed to working as much as possible in harmony with nature,

[*Mr Richard Holden*]

while producing sustainable and nutritious food and products from their land. I am glad that when we come back in September, the trade agreements that we have negotiated will be addressed on Second Reading, and I am glad that the Department has had the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 to ensure that Britain's agricultural interests are looked after. The Government are driving forward changes to Britain's agricultural sector, following our exit from the EU. I hope that environmental land management schemes will, over time, provide a real environmental link, while ensuring that good food production is maintained in the UK.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): My hon. Friend rightly highlights the importance of agriculture remaining at the heart of the county shows that he eloquently describes. Does he agree that food production must remain at the heart of UK agricultural strategies? That does not mean that we are ignorant of the net zero challenge, and some of the environmental imperatives, but keeping British farmers farming and producing high-quality food must be the overriding goal.

Mr Holden: I agree with my right hon. Friend, and he is right to highlight that. It is true not just in agricultural farming but for our fishing industry, as I am sure his community would reflect. Nothing has brought that home more than what has happened recently overseas, and the knock-on impact on inflation and food prices here. There is also the security element, so he makes a valid point, which I will return to later.

David Linden: I agree with the point made by the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), but do we not need to be realistic in this debate and ensure that we take a much more liberal view towards migration policy if we are to support the UK's agricultural sector? There is no doubt that we have a workforce shortage, which so far the Government are not doing enough on.

Mr Holden: I thank the hon. Member for raising that point. One important point that I would mention to him, though, is that we need to have a really productive farming sector, and I am glad that the Government are looking to introduce some measures to drive that productivity. If we look across the sea to Holland, which actually has more people employed in the agricultural sector than we do, it has introduced some very productive farming measures over the past few years. There has to be a broader picture, but capital investment in particular is going to be essential if we are to grow our way out of the issues we face with not just food security, but the rural economy.

To pick up on a broader theme that both my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) have highlighted, I am really keen that we put our focus on the environment where it can do most good. In my area, we have huge amounts of upland peat, and there is currently a lot of grit removal going on, which is helping to ensure that our rural communities can engage in carbon capture and storage on relatively low-value agricultural land. Peat takes up four times as much carbon dioxide per acre as forestry,

so I would much rather concentrate on where we can get the biggest bang for our environmental buck and not be pushing afforestation as widely as possible, particularly on higher-value agricultural land. That is a particularly important point; it is something I have discussed with Ministers, and it is something the Government are moving towards.

British farming is the UK's largest manufacturing sector; in fact, it is important to remember that we could not have had an industrial revolution without an agricultural revolution before it. Despite the enormous output, with the specialisation and diversification of Britain's farms and the premium products they produce, we now need to aim for another agricultural revolution. That is why I am so keen to ensure that we get some real capital into our farming communities to help drive the next wave, because those things go hand in hand with each other.

I am proud of the unique output of our farming communities, and I am particularly proud to see them celebrated in these rural shows. As I said, those shows bring us together as local towns and communities to see what is happening on the farm—I am sure Members from across the House will have seen that locally. We do not want our agricultural and rural communities to just become the sites of holiday homes.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): My hon. Friend is giving an excellent speech, highlighting the importance of the shows to rural communities. The Anglesey Agricultural Show on 9 and 10 August is perhaps the most high-profile event on the Ynys Môn calendar. It has a proud history, going back over 200 years. Over 50,000 people flock to the show to see livestock, equestrian events, local crafts and food and, this year, even giant tortoises. That show owes its success to a team of hard-working volunteers, so does my hon. Friend agree it is vital that we give support to shows such as Anglesey's to support our rural communities and rural heritage? Does he also agree that I should help with the sheep shearing?

Mr Holden: I certainly think that my hon. Friend should help with the sheep shearing, and I hope she shares some videos on social media. She raises a particularly important point about the volunteers behind those shows. I have seen it myself on the ground: they could not take place without the volunteers who run the committees, put up the signs and do the fundraising to ensure that they are sold out. Often, the judges will themselves be volunteers. They are the backbone of those shows, reflecting the real link between the rural communities and the shows. I obviously encourage as many people as possible to go to the Anglesey show.

My hon. Friend's intervention relates to the point I was making about tourism in rural areas. We have to ensure that our rural areas are thriving hubs not only of agriculture, but of environmental land management and tourism. We have to ensure that they do not die—that they do not become dormitory villages or just the sites of second homes. It is really important that those local communities are able to thrive, and that the links between agriculture and the broader economy and our lives are maintained. That is one of the reasons why these shows—including, obviously, the Anglesey Show—are so important.

We must ensure that our farmers are as productive as possible and that they grow for Britain, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire was saying. Direct interaction with the farming community through county shows will probably help to address some of the issues and concerns that people might have by showing some of the diversification that takes place in the sector. There is always a danger of an urban disconnect with rural Britain. That is why these shows are so important: they provide an easy and very accessible link between our rural communities and people from across the country.

In the light of the rising costs of food, people are starting to look at food in a slightly different way. The Russian blockade of Ukraine has caused huge problems, following their illegal invasion of that country. It is not so much that Britain needs to be totally self-sufficient in everything, but we certainly need to be more self-sufficient than we have been. When I was a special adviser looking at the balance of trade between Britain and other countries, one of the biggest things that we were importing that we could, actually, easily do here was food. I am particularly glad that the Government are starting to look at that area, to see how we can become more productive and grow more in the UK. That is also particularly important when we look at the environment at the moment. We want to see those food miles reduced as much as possible and see things grown in the UK. We need to take more account of the transportation costs and the environmental impact of that transportation, rather than simply the bottom line in terms of price and other considerations.

Britain's farms are essential to our national economic interests, not just because they look great and they keep our country looking great, but because we need them to be as productive as possible to help our country. Country fairs are central to that rural economic fabric and to highlighting the great work that our farmers do. They provide unmatched social benefits to our towns and villages. County fairs also play a pivotal role; we saw the county flags around Parliament Square just yesterday, showing that they are also at the heart of rural Britain. The fairs provide a brilliant opportunity for the transfer of knowledge as well, by getting farmers together to see innovations and spread best practice within the rural community.

The shows provide a value beyond their locality as a source of income generation for the wider community, for the people visiting, and as an eye-opener for what farming is actually about in modern Britain. The largest shows—such as the Royal Cornwall Show, of which I know the Minister is a great fan, the Great Yorkshire Show, which I am sure will be mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), the Royal Three Counties Show, the Royal Highland Show, the Royal Welsh Show and the Balmoral Show—are not just in their local interest; there is also a national and often international interest in them. They offer a new set of opportunities for our farmers to diversify their operations, expand into new markets and find new, much-needed revenue sources.

Rural Britain must maintain its cherished position in the national fabric. It is imperative that we protect and promote county and agricultural fairs across modern Britain and do everything we can to ensure that they thrive into the future. They provide a stage on which the very best of our rural towns and villages can be showcased, as well as serving as a much-needed driver for innovation,

investment and tourism in our rural economies. Their importance cannot be underestimated, and I look forward to visiting my local rural shows in Wolsingham, Stanhope, Hunstanworth and St John's Chapel later this summer.

1.59 pm

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Huq. I start by thanking and paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) for the intelligent and eloquent way that he set out the issues. It was an enjoyable speech to listen to, and informative as well. It is a timely moment to secure a debate on county agricultural shows in a week when, as my hon. Friend said, the historic county flags are flying around Parliament Square. It is delightful to see Pembrokeshire's county flag among them.

The four-day Royal Welsh Show has been taking place this week. It is another great success, and it is great to see it back after the difficult covid years. It is a good moment for this debate, as we look ahead to the summer recess that is about to start. Many of us will be getting out and about in our constituencies, and going around our county shows. As my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham said, the smaller—often village-sized—shows are still an important part of the fabric of rural and agricultural life in the 21st century.

My county show—we refer to it as “the county show”—is the Pembrokeshire agricultural show. It is the pre-eminent county show in Wales. It is one of the last remaining three-day shows. Covid has been a huge interruption to the show. It is back this year in a two-day format, but I hope it will return to the full three days in future years. It attracts more than 100,000 visitors every year. It always falls in the middle of August, when there are thousands of tourists visiting the beautiful beaches and countryside of Pembrokeshire.

What we get at the Pembrokeshire County Show is an incredibly impressive shop window on agricultural and rural life in Pembrokeshire. It is not just about farming, although that remains at its heart. It also brings in other industries from the private sector, such as car and machinery dealerships. All kinds of voluntary groups and charities have stands. Myself and Conservative colleagues in the Senedd have a stand, and run advice surgeries. No other event in the Pembrokeshire calendar brings together so many people from so many different backgrounds to celebrate agriculture, farming and rural identity. The point that my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham makes about identity and cohesion in a community—that sense of community feeling—is really important. For us in Pembrokeshire, the county show is a great vehicle for expressing that.

It is the Pembrokeshire Agricultural Society that runs the Pembrokeshire show. I put on record my thanks and pay tribute to the team from the society, particularly the new chairman this year, Mansel Raymond. Those Members who have been involved in dairy issues may recognise the name from his time chairing the National Farmers Union dairy board. He is a very successful farmer in the community; he takes over from Stephen James, a previous chairman of NFU Cymru. They and their teams have done a fantastic job of keeping the Pembrokeshire Agricultural Society running during these difficult years of covid, getting it to the position where we can run the show once again this year.

[*Stephen Crabb*]

The Pembrokeshire Agricultural Society was actually founded in 1784; it goes back more than 230 years. It was founded exactly at a time when the agricultural revolution was feeding into the industrial revolution, which my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham talked about. The founder of the agricultural society was one William Knox; he was not a Welshman but from Scotland, a relative of John Knox. He was a former Under-Secretary of State for America who found himself in Pembrokeshire. The society had some difficult years, but it was re-founded in 1901, specifically with the purpose of running the flagship county show every summer. That has happened every year since, and for the last 63 years it has happened at the Wityhush airfield site, just outside Haverfordwest, which is of course the county town of Pembrokeshire.

