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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 22 September 2022

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Members Sworn or Affirmed

9.34 am

Mr Speaker: I now invite remaining Members to swear the oath or make the solemn affirmation to His