It is a tremendous show, Dr Huq, and if you ever find yourself in west Wales in the middle of August, I hope you take some time out to visit the Pembrokeshire show. Indeed, I have seen many colleagues over the last 20 years, from all sides of the House, visiting the show when they have been on holiday in Pembrokeshire. They always have a great time.

For all the activities, the stalls and the fun, leisure aspects that tourists and visitors enjoy, at the heart of the show remains agriculture, farming and competition. There are livestock competitions and other types of contest. Farming remains at the heart of the show, which is a really key point that I want to stress, because farming is the backbone of rural life. Some shows around the country have morphed over recent years into more generic country fairs; they have a place and are fun as well. But for the county agricultural shows that we are discussing this afternoon, the key point is that they have farming strongly at their heart. As I said, farming is the backbone of rural life.

I chair the Welsh Affairs Committee, and it is great to see some colleagues from Wales present this afternoon. We recently completed an inquiry into the social and cultural benefits of family farms in Wales, taking into account the signing of new trade deals and some other trends in agriculture. I think that all members of the Select Committee would agree that maintaining vibrant farming is really important, not just for the economic benefits to rural communities, but for protecting something that is quite unique and special about our heritage. That has particular importance for us in Wales, where I think it is fair to say that the farming community is probably the most important vehicle for incubating and protecting the Welsh language, which of course goes to the very heart of our identity in Wales. All these things link together and come together very effectively in these annual agricultural shows.

In the report that the Select Committee produced on family farms in Wales, we highlighted a number of risks that I think it is important to put on the record. My hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham has already touched on them. We made the point about keeping farming principally about food production. There is also the point about tree planting in Wales. We observed as a Committee that more and more high-quality agricultural land is being purchased for tree planting in Wales. That represents an almost permanent loss of agricultural land for these activities. I have a particular concern that some of that land is being purchased by

corporations with no real connection to Wales at all. They are, in my view, practising a form of greenwashing: it allows those corporates to say that they are offsetting their carbon emissions. I do worry. I worry about farming when farming is being pushed more and more away from core food production. I worry about farming when more and more land is being given over to tree planting. That of course has benefits, but when it means a permanent loss of quality agricultural land, that is a concern.

The Pembrokeshire County Show will be happening again this August. It is a fabulous shop window on our rural community. However, smaller shows are happening as well. We have the Nevern Village Show and the Fishguard Show. My local show is the Clarboston Road Show, in the next village along from where I live. They all have their particular characteristics. They all have their local characters and individuals who give so much of their free time to volunteer and to make the show happen. Those people are the bedrock of our communities, and we salute them this afternoon.

2.8 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr Huq, and it is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), who gave us a wonderful picture of just how important county shows and the smaller shows are to rural life and to the fabric of communities in Preseli Pembrokeshire.

I join the right hon. Member in congratulating the hon. Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) on securing this very important debate. He has timed it perfectly, as it comes at the end of Royal Welsh week. However, I congratulate him primarily on a tour de force of a speech, which covered the county agricultural shows in his constituency, their long history, and the importance of agriculture and rural life to his communities and parishes. He eloquently described in great detail how integral these shows are to the social and economic fabric of the communities and parishes that he represents. It will not surprise hon. Members to hear that I will make the same case for the importance of agricultural shows in my constituency of Ceredigion.

We have already heard an interesting point that I had not considered before coming to this afternoon's debate. The origin and purpose of a number of these agricultural societies and agricultural shows was not only to showcase farmers' wonderful produce and stock, but to exchange best practice and techniques. That was an important endeavour, and it played such an important role in the agricultural revolution. As a rural MP, I think the importance of the agricultural revolution is often downplayed when we consider the history of the United Kingdom; as the hon. Member for North West Durham said, without the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution would not have followed.

The Cardiganshire Agricultural Society was established in 1784; the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire told us that the Pembrokeshire Agricultural Society was founded then, too, so there was something in the waters of west Wales in that year. I am afraid to say that it was not Mr Knox who founded ours, although I note that he was an Under-Secretary of State for America, so in 1784 he perhaps had a bit more time on his hands, after the 1783 treaty. However, the purpose of that society

was to promote agricultural techniques and to share best practice. I am pleased to say that it continues in existence, and continues to meet regularly. I have a fond memory of attending one of their annual dinners in Lampeter some years ago, when I was a relatively new Member of Parliament. It is fantastic that their sharing of best practice continues to this day. Such bodies are of integral importance. They represent broader networks of societies, both at parish and village level, but larger towns would also hold an annual agricultural show.

The first Cardigan county show was held in 1854, so there was a bit of a gap after the society was established. I am pleased to say that we have continued to have annual shows, except during the covid pandemic and in a few other instances over the decades. It is a staple of the local calendar. We have missed it for the past two years; perhaps I underestimated just how much I would miss agricultural shows—not just my home show of Lampeter, but all the other shows that we Members of Parliament have the privilege of—well, a convenient excuse for—attending.

I am pleased to say that in Ceredigion, we have the best part of 20 agricultural shows. Despite the two-year gap forced by covid, they are all back up and running. The first one started in June, and they will continue through to the beginning of September. Obviously, produce and livestock is on show, but they also serve as important social hubs for rural communities. The larger county shows that we have in Cardigan and Aberystwyth are really impressive spectacles and feats of logistics—I am in awe of them—and they are made possible by the committees of volunteers who are in charge of them.

The smaller shows also serve an important function. The right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire mentioned the number of challenges that agriculture faces. In Wales, there are changes to agricultural policy, the disruption of covid-19 and Brexit to some extent, and the challenge of losing large tracts of agricultural land to plantation for forestry and offsetting schemes. Our farmers come under the cosh, whatever direction they face. Farming is, as I am sure hon. Members know, a lonely profession at times, so the local show is a great opportunity for local farmers to take the day off and socialise with each other. They go to shows to share problems and advice, but also to enjoy each other's company. We have missed that for two years, so I am pleased that this year we will have the whole host of shows again in Ceredigion.

Some shows have merged; they have had to change quite a bit. We now have a great variety of displays and attractions. If anybody needs a holiday suggestion this year, I invite them to Ceredigion. We have it all. We have the core elements of an agricultural show, livestock displays and goods—vegetables and preservatives, you name it—but we also have speed shearing events, which are fun. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) may wish to attend a few of those events in Ceredigion before she tries her hand at shearing at the Anglesey show later in August. We also have the harness racing—several racing events, as it happens—vintage displays and tractor runs, and of course we have the Barley Saturday celebration in Cardigan. If Members have not been able to attend that yet, I very much recommend that they catch it next year.

These events are a celebration of our rural heritage, but they also look to the future, and allow us to share techniques and technology. Perhaps most importantly,

shows allow young people, especially at the local show level, to try their hand at showing animals, or exhibiting vegetables, fruits or preservatives. They given them a chance to compete. I pay tribute to the Ceredigion Federation of Young Farmers Clubs, or YFC Ceredigion, the county organisation for the young farmers clubs; the opportunities they give to our young people are second to none. YFC Ceredigion had a good time of it in the Royal Welsh Show this week, where it won the display competition. I believe YFC Ceredigion is playing rugby later against Brecknock in the final; I do not think the match has kicked off yet. I wish the team the very best in that endeavour. YFC Ceredigion also managed to win the after-dinner speaking category of the competition run by the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs.

There is a close link between large shows and the network of local, smaller shows at which young people first experience competing in a whole range of categories and codes. Those shows feed up to the counties and ultimately the Royal Welsh Show. We have heard a little bit about the Royal Welsh already. It is a fantastic event—a really impressive week—and I pay tribute to the organisers, who even managed to provide air conditioning for some of the livestock sheds in this week's warm weather. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) perhaps will not thank me for reminding the House that the first ever Royal Welsh Show for agriculture was held in Ceredigion, back in 1904, although I am willing to concede that the present location in Builth Wells is just as good for the animal event. Without the smaller shows and the county shows after them, the Royal Welsh would not be the great success that it is.

In closing, I thank the scores of volunteers who serve on the committees of these small shows, ensuring that everybody is registered in time, that the information and entries are in order, and that the insurance is sorted out. It was a particular challenge this year to secure marquees for the produce tents. Those volunteers do it year in and year out, often without seeking any thanks or celebration, but it is a great pleasure—once again, I thank the hon. Member for North West Durham for giving me the opportunity to do so—to place on record how much we appreciate their efforts. Without their tireless work to make sure that small and county shows go ahead, the rural community could not come together every year to share and celebrate our rural heritage, and to keep a little bit of that social fabric intact. I am sure that all rural MPs will agree that there is a real and specific type of community spirit in rural areas, and rural agricultural shows make an invaluable contribution to the endurance of that spirit.

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): From Wales to Yorkshire: Andrew Jones.

2.18 pm

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): Thank you very much, Dr Huq, for calling me to speak. It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, but particularly when you have been so flexible with your diary in getting here today.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) on securing this debate. Agricultural and county shows are hugely important for our economy. They are also one of the most enjoyable parts of rural Britain, whether the shows are large or small. In Harrogate and Knaresborough, we have both

[*Andrew Jones*]

types, and I love them both. Thanks are due to the organisers of all these shows up and down our nation. It requires a huge effort and great skill to put these events on, and much of the work is done by volunteers; we should recognise and celebrate them.

I will make an immediate declaration of interests—I spent last Friday at the Great Yorkshire Show in Harrogate. For those who have not visited it yet, it is the largest agricultural show in England and it is, as described, great. There is a 250-acre site in Harrogate. The show is over 160 years old, and there was a wonderful sense of excitement and fun about it.

I will spend a few minutes discussing the ingredients that make agriculture and county shows so special and important. I agree with colleagues that the most significant ingredient is the sense of community and belonging brought about by each show. The Great Yorkshire Show is from Yorkshire, for Yorkshire and, of course, in Yorkshire—it is a part of our Yorkshire identity. Of course, shows across the country are part of and reflect their local community, and that has been made clear in the debate. Some 140,000 people came to the Great Yorkshire Show last week. When I went on Friday, I had a little think about when I first visited, and I think it was in 1973.

Mr Holden: That's not possible!

Andrew Jones: My hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham is a generous man, but he is also completely wrong. My point is that the show has been a big part of something I have enjoyed. About 80% of the visitors are from Yorkshire and the Humber and the north-east, which means that many visitors come from a considerable distance away, which obviously brings a significant boost to the tourism and hospitality sectors.

The shows are places where people come together. We have highlighted that that is particularly true for farmers, but the shows are social beyond that; the beer tent does a brisk trade. Shows also celebrate the local agricultural sector, and the stock displays are critical to that. It is always great to see the pride in animal husbandry. Last Friday, I spoke to cattle farmers in the morning and sheep farmers in the afternoon, and congratulated those who had won prizes, such as best in show. The competition was strong, and their delight in winning was good to see. The livestock are the heart of the show.

There is obviously a commercial element to shows, and a strong retail presence. There are also agricultural equipment displays, which are a good way for people to see what is available and learn about new ideas and technology to boost productivity. There is business, and lots of money changes hands, but that is not the beating heart of the show. They are not just trade shows; they are much more complicated, but also more significant, than that. They are a platform for the celebration of the produce of an area, and they are a showcase of that produce. I do not just mean the livestock; I am particularly thinking about some of the smaller food producers. The quality of local produce, up and down all four nations of the country, is absolutely fantastic.

The shows are a platform that enable companies to reach customers and be spotted by bigger distributors. Introductions can be made, knowledge shared, and,

later, deals done. I am sure we can all think of examples of how that has worked in our constituency. Certainly, judging by the sampling in the food halls last Friday, the enjoyment of local produce was pretty strong. The shows keep evolving, of course, and there are always new things to celebrate and new things to learn, as well as old. There can be new companies and new displays; for example, this year, the Yorkshire Show had sheepdog trials for the first time, which drew crowds.

The knowledge-sharing mentioned by a number of Members is an absolutely critical but under-recognised part of the shows. That works in a few ways. To give a practical example, Rural Payments Agency staff may be available to answer questions, and there can be expert talks put on to enable the sharing of best practice. Shows are also critical, and practical, for MPs. I had many excellent conversations at the Great Yorkshire Show last week, including with ASDA; I met its representatives to discuss local sourcing and the challenges of food inflation, and I met the National Farmers Union to discuss the challenges faced by local farmers. When I was last at the Boroughbridge Show, I met the Rare Breeds Survival Trust—a charity whose aims I support—and I did so again in Harrogate last week. We also had Ministers present, which was valued by those who got the opportunity to say hello. I do not think my hon. Friend the Minister has yet visited the Great Yorkshire Show, but I hope it is only a matter of time until he does. He would be welcome.

There are many elements that make agricultural and county shows work, but at their heart is a celebration of the countryside, its people and produce, its stewardship and its future. Their anchor is in local communities, and they make communities stronger. They are important to rural Britain, as the title of the debate suggests, but I would like to go further and say that they are important to all of Britain.

2.25 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I am sure that most people are wondering why on earth the MP for the small, four-mile-long urban constituency of Glasgow East is speaking in the debate. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson), who had intended to speak—no doubt paying great tribute to the Turriff Show—has had to return to his constituency, so I have been drafted in at short notice. I am sure the Chamber will be disappointed to hear that.

I thank the hon. Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) for securing and opening the debate. I suspect there is a good chance that that was his last speech from the Back Benches; we shall see what happens in September.

Across Scotland, agricultural and county shows are hugely important to the cultural fabric of local communities. Some events have taken place for hundreds of years. Indeed, the First Minister marked the 200th anniversary of the Royal Highland Show this year, emphasising its importance as

“a place where the agricultural sector meet, debate and exchange ideas. And it showcases often to audiences who might not otherwise think very much about these things”—

myself included—

“the quality, the variety and the importance of Scottish agriculture and of the Scottish food and drink industry.”

In the past two years, the pandemic has prevented many agricultural and county shows from going ahead, but it is fantastic to see these events go ahead this summer, and to see people from not just across Scotland, but across these islands, embracing and celebrating the rural community. However, I would be remiss if I did not mention the various issues that have affected, and still affect, the farming and agricultural community across Scotland. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) said, the conflict in Ukraine, the devastating impacts of Brexit and the ongoing disruptions caused by the pandemic continue to worry our farmers.

North of the border, the Scottish Government are committed to supporting rural and agricultural communities. Indeed, earlier this year, the Scottish Government launched the national strategy for economic transformation, which makes it clear that every part of Scotland, especially rural Scotland, is crucial to the recovery from the pandemic. In March, the SNP Government set up a food insecurity taskforce to advise on the problems that the invasion of Ukraine would cause, including the difficulties caused by increased costs—a point already made in the debate. The taskforce has already reported, and some of the key recommendations have been accepted, such as the establishment of a new food security structure in Scotland.

Alongside pressing the UK Government to do more to support the food and farming sectors, the Scottish Government are using their powers to the maximum in order to address the challenges that face our farmers every day. Indeed, our First Minister has already announced major investment of more than £200 million through the 2022 to 2027 environment, natural resources and agriculture strategic research programme. By contrast, the Conservative Government in Westminster remain committed to a disastrous Brexit policy that undermines farmers, while also failing to address the significant cost of living crisis, which is devastating for our rural communities.

I can absolutely get behind the tone of the debate that the hon. Member for North West Durham has brought to the Chamber. However, when we politicians turn up at agricultural and county shows across these islands this summer, pose for our photo ops—some of which might include sheep shearing—and chat away to our constituents, we must remember what we have voted for. Did we support a Brexit that harmed farmers, and a Tory Government who are failing to act on the cost of living crisis, which is undoubtedly impacting on rural communities?

Agricultural and county shows should showcase the very best of farming and rural communities across these islands. However, such communities can flourish only if they are properly funded and supported, and the success of farmers in Scotland is fundamental to our environment, our economy and our reaching our sustainability goals. They should never, ever, be taken for granted.

2.29 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for filling in at the last minute, Dr Huq. I thank the hon. Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) for securing this important debate and informing us of the many agricultural shows that operate in Durham. I remember as a nine-year-old going to the Royal Show at the National Agricultural Centre in Stoneleigh, which sadly has now closed. I was amazed at the animal

activities and the sounds and smells, which stayed with me, so I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about agricultural shows.

The years 1066, 1939 and 1966 are all famous in our history. The years 1763, 1796 and 1838 probably mean little to most of the population, but mention them to farming communities the length and breadth of the country and the response will be different. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Wolsingham Show, which was the first agricultural show to be held in Britain, in 1763. The Otley Show in my constituency was first held in 1796, and is now the longest-running one-day agricultural show in the United Kingdom, and 1838 saw the creation of the Yorkshire Show, now the Great Yorkshire Show, which the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) spoke about at length. It is now the largest show, with 140,000 visitors, and I am sure that will grow year on year. I did not go this year, but I went last year, when there were only 130,000 visitors. We are clearly ramping up the visitor numbers at the Yorkshire agricultural showground.

All agricultural and county shows play an extremely important role in rural Britain. They provide an insight into farming and an opportunity for farmers to promote stock and produce, as well as the food industry more widely. They are above all a celebration of British farming, but they are not only that. We need to reflect on the fact that farming can be an isolating job on a day-to-day basis. Shows give farmers community, something to aim for, and an opportunity to reaffirm their pride and commitment to farming. Farmers put a huge amount of time and effort into their stock, and shows provide the platform to build both their reputation and their business.

It is not just farmers who benefit from agricultural shows, though. Whatever their size, shows give the public the opportunity to learn more about farming and build an understanding of the connection between our farms and the food on our tables. In a world of prepackaged, pre-cut supermarket produce, it is a much-needed education about the origins of our food. In a world of uncertainty about the quality of our food, it gives the public the reassurance that livestock is well cared for by our farming communities.

Agricultural and county shows provide an opportunity for us to celebrate rural life and the invaluable contribution that farming makes to this country. Agriculture is a vital industry filled with talented and hard-working people, but under the watch of our current Government, the farming sector has been beset by crisis after crisis, from the pig backlog that resulted in tens of thousands of healthy pigs being culled, to the avian flu outbreak of the past year—the worst in living memory.

During these difficult times, farmers in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and mainland Europe have been able to turn to their Governments for help. Farmers in England have not been given the same support. This year, at agricultural shows up and down the country the main topic of conversation among many attendees will be the latest set of crises bearing down on the agriculture sector: inflation, lack of seasonal labour, and the botched roll-out of the environmental land management scheme. It is a dangerous combination that is putting the future of British farming and agriculture in jeopardy.

Farmers, those in the industry and Opposition Members have been warning for months that British agriculture faces a chronic shortage of workers this year, but the

[Alex Sobel]

Government have apparently not listened. The response in ramping up the number of seasonal worker visas has been very slow: they are now at 40,000, but the NFU has said it wants 70,000 worker visas to bridge the gaps. NFU survey data for April showed an estimated notional seasonal worker shortfall of 12% in horticulture—three times the figure for the same month last year. Industry experts say that there will be a catastrophic waste of home-grown fruit and vegetables this summer due to the lack of workers. Ultimately, many agricultural businesses face bankruptcy if they cannot access the necessary labour to harvest their crops. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues will address those issues when they go to the shows this summer.

On top of a shortage of workers, farmers are also contending with soaring inflation, which is pushing up the price of agricultural inputs. Independent consultant Andersons' latest inflation estimate for agriculture is 30.6%—three times higher than general inflation. Agflation is a huge issue, and one we must address.

As we all know, the invasion of Ukraine has resulted in significant increases in gas prices. For some farmers, the price of gas is now as much as 200% higher than it was at the start of 2021. Without food security, the food supply that people up and down the country expect will start to disappear. We saw shortages of food on shelves during covid; we might be back there again, perhaps worse. Some greenhouse growers cannot afford to heat their greenhouses and we are seeing a drop in the production of crops like peppers, cucumbers and tomatoes, which will mean more imports and potentially more shortage as demand builds across Europe.

In addition, fertiliser production is also heavily linked to gas. As international gas prices soar, so does the cost of fertiliser. In January 2021, the cost of ammonium nitrate was £200 per tonne; it is now £900 per tonne and rising. We are seeing a catastrophic conflation of problems affecting farmers, who will be going to the shows this summer and discussing them with each other, and raising them with us as politicians.

Food businesses face the same problems. I recently spoke to a Yorkshire biscuit manufacturer that has seen a huge increase in the prices of all its main ingredients. Margarine, sugar and wheat prices are all affected by the war in Ukraine and the agricultural worker shortage. The manufacturer cannot afford to increase workers' wages, but has had to put up its prices as inflation is running at over 10%. That same issue was raised with the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough in his discussions with Asda at the Great Yorkshire Show. As Asda is a Leeds-based business, I will also be discussing those issues with the company.

These latest crises take place against the backdrop of the slow introduction of the ELM scheme—another big talking point among farmers, the NFU and the Country Land and Business Association at shows and elsewhere. The Government are phasing out direct payments, but were are seeing a significant gap between the ELM scheme's introduction and direct payments being phased out. Farms could go to the wall if the scheme's roll-out is not accelerated. This is another example of agriculture being pushed into a difficult place. If the Government continue to push ahead as they are, many farming businesses will go bust. This not only harms farmers,

but undermines our efforts to reach net zero, which may force us to import more food, produce to lower environmental standards, and use more carbon to get it here.

Many Government Members will be preoccupied over the summer by yet another Tory leadership election, but at agriculture and county shows, I fear people will be more concerned about the challenges facing British agriculture and food businesses. While the Government may be content to amble on without a plan, Labour pledges to provide agricultural communities with the support they need. On the ELM scheme, the Opposition support the NFU's call for basic payment reductions to be paused for two years to provide more time for the scheme to be rolled out. We would reprioritise the ELM scheme to secure more domestic food production in an environmentally sustainable way, as part of our plan to support farmers to reach net zero. The shadow Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs team will be at shows all summer discussing these issues and offering solutions. I hope the Minister can offer us some now.

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): Already becoming a veteran for a relatively new Minister, I call Steve Double.

2.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Double): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Dr Huq. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) for securing this important debate. What better way to end our last moments of this term before we leave for the summer recess than talking about our amazing regional agricultural shows?

We have had a virtual tour of agricultural shows across the country during this debate, from the Wolsingham Show, which we were told is the oldest in the country, beginning in 1763, to the Ynys Môn Show—I am sure we all look forward to seeing pictures of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) shearing sheep in due course. We also heard about the Royal Welsh Show and the Pembrokeshire County Show, mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), as well as the Cardigan County Show. In typically modest Yorkshire style, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) highlighted that the Great Yorkshire Show had 135,000—I think he said 140,000, but my figures say 135,000—visitors this year, which beat the Royal Cornwall Show, which had a mere 126,000 visitors. However, we did have the Prime Minister, so I trump him there. The Royal Highland Show—although a long way from Glasgow East—was mentioned by the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden). It would be remiss of me not to mention the Cockermouth Show. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson), who is my Parliamentary Private Secretary, so is unable to speak in the debate, was telling me before the debate what a wonderful show it is and that he will have a stand there this year. I am sure everyone looks forward to that.

There are more than 400 show days per year around the country, put on by over 350 agricultural and county shows. They welcome over 7 million visitors and act as a vital link between rural and urban Britain. Shows of all sizes, big and small, connect our rural communities and play an important part in the tapestry of rural life.

Agricultural shows bring people together to network and do business, and they give the public a glimpse into farming life. They play an important role in continuing to inform and education the population about where our food comes from and the vital connection we all need to have with the natural world.

Agricultural shows provide a chance for farmers to discuss emerging technologies and innovations with manufacturers. Several hon. Members made the point about the importance of farmers getting together at these shows and talking about their working practices. They are a fantastic showcase for the diversity and success of British agriculture, particularly for people who do not work in the countryside. They offer benefits to small businesses and the local area, and they are a great showcase for the amazing regional food and drink that is produced up and down our country.

A number of hon. Members said that virtually every show has had to stop for the past two years because of the pandemic, and it has been welcome seeing so many of them being held again this summer. The strong attendance at shows up and down the country shows how much they not only have been missed, but are valued by so many people. For the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, agricultural shows give us the chance to meet people from all kinds of farming backgrounds and rural lives across the country. They help us better understand the experiences and views of members of the farming community, who can help shape ideas, ask questions and offer challenge.

The future farming and countryside programme, which is leading the farming policy reforms in England, attended 28 events in June alone. These included the Royal Cornwall Show, the cereals show in Nottinghamshire, as well as shows in Norfolk, Hereford, Lincolnshire, Devon and Northumberland. I look forward to attending the North Devon Show next month and, as a proud Cornishman, I am sure I will get a warm welcome. Attending the agricultural shows is valuable to DEFRA. I know the Secretary of State and all Ministers have been working hard to attend as many shows as possible this summer and will continue to do so. I also know how important attending shows is to local Members of Parliament, as my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham mentioned. They give us that important connection and ability to discuss rural issues with so many people.

Agricultural shows are of great value to farmers. As well as the opportunity for networking and seeing examples of best practice, they allow farmers to give feedback to DEFRA Ministers and officials. For example, we have spent much of the summer so far talking about the new sustainable farming incentive, which opened at the end of June. These conversations have been extremely fruitful for talking about the benefits of the sustainable farming incentive and other environmental schemes and grants, and receiving feedback on what farmers want to see in the future from our work. Conversations with farmers at shows provide vital feedback that we will incorporate in our future communications about the scheme, helping many more farmers than just those we meet in person to understand the benefits.

Of course, agricultural shows afford broader benefits to the economy. For example, they provide income and employment for small businesses, such as exhibitors and marquee manufacturers that rely on agricultural

shows, as well as local accommodation providers, caterers and equipment hire providers. The economic benefit of these shows goes beyond the agricultural sector in supporting the rural economy.

Agricultural shows also play an important role in connecting rural communities and educating the wider public. The Country Land and Business Association commented that agricultural shows are particularly important to the culture of rural areas. The shows act as a vital link between rural and urban Britain, and can be used as a major education tool in informing those who attend about the diversity of agriculture and land-based activities, and in promoting the importance of those who live and work in rural communities.

A further point can be made in relation to land management practices, given that the shows are seen as showcase events. Since the start of the century, we have seen the importance of the environment and the role that land managers play as custodians of the countryside. It is here that education is becoming so important; and, in a practical sense, shows provide a larger audience for the essential message of what agriculture is and does.

Let me respond to a number of the points raised during the debate. Several colleagues wanted to thank the many volunteers who make these shows possible; I would like to reinforce that point. From my own experience, I know the importance of the hundreds of volunteers who give their time to put on these shows. It is right that we all acknowledge their work and say thank you to them for all that they do.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire made a really important point about making sure that food production is at the heart of agricultural policy. That is something that we have demonstrated with the publication of the national food strategy; with the events of recent years, including the events in Ukraine, it will become even more important going forward to put food production and security at the heart of our policy making. He also said that farming is a unique part of our national heritage—a point that I am sure many of us can get behind and welcome.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) made the point that shows give a great opportunity to young people, which I have seen many times. One of my earliest memories was being given the day off school to attend the Royal Cornwall Show, which is something I would encourage. I am not here to make education policy, but it is important to teach our young people about where our food comes from, in order to help them better understand the importance of food production and our environment, and the central part that our farmers play in that. The more we can give our young people the opportunity of engaging with these shows, the better, because they are a really great way of teaching them about those things.

One thing I was aware of before—but of which I have become particularly aware in the two weeks that I have had this role—is that sadly sometimes our farmers are presented as the villains when it comes to environmental protection and net zero. I think that is very unfair, because certainly all the farmers I know are really committed to sustainability and to doing everything they can to protect our natural environment. Again, our agricultural shows can play a vital role in getting that message out and helping people to engage with the farming sector, in order to understand all that the sector

[*Steve Double*]

is doing to work with us to protect our environment, fight climate change and adapt to it. That is an important point to make.

In closing, this has been a great debate and a great way for most of us to end our time in Parliament before we head off to the recess. Agricultural and county shows are an essential part of the ongoing relationship between DEFRA, farmers, land managers and the wider public. They continue to be a fundamental element of our open dialogue with farmers, and we are committed to working in partnership with them. Like all Members who participated in the debate, I celebrate our agriculture and county shows, and I wish them the very best for the future.

2.50 pm

Mr Holden: I thank Members for the broad and mostly cross-party spirit in which the debate has been conducted. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) and the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), who gave us a great tour of west Wales—I might even get down there myself this summer.

The hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) does not have any shows in his patch, but he stepped bravely into the breach today, as did the Minister—

I know there was a debate about whether he or a Minister from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport would be responding. I thank the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), who is just down the road from me; it is always great to see him here. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) was suffering in silence today, but at least he got a shout-out for Cockermouth.

I want to highlight the important economic benefit of these shows and the invaluable contribution that they make to our rural communities and the sense of belonging there. Most of all, I thank the volunteers at the shows, who keep them going year after year, because they are such a valuable part of our rural communities. I thank the guys at Wolsingham Show and Stanhope Show, and the Weardale Agricultural Society, which is run from St John's chapel. I look forward to seeing them in the next couple of months.

Dr Rupa Huq (in the Chair): More holiday suggestions than you can shake a stick at.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the importance of agricultural and county shows to rural Britain.

2.51 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 21 July 2022

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Serious Fraud Office and the Unaoil Case: Independent review

The Attorney General (Suella Braverman): I wish to provide details of the findings of an independent review I commissioned into the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) failings identified by the Court of Appeal in the case of *R. v. Akle and Anor* (2021). I committed to this in my written statement of 9 February 2022.

The objectives of the review were to consider and provide recommendations in relation to the following matters:

1. What happened in this case and why? In particular, assessing the two key failings identified in the judgment: a) What occurred as regards SFO contact with third-parties and why; and b) Why did the SFO disclosure failures identified in the Court of Appeal judgment occur?
2. What implications, if any, do the failings highlighted by this case have for the policies, practices, procedures and related culture of the SFO?
3. What changes are necessary to address the failings highlighted by the judgment and any wider issues of SFO policies, practices, procedures or related culture identified by the reviewer?

I am grateful for Sir David Calvert-Smith's work on leading this review. His findings fall into two categories: thematic failings and events. Sir David found five recurrent themes that were fundamental to the Court's judgment, some of which indicate general organisational issues within the SFO's control and where failures occurred. These themes are: record-keeping; compliance with casework assurance processes; resourcing; understanding about priorities; and distrust between the case team and senior management resulting from the latter's contact with David Tinsley. Sir David highlights a sequence of 17 events or mistakes that led to the Court's judgment.

Following these conclusions, Sir David makes eleven recommendations which the Attorney General's Office (AGO) and SFO accept. They broadly cover:

1. Case assurance—all cases should have sufficient resources, all members of case teams should comply fully with case assurance processes and all contact with defendants, suspects and their representatives should be recorded as necessary. Superintendence should be revised and considered further.
2. Disclosure—all cases should have effective disclosure strategies and management, and the Attorney General's Office and SFO should work together to identify any necessary changes to the Attorney General's disclosure guidelines.
3. Personnel—all staff should be able to raise concerns about cases, the relationships between investigators and prosecutors should function as envisaged under the Roskill model, and there should not be "interregnum periods" between Directors or General Counsel.

Building on work already undertaken by the SFO a clear plan of action to respond to the review recommendations has been developed. I will be closely monitoring the SFO's progress and delivery of that plan and will provide an update to Parliament in November 2022 and February 2023.

I will place a copy of the review and the response in the Libraries of both Houses so that they are accessible to Members. Junior officials' names have been redacted from the published review in line with standard Government practice. The SFO has waived legal privilege in relation to legal advice referred to in the review only for the purposes of this review.

The documents will also be available on gov.uk.

[HCWS267]

CABINET OFFICE

UK Commission on Covid Commemoration

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Michael Ellis): My noble Friend the Minister of State, Lord True CBE, has made the following written statement:

Today, I am establishing a UK Commission on Covid Commemoration to secure a broad consensus across our whole United Kingdom on how we mark and commemorate this very distinctive period in our collective history.

I have appointed the right hon. Baroness Morgan of Cotes to chair the Commission. She will be supported by 10 members from across the UK who have knowledge and understanding of some of the issues experienced by those affected by covid-19 and are well respected in their fields of expertise.

Working together with the Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Commission will recommend how those who have lost their lives should be remembered in our communities and across the UK. It will also consider how we can commemorate the service of critical workers, recognise the experience of those who were seriously affected by covid-19, celebrate the advances in UK science and remember the national spirit which led to so many people volunteering to support their neighbours and communities.

The Commission will engage individuals, particularly those who have lost loved ones, and organisations across the UK, to inform its recommendations. I have asked the Commission to submit its report to the Prime Minister by the end of March 2023.

I have today placed a copy of the list of the Commissioners and terms of reference for the Commission in the Libraries of both Houses in Parliament and published them on gov.uk.

[HCWS262]

TREASURY

Annual European Union Finances Statement

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Simon Clarke): I am today laying before Parliament a document entitled "The European Union Finances Statement 2021 on the implementation of the Withdrawal and Trade and Cooperation Agreements" (CP 732). This is an annual publication and the 41st in the series.

This year's statement continues to include an updated Government estimate of the financial settlement. As detailed below, the estimate can be found in annex A and contributing figures in chapter 2 and 4.

This year's edition is the first in the publication series to cover the UK as a non-member state and having completed the 11-month transition period. Now that the UK has left the EU and is no longer involved in the EU's multiannual financial framework, detailed financial reporting on participation is of diminishing relevance.

This year's edition follows the recommendations from the European Scrutiny Committee in relation to how the information is presented in this year's document. The cut-off date for reporting for this edition of the EU finances statement is December 2021, as these statements will continue to be published on a yearly basis. However, the statement also provides brief details of the invoice received subsequently to this period in April 2022, and which will be reported on in detail in next year's statement. This year, the April invoice provides a single net liability for the UK of €3,419,693,252.35 (£2,877,500,887.19)

The focus of this statement, therefore, is on the implementation of the withdrawal agreement and the trade and co-operation agreement, in effect turning the formerly annexed chapters into the main body of the text. The presentation of both payments and the outstanding liability under the WA has changed accordingly.

This year the statement separates backward-looking reporting on the payment of net liabilities made by the UK from HM Treasury's forecast of outstanding liabilities. Chapter 2 gives a breakdown of the April and September 2021 invoices received from the EU and their payment during that calendar year. It gives an updated figure for the total paid up to 31 December 2021 of £5,812,719,159.

Chapter 3 of the statement provides detail on the verification arrangements that HM Treasury has undertaken in relation to the financial settlement under the WA and which was reflected in domestic law in the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.

HM Treasury estimates that the current net value of the financial settlement is £35.6 billion. Chapter 4 breaks down the forecast outstanding UK net liabilities to the EU from 1 January 2022 onwards, providing a point estimate of the total outstanding of €29.0 billion (£24.6 billion).

This statement reports on the status of EU programme association in chapter 5. In this edition we give the current estimate for the total cost of participation in all three programmes over the seven-year MFF (around £17 billion). This breaks down to in the region of £15 billion for Horizon Europe, £1.2 billion for Euratom R&T and Fussion4Energy, and £0.8 billion for Copernicus.

As all payments will be made from departmental accounts, HM Treasury do not plan to replicate or consolidate financial reporting on the TCA in future editions of the statement. Nor do we intend to report annually our revised estimate of liabilities expected under the TCA, because actual costs will, in future years, appear in the departmental resource accounts.

The latest estimate of £42.5 billion shows an increase against the original range of £35-39 billion, which is primarily due to the most recent valuation of the UK's obligation under article 142 for EU pensions. The primary drivers are the latest discount rates and inflation assumptions, which are centrally set by the Government for valuing long-term liabilities. However, given that this is a multi-decade liability, the variables used in this forecast will continue to fluctuate up and down. The agreed scope of the underlying liability remains unchanged, and the UK will continue to pay those liabilities as they come due, according to the actual value at the time.

[HCWS272]

DEFENCE

Military Support to Ukraine

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace):

I am pleased to provide the House with a further update on equipment that the UK is providing to the armed forces of Ukraine. The UK is proud to lead the way in providing military assistance to Ukraine. The Prime Minister announced at the NATO Leaders' Summit on 30 June that a further £1 billion of military support to Ukraine will be provided. This brings the UK's total military support to Ukraine to £2.3 billion.

We have already supplied Ukraine with a significant quantity of equipment, including:

- More than 6,900 anti-tank missiles (including more than 5,000 next-generation light anti-tank weapons, as well as Javelin, Brimstone, and other anti-tank weapons)

- Multiple launch rocket systems

- 120 armoured fighting vehicles

- Six Stormer vehicles fitted with Starstreak launchers as well as hundreds of Starstreak missiles

- Maritime Brimstone

- More than 16,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, as well as anti-structure munitions and 4.5 tonnes of plastic explosive

- Communications equipment

- Electronic warfare equipment

- More than 82,000 helmets, 8,450 sets of body armour, medical supplies and more than 5,000 night-vision devices.

Our support for the armed forces of Ukraine (AFU) will continue. In the next few weeks, we will be giving the AFU equipment, including:

- More than 20 M109 155mm self-propelled guns

- 36 L119 105mm artillery guns and ammunition

- More than 50,000 rounds of ammunition for Ukraine's Soviet-era artillery

- At least 1,600 more anti-tank weapons

- Unmanned aerial systems (including 100s loitering aerial munitions)

- Counter-battery radar systems

- Medical equipment

Future planned military support will also include more sophisticated defence systems across a range of capabilities.

On 25 April I also committed to placing an update on international donations of military equipment to Ukraine in the House Library. I include below two summaries: one of UK donations; and a second of combined international donations. These summaries only contain quantities known to the UK where other countries are content for this information to be released. We do not necessarily see or know the totality of assistance provided by all donors. The delivery and provision of aid is dynamic and fast moving so the numbers and types of capability included are likely to change quickly.

The scale and range of equipment we are providing, at pace, demonstrates how we are delivering on our commitment to provide Ukraine with support to resist and defeat the Russian invasion. We will continue to do so until Ukraine's sovereignty is restored.

UK donations to Ukraine:

Major capabilities

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Anti-Air	<100	>300	
Anti-Tank	<100	>9,000*	
Anti-Structure		>15,000	
Anti-Personnel (including small arms, mortar & grenade)	>6,000	>1,000,000	
Anti-Ship		<100	
Artillery	<10	>16,000	

Communication systems

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Long range			<100
Satellite			>100
Short Range			>400

Electronic warfare systems

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Jamming			>300
Physical Counter			<100

Equipment support

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Spare Parts			>100
Tools (pallets, kits etc)			<100

Intelligence, surveillance & reconnaissance (ISR) systems

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Laser Designator (eg range finders, aiming systems)			>100
Optical (including Uncrewed Aerial Systems)			<100
Radar			<100

Life support

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Rations			<100,000
Medical			<100
Clothing			<100,000
NVDs / Thermal			>5,000
Sleeping			>2,000

Mobility

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Armoured Fighting Vehicles			>100
Ambulances			<100
Soft Skinned (including cargo Uncrewed Aerial Systems)			<10

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Ballistic Vest			>8,000
Helmet			<100,000

*includes single use weapons and unguided munitions

International donations to Ukraine—43 countries including UK (International data as at 5 July 2022)

Major capabilities

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Anti-Air	>700	>100,000	
Anti-Tank	<4,000	<250,000*	
Anti-Structure	>2,000	>600,000	
Anti-Personnel (including small arms, mortar & grenade)	>7000,000	>100,000,000	
Anti-Ship		<200	
Artillery	>200	>250,000	

Mobility

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Armoured Fighting Vehicles			>600
Ambulances			<100
Soft Skinned (including cargo Uncrewed Aerial Systems)			>200

Communications systems

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Long Range			<100
Satellite			>900
Short Range			>400

Electronic warfare systems

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Jamming			>400
Physical Counter			>200

Equipment support

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Spare Parts			>12,000
Tools (pallets, kits etc)			>100

Explosive ordnance disposal (EOD)

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
PPE			<100
Metal Detector			>400
Robot			<100

Intelligence, surveillance & reconnaissance (ISR) systems

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Laser Designator (e.g. range finders, aiming systems)			>2,000
Optical (including Uncrewed Aerial Systems)			>500
Radar			<100

Life support

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Rations			>1,000,000
Medical			>200,000
Clothing			>200,000
NVD / Thermal			>30,000
Optics (sights, binoculars etc)			>30,000
Sleeping			>500,000
Utilities (including generators)			>100

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

	Weapon	Ammunition	Other Aid
Ballistic Vest			>100,000
CBRN PPE			>70,000
Helmet			>200,000

*Includes single use weapon and unguided munitions
[HCWS259]

EDUCATION**Academy Trust and Local Government Pension**

The Secretary of State for Education (James Cleverly): In 2013, we introduced a guarantee to local government pensions scheme (LGPS) administering authorities that in the event of the closure of an academy trust any outstanding LGPS liabilities will not revert to the fund.

Although there is no end date to the guarantee, we committed to undertake assessments at regular intervals to determine whether the guarantee remains affordable and is being fully recognised by LGPS administering authorities in their risk assessments of academy schools and the subsequent setting of employer contribution rates.

I can today confirm that we will continue to provide a guarantee to LGPS administering authorities with a new increased annual ceiling of £20 million, and a parliamentary minute, which sets out the detail of the guarantee, has been laid in both Houses.

When we first introduced the guarantee, we agreed annual limits for each financial year based on estimates. We have reviewed all payments the Department has made under the guarantee policy since 2013 and have set a new annual limit of £20 million per annum.

In the three most recent financial years the amounts requested and paid under the guarantee policy were as follows: 2021-22: £3 million, 2020-21: £4 million, 2019-20: £11 million. Since the guarantee was introduced, the Department has never reached the set annual limit.

We expect administering authorities to recognise the direct Government backing provided by the guarantee and continue to treat academies equitably with local authority maintained schools when setting employer contribution rates and deficit recovery periods.

The guarantee provides academy trusts with direct Government backing for certain pension costs which will enable LGPS administering authorities, and I ask you to ensure that this is reflected in this year's scheme valuation, both in the setting of the employer contribution rates and the length of the deficit recovery period.

[HCWS261]

Further Education Funding and Accountability: Consultation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Andrea Jenkyns): Today, as the Government continue to build back better from the pandemic and begin the critical work of levelling up the UK, I am announcing further steps towards delivering the ambitious reforms set out in the Skills for Jobs White Paper. Skills for Jobs set out our vision for a skills system that supports people to access the skills required and to get the jobs our economy needs, increasing productivity, supporting growth industries, and giving people opportunity.

We are launching a second consultation today, containing proposals for implementing a new further education funding and accountability system in England to help deliver on this vision. The consultation is open from 21 July 2022 until 21 September 2022.

In this consultation, we want to hear from all interested stakeholders and welcome responses to the consultation from individual learners, providers (especially colleges), employers, representative bodies, local government partners and MCAs.

Our reforms are about changing the incentives in the further education (FE) system by focusing on employment outcomes and simplifying the funding system so we can best support learners into high-value jobs. These reforms will:

Deliver a simpler and more effective funding system, to make it easier for providers to invest in the best way possible to achieve good outcomes for their learners.

Deliver a fairer system by moving towards a more equitable approach to funding areas in the next spending review, and in the meantime, exploring how our available resources can support those areas most in need to support levelling up and spread opportunity across England.

Finally, we want to create and deliver a system that is focused on outcomes. We will use the funding system to encourage providers to offer courses that lead to better outcomes for the local and national economy and society, while holding providers accountable for delivering for their learners.

This will enable providers to ensure that they are meeting the needs of their learners, employers, and the wider area, putting taxpayer investment to the best effect.

Subject to the responses to the consultation, we intend to introduce our reforms from the academic year 2023-24, with further reforms coming in the next spending review.

This is a key milestone in the delivery of our Skills for Jobs reform programme, which will transform the whole skills system so that we can train the dynamic and flexible workforce our economy needs.

[HCWS268]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

NHS Covid Travel Pass for Children

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maggie Throup): As part of our continued commitment to support travel for the school holidays, on 21 July the Government are launching an NHS covid pass service for parents or guardians of children aged 5 to 15 years old to request a digital travel pass on behalf of their child. This will include a record of all covid-19 vaccinations received and proof of prior infection (recovery status). Children aged 5 to 11 can currently only access an NHS covid pass letter. Children aged 12 to 15 can currently only access a digital NHS covid pass using their own NHS login; this new service means that parents can also request a pass on their behalf.

Launching this new service, and thereby extending a digital solution to children aged 5 to 11, alongside giving the parents of children aged 12 to 15 the ability to request a pass on their child's behalf, will make it quicker, simpler and save families the cost of testing in countries where this is required for foreign travel. The UK has no covid certification requirements, this is to support outbound travel to a variety of countries that still have requirements.

A parent or guardian will be able to request a PDF version of the travel NHS covid pass via the NHS website. The digital pass will only be sent if they enter a mobile number which matches the number on the child's GP record and if they correctly enter a one-time password sent to this number, or if they enter an email address that matches the email address on the child's GP record.

This service will be available for children aged 5 to 15 resident in England or the Isle of Man. For those registered with a GP in Wales, parents or guardians should check the gov.wales "Get your NHS covid pass" website for information on their service. In Scotland,

under 16s can request a copy by phoning the covid status helpline on 0808 196 8565. In Northern Ireland, parents or guardians of children aged 5 to 11 years can request a digital or printed covid certificate on behalf of a dependent. Those under 16 can upload the certificate—requested on their behalf—to display on the COVIDCert NI app.

[HCWS273]

Covid-19 Vaccine Supply

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maggie Throup): This statement is a retrospective notification to the House of Commons following accounting advice that the initial phase of this transaction should be classified as a gift. It is normal practice that when a Department proposes to make a gift of a value exceeding £300,000, a minute is presented to the House of Commons setting out particulars of the gift.

In September 2021, the UK Government announced initiatives to share 4 million Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine doses with Australia and 1 million doses with the Republic of Korea. This arrangement was mutually beneficial and ensured these Pfizer/BioNTech doses—which were not immediately required in the UK—were used to support international vaccination efforts. The same volume of doses were returned later in the year. Sharing doses meant those countries had immediate access to vaccines they could put to use in their domestic campaigns and enabled the UK to better align timings of our own supply with our requirements.

The vaccine taskforce has worked to optimise supply for UK domestic need through its close work with vaccine developers, as well as supporting the global distribution of vaccines with our international partners. The reciprocal dose sharing arrangements with Australia and South Korea is an example where we have worked with other countries in a mutually beneficial way to achieve this.

HM Treasury has approved the decision.

[HCWS266]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The United Kingdom continues to make good progress toward joining the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership (CPTPP) this year. Below is an update to Parliament on developments in negotiations over the course of recent months.

This bloc of 11 countries represents around £9 trillion in GDP and includes some of the world's largest current and future economies. Joining CPTPP puts Britain at the heart of a dynamic group of countries, as the world economy increasingly centres on the Pacific region. And as these economies grow, it is even more important that the UK is in a free trade agreement with them, so that we benefit from this growth.

CPTPP membership offers a wide range of benefits for the UK. Accession could see 99.9% of UK exports being eligible for tariff-free trade with CPTPP members. Joining could also, for example, greatly benefit our world-class services sector through advanced provisions that facilitate digital trade, and modern rules on data to enable more financial and professional services markets to be opened up.

This will support the economy across the UK: the Department for International Trade's published scoping assessment shows that joining the agreement could benefit all parts of the country, with the greatest relative gains expected in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The UK announced its intention to join CPTPP in February last year and began formal negotiations on our accession in June 2021. In February this year, CPTPP parties confirmed that we were ready to move to the final phase of the accession process, having largely demonstrated our compliance with the existing CPTPP rules.

This final phase of the accession process involves applicants making high-standard market access offers to CPTPP parties. The UK submitted initial offers in March 2022, including on goods, services, investment, Government procurement and financial services. Since then, we have continued to engage in talks on both a bilateral and collective basis with CPTPP members in order to come to an agreement on these market access issues.

We will continue to negotiate with CPTPP members over the coming months. We will ensure the UK joins the agreement on the right terms, and that British businesses can begin taking advantage of this trade deal as soon as possible.

The Department will continue to engage with Parliament over the course of negotiations. Once the agreement is signed, it will be subject to pre-ratification scrutiny under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 (CRaG), and any legislation required to implement the agreement will need to be passed. Prior to commencing scrutiny under CRaG the Government will commission and publish the advice of the independent Trade and Agriculture Commission, as well as laying its own report under section 42 of the Agriculture Act 2020.

[HCWS265]

Mexico Trade Negotiations

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The first round of United Kingdom-Mexico free trade agreement negotiations took place during the week commencing 11 July. A small delegation of officials undertook technical discussions in person in Mexico City with most talks taking place virtually.

During the first round, talks focused on gathering insights on key interests and priorities across policy areas as well as building a shared understanding of each other's initial positions in the areas expected to be covered in the free trade agreement. Technical discussions were held across 31 policy areas over 28 sessions.

The United Kingdom and Mexico share a joint ambition to take our trade and economic relationship to the next level, deepening trade and increasing investment flows for the benefit of both countries.

The existing United Kingdom-Mexico trade continuity agreement is outdated. These negotiations are an important opportunity to negotiate a significantly more ambitious agreement which is better suited for the 21st century. This includes strengthening United Kingdom-Mexico trade in goods and services, already worth £4.2 billion, and delivering on new and progressive issues such as digital trade, trade and gender equality and innovation.

The second round of official level negotiations is due to take place in autumn 2022.

HM Government remain clear that any deal will be in the best interests of the British people and the economy.

HM Government will keep Parliament updated as these negotiations progress.

[HCWS270]

UK-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The Government have, today, laid before Parliament a report on the UK-New Zealand free trade agreement. The report is required under section 42 of the Agriculture Act 2020, prior to the agreement being laid before Parliament for formal scrutiny under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 (CRaG).

The Government have always been clear that we will not compromise on the UK's high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards in our trade negotiations. This report, which draws on independent advice from the Trade and Agriculture Commission¹, Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland, confirms the Government's view that the UK-New Zealand FTA is consistent with the maintenance of UK statutory protections in these areas.

This report is intended to inform and support scrutiny of the UK-New Zealand agreement prior to its ratification and entry into force. The text of the agreement was published on 28 February 2022 and will be formally laid before Parliament for scrutiny under the provisions of CRaG in due course.

¹ TAC advice published on 30 June 2022 at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-new-zealand-fta-secretary-of-state-for-international-trades-request-for-trade-and-agriculture-commission-advice>

[HCWS269]

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Intergovernmental Relations Quarterly Report: Quarter 2 2022

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Greg Clark): Today, the UK Government published the report of our engagement with the devolved Governments in quarter 2 of 2022 on gov.uk.

The report covers a period where we have seen unprecedented events, and gives an insight into the extensive engagement between the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern

Ireland Executive between 1 April and 30 June 2022. During this reporting period the Governments collaborated on a number of areas, not least in the further development and progress of the domestic response to the war in Ukraine, including the expansion of the Homes for Ukraine resettlement scheme to allow children and minors under the age of 18 to come to the UK in defined circumstances.

The report is part of the UK Government's ongoing commitment to transparency of intergovernmental relations to Parliament and the public. The UK Government will continue with publications to demonstrate transparency in intergovernmental relations throughout 2022 and beyond.

[HCWS264]

PRIME MINISTER

Government Delivery

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): The Government that I have had the privilege to lead have focused relentlessly on delivery. This statement updates the House on what we have achieved since I was invited by Her Majesty The Queen to form a Government in July 2019, and puts on record why the millions of people who voted Conservative in 2019, many for the first time, were right to place their trust in me and in this Conservative Government.

First, after the country had endured three years of indecision and uncertainty with a deadlocked Parliament and a paralysed Government, we got Brexit done. We delivered on the decision the people of the United Kingdom made in 2016, and took our country out of the European Union, negotiating a new trade and co-operation agreement that preserves zero tariff, zero quota trade. Since our exit, we have been seizing the opportunities that come with this new freedom. We have signed three major new trade deals with Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, supporting food, drink and manufacturing exports as well as digital trade, and taking our total number of FTAs to over 70, with negotiations under way on many more. We have selected eight locations for freeports, with two already operational and the others coming on stream later this year. We have passed the Agriculture Act and the Fisheries Act, reforming what were wasteful and bureaucratic European schemes to the benefit of our farming and fishing communities and the environment. We have put in place a points-based immigration system that gives the people of this country control over our own borders. It is because we have this control that we have been able to react swiftly and generously to events in Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine, and strike the migration and economic development partnership with Rwanda in response to the shared international challenge of illegal migration, breaking the business model of people smuggling gangs.

Second, thanks to the fortitude and spirit of the British public, we guided the country through its greatest challenge since the Second World War. A pandemic is the kind of crisis that no Administration want to face, but which it is the Government's solemn duty to tackle. We supported the NHS and the incredible doctors, nurses and carers who acted so valiantly to treat and care for the ill, and to whom I owe my own life. We built

a huge testing regime, distributing more than 2 billion lateral flow tests across the UK, and at the peak delivering more than 7 million tests to households every 24 hours. We invested in antivirals, adding more powerful new drugs to our armoury than any of our neighbours. In the face of predictions of 12% unemployment, we deployed the furlough scheme, which supported the jobs of 11.7 million people through lockdown. Most importantly, we bet early and bet big on vaccines before success was guaranteed, becoming the first country in the world to administer one outside of clinical trials and the fastest in Europe to roll them out at scale—over 70% of the entire UK population aged 12 or above received at least one dose within the first six months, and the total number of jabs now stands at over 150 million. Thanks to these efforts, we were able to emerge from lockdown early and set out our plan for living with covid, getting our lives back on track.

Third, when I became Prime Minister I stood on the steps of Downing Street and said it was my job to level up the country, because while potential is evenly distributed throughout the population, opportunity is not. This meant bringing down crime, strengthening our health system, sorting out social care and improving our schools—and the Government acted on every front.

Our streets are safer. We have recruited more than 13,500 additional police officers, over halfway to delivering our pledge to put an extra 20,000 officers on the streets by 2023. We have taken over 50,000 knives and offensive weapons off the streets, and brought knife crime and thefts down last year compared to 2019. We have backed the police with the support they need, providing the largest funding boost in a decade, and equipping them with new powers to tackle disruptive protests and use stop and search. We have rolled up over 1,500 county lines, going for the gangs that peddled them and protecting the young people exploited by them. We have changed the law to make sure serious violent and sexual criminals spend more time behind bars.

Our NHS is on a surer footing. We have more doctors and around 30,000 more nurses than in March 2019, well over halfway to meeting our commitment of 50,000 more nurses by 2024. We have recruited another 18,000 primary care staff, such as physiotherapists and pharmacists, putting us on track to reach 26,000 by 2024. We have launched the biggest catchup programme in the NHS's history to tackle the legacy of the pandemic, aiming to deliver around 30% more elective activity by 2024-25 than before the pandemic hit, underpinned by a £39 billion investment. We have opened almost 100 community diagnostic centres, helping millions of patients to access earlier diagnostic tests closer to home. We have begun the biggest hospital-building programme for a generation. We have published England's first women's health strategy to improve the health and wellbeing of women and girls, and widened access to life saving drugs.

Our broken social care system is finally being fixed. We have ended the cruel lottery of social care costs with a plan that means no one will pay more than £86,000 over their lifetime, when previously many had to pay six figure sums. We have lifted the previous limit for financial support by more than 400%, so that anyone with assets of under £100,000 will be eligible for help, and those with under £20,000 will pay nothing at all. We have designed a way to make the overall system fairer, so that those who fund themselves do not pay more than state-funded individuals for the equivalent standard of care.

We have committed to providing our brilliant social care workforce with new training and qualification opportunities, so that they can progress and improve while providing an even greater standard of care.

Our schools are better. We have supported children to recover from the impact of the pandemic with over 2 million tutoring courses and a programme to reach 6 million by 2024. We have supported teachers too, with over 80,000 benefiting from additional training and support, while bringing starting salaries up to £30,000, attracting more bright and able graduates to inspire the next generation. We have injected the biggest funding boost in a decade, taking core funding to £56.8 billion by 2024-25. We have driven up school standards, with 87% of schools now rated good or outstanding, up from 68% in 2010. We have set an ambition for 90% of children to leave primary school at the expected standard in reading, writing and maths by 2030.

Fourth, in spite of the challenges posed by covid and the subsequent headwinds in the global economy, we secured the fastest economic growth in the G7 last year. We have helped people into jobs by partnering with employers, including 500,000 since January this year through the Way to Work programme, and we have the lowest unemployment rate in almost 50 years. We have focused on getting young people into work, an area where versus other OECD countries we know we can do better, with 163,000 supported by the Kickstart scheme to start their career and gain vital work experience. We have redressed Britain's historic underinvestment in infrastructure, developing a five-year, £600 billion pipeline of infrastructure projects to improve connectivity and drive economic growth, including a £96 billion investment through the integrated rail plan—building three new high-speed lines in Northern Powerhouse Rail, HS2 East and HS2 West, and reopening lines to industrial and country towns cut off under Beeching. We have committed £5 billion to boost buses and cycling and a further £5.7 billion to level up local transport systems in the mayoral combined authority areas. We have accelerated the deployment of wind, new nuclear, solar and hydrogen power generation, with the 10-point plan for a Green Industrial Revolution and our broader net zero agenda already yielding £22 billion in private sector investment and 68,000 clean jobs—and an ambition to unlock £100 billion of investment and 480,000 such jobs by the end of the decade. We have continued to support the production of domestic oil and gas in the nearer term, which must underpin our transition to cleaner and cheaper power, working to retain the skills and industry in Aberdeen and elsewhere by putting nearly £2 billion into technologies such as carbon capture, usage and storage. We have raised the proportion of properties able to access the fastest gigabit-capable broadband from 9% when my Administration took office to 68% now. We have set an ambitious 2030 date for ending sales of new petrol and diesel cars, with over half of all new cars sold now electric or hybrid, and we have bolstered our strategic road network through a £27.4 billion road investment strategy that includes building the first new trans-Pennine dual carriageway since 1971.

We have awarded 101 towns deals across the country to address high levels of deprivation and open up new opportunities by fostering economic regeneration, stimulating investment and delivering vital infrastructure. We have made it easier to own a home, with over

400,000 first time buyers last year marking the highest number since 2006, and housebuilding rebounding strongly after the challenges posed by the start of the pandemic. We have set out plans for renters reform that will provide renting families more security at the same time as supporting landlords. We have cemented the UK's status as a science superpower, recognising that the ability to advance and exploit science and technology will be an increasingly important competitive edge over the coming decade, growing research and development spending by 33% over this Parliament, the fastest ever rate. We have attracted more venture capital investment in tech startups this year than any country bar the US, putting us ahead of China, Japan and Germany. We are levelling up skills, because stronger skills lead to better, higher paid jobs—with over 20,000 people already benefiting from skills bootcamps, and 175 colleges due to offer T-levels from this September. We have announced a lifelong loan entitlement so that from 2025 everyone can access funding to support up to four years of post-18 study, be that modular or full time—helping people gain skills at any stage of their life. We have increased the national living wage by the largest ever cash amount, and reduced the universal credit taper rate to make sure work pays.

Fifth, embracing the freedom we now have to chart our own course, we led on the international stage. We used our G7 presidency to launch the \$600 billion Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment—closing the infrastructure gap in developing countries while enhancing our economic and national security—and to agree a minimum corporate tax rate to crack down on avoidance. We have driven action on climate change, marshalling nearly 200 countries at COP26 to treble global net zero agreements so that they now cover 90% of the world economy, committing to reach net zero in the UK by 2050, and driving down emissions at the fastest rate in the G7. We have stepped up where our help was needed, be it in evacuating over 15,000 people from Afghanistan in just 16 days through Operation Pitting, offering a route to the UK for holders of British national (overseas) passports and their family members in Hong Kong, standing up the Homes for Ukraine scheme, or providing £548 million to COVAX to get 1.3 billion vaccine doses into 87 developing countries.

Across these five fronts—Brexit, covid, public services, the economy, and the world stage—this Government have delivered. As we prepare for a change in Administration, there are two further fronts on which we are already taking decisive action, and on which the commitment of the next Conservative Prime Minister will not waver.

At home, we are standing by the side of the British public as we cope with pressures on the cost of living—just as we did in the darkest hours of the covid crisis. We have set out a £37 billion package which will see the most vulnerable 8 million households get support worth £1,200. Qualifying low income households will get £650, with the first half being paid into bank accounts this month, and the remainder following in the autumn. Every household in the country will get £400 towards their energy costs. Most will get a £150 council tax rebate. Pensioners in receipt of winter fuel payments will get a separate payment of £300, and disabled people a further £150.

Both I, and my successor, will continue to focus support on those who need it the most.

Abroad, we are standing up for Ukraine—as we always have when our fundamental values are threatened. We have brought the G7 and NATO together in support of the Ukrainian people so that the free West speaks with one voice and brings its collective might to bear. We have provided significant amounts of lethal aid, including 2,000 anti-tank missiles in January before the invasion started. We have committed military, humanitarian and economic assistance totalling nearly £4 billion, more than any other country apart from the US. We have donated over 11 million medical items, 856 mobile generators and 20 NHS ambulances, and sent the largest fire deployment to ever leave the UK. We have acted decisively with our allies to sanction over 1,000 individuals and 100 entities, freeze the assets of banks, and isolate Russia from international trade. We have introduced the fastest and largest visa scheme in our history to welcome Ukrainians who wish to find safety elsewhere, with over 95,000 arriving in the UK to date. We have stepped up our NATO commitments to strengthen the alliance, more than doubling our presence in Estonia, providing the SkySabre air defence system to Poland, and delivering enhanced air policing missions. For as long as it takes, the UK will continue to back Ukraine’s fight for freedom.

Finally, in everything this Government have done, we have striven to deliver for the whole of our United Kingdom—for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. From the vaccination programme, where we were able to ensure everyone across our islands could benefit from swift access to jabs, to the furlough scheme, which relied on the financial firepower of the UK Treasury, to our Levelling Up fund, supporting town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets across the UK, the benefits of our great union have never been more evident.

I am proud of our record in office since 2019. I remain determined that we continue to deliver in our final weeks. And I know that the Conservative Government that follows after us will do what their predecessors have always done and meet the challenges of the day by serving the British people.

[HCWS260]

TRANSPORT

Active Travel England: Framework Document

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Trudy Harrison): The Department for Transport is today publishing the framework document for Active Travel England. This confirms Active Travel England’s responsibilities and objectives and sets out its relationship with, and accountability to, the Department and Parliament.

Active Travel England will lead the delivery of the Government’s strategy and vision for creating a new golden age of walking and cycling where half of all journeys in towns and cities are walked and cycled by 2030.

Active Travel England will hold the active travel budget in England, including for new infrastructure and behaviour change initiatives such as cycle training. It will assess all applications for active travel capital and revenue funding, including from wider funds such as the city region sustainable transport settlements, the levelling up fund and road investment strategy 2, and

award funding to schemes only if they meet the standards and principles set out in local transport note 1/20, or any later national design standards. It will also inspect new active travel infrastructure to ensure schemes meet these new standards and principles and ask for funds to be returned for any which have not been completed as promised, or not started or finished within the agreed timeframe. Active Travel England will work with local authorities developing new schemes and support their capacity by delivering training and disseminating best practice. ATE will also begin to inspect, and publish reports on, highway authorities for their performance on active travel and identify particularly dangerous failings in their highways for cyclists and pedestrians. In these regards, the commissioner and inspectorate will perform a similar role to Ofsted from the 1990s onwards in raising standards and challenging failure.

It will also act as a statutory consultee in the planning system and review active travel provision in major planning applications.

Ministers at the Department for Transport will have responsibility for Active Travel England. As an Executive agency, Active Travel England will have a degree of operational independence in delivering its duties. It will be led by its chief executive officer who will be the agency’s accounting officer and report to Parliament as needed. Active Travel England will also have its own board which will be chaired by the national active travel commissioner.

The framework document will come into effect when Active Travel England is formally established as an Executive agency later this year and will be reviewed next year. I am placing a copy of Active Travel England’s framework document in the Libraries of both Houses.

The standing up of Active Travel England is gathering pace. Today’s publication of its framework document follows last month’s announcement of senior appointments to Active Travel England. This included confirming Chris Boardman as England’s national active travel commissioner on a permanent basis and the appointment of Danny Williams as Active Travel England’s chief executive.

[HCWS263]

Search and Rescue Aviation Procurement

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): Following an extensive 18-month procurement process to procure the next decade of search and rescue aviation services, this process has now finished, and I wish to inform the House of the results.

I am pleased to announce that a £1.6 billion contract will be signed today to provide a search and rescue helicopter service for the whole of the UK with Bristow Helicopters Ltd.

The new contract will see the UK search and rescue region benefit from advances in technology to save more lives, even more quickly. A fleet of state-of-the-art helicopters, planes and drones will operate across the United Kingdom and far out to sea in support of the lifesaving work of HM Coastguard. These aircraft will also support the work of the other emergency services, border protection, fisheries protection and pollution prevention.

A strong competition led to this contract being signed, and a credible, data-led requirement resulted in a contract that is highly innovative and takes account of anticipated future demands such as increased tourism in certain areas.

The new contract will guarantee that there will be no base closures or job losses in this critical service. Instead, two new seasonal bases, operating for six months of the year, will be opened in areas of particular growing demand. A new base at Fort William will meet the summertime peak tourism demand in the Ben Nevis area, while a new base in Carlisle will also meet similar demands in the Lake District area.

All helicopter bases will continue to be operational 24 hours a day, apart for Fort William and Carlisle which will operate 12 hours a day from April to September. The transition out from the current contract will start 30 September 2024 and run through to 31 December 2026. The transition will be seamless and will follow extensive engagement with stakeholders including the thousands of rescue volunteers who rely on these arrangements.

In addition to our existing base in Doncaster, highly sophisticated surveillance planes will operate from Prestwick and Newquay. This will give the UK much more capability to search for people needing our help over large areas and prevent illegal or anticompetitive activity in UK waters. Both Doncaster and Prestwick will be operational

24 hours a day, with Newquay operational 12 hours a day all year round. Some of these aircraft can reach the mid-Atlantic, which is the extent of the UK's search and rescue region.

The new service will comprise of:

18 helicopters including existing Leonardo AW189s and Sikorsky S92As augmented with the introduction of Leonardo AW139 helicopters.

Six King Air fixed-wing planes, including the B350, B350ER and the B200.

One mobile deployable Schiebel S-100 drone system capable of operating anywhere in the UK.

A new state-of-the-art search and rescue helicopter simulation training facility at Solent airport next to the HM Coastguard training facility will house a synthetic rescue hoist and helicopter suspended over a large training pool. This is a vital addition to training the next generation of technical winch crew.

Further innovation throughout the life of the contract will involve the use of uncrewed aircraft and aircraft powered by sustainable aviation fuels.

This is a major investment by the UK Government in critical national service which covers a wide range of activity. It protects the services we have come to rely on for years to come.

[HCWS271]

Ministerial Corrections

Thursday 21 July 2022

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Online Safety Bill

The following is an extract from the debate on Report of the Online Safety Bill on 12 July 2022.

Damian Collins: If something is illegal offline, it is illegal online as well. There are priority areas where the company must proactively look for that. There are also non-priority areas where the company should take action against anything that is an offence in law and meets the criminal threshold online. The job of the regulator is to hold them to account for that.

[Official Report, 12 July 2022, Vol. 718, c. 161.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins)

Errors have been identified in my response to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry).

The correct response should have been:

Damian Collins: If something is illegal offline, it is illegal online as well. There are priority areas where the company must proactively look for that. There are also non-priority areas where the company should take action against anything that is an offence in law **which has an individual victim** and meets the criminal threshold online. The job of the regulator is to hold them to account for that.

The following is a further extract from the debate on Report of the Online Safety Bill on 12 July 2022.

Damian Collins: On the amendments that the former Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), spoke to, the word “consistently” has not been removed from the text. There is new language that follows the use of “consistently”, but the use of that word will still apply in the context of the companies’ duties to act against illegal content.

[Official Report, 12 July 2022, Vol. 718, c. 209.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins)

Errors have been identified in my intervention on the hon. Member for Enfield North (Feryal Clark).

The correct response should have been:

Damian Collins: On the amendments that the former Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), spoke to, the word “consistently” has not been removed from the text. There is new language that follows the use of “consistently”, **and** the use of that word will still apply **across the safety duties and in particular for category 1 platforms**.

The following is a further extract from the debate on Report of the Online Safety Bill on 12 July 2022.

Damian Collins: A number of Members raised the issue of freedom of speech provisions, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) at the end of his excellent speech. We have sought to bring, in the Government amendments, additional clarity to the way the legislation works, so that it is absolutely clear what the priority legal offences are.

[Official Report, 12 July 2022, Vol. 718, c. 218.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins)

Errors have been identified in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie).

The correct response should have been:

Damian Collins: A number of Members raised the issue of freedom of speech provisions, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) at the end of his excellent speech. We have sought to bring, in the **Government’s commitments via written ministerial statement**, additional clarity to the way the legislation works, so that it is absolutely clear what the priority **categories of harmful content are**.

The following is a further extract from the debate on Report of the Online Safety Bill on 12 July 2022.

Damian Collins: The Bill absolutely addresses the sharing of non-consensual images in that way, so that would be something the regulator should take enforcement action against—

[Official Report, 12 July 2022, Vol. 718, c. 259.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins)

Errors have been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips)

The correct response should have been:

Damian Collins: The Bill absolutely addresses the **non-consensual sharing of intimate images** in that way, so that would be something the regulator should take enforcement action against—

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Thursday 28 July 2022**

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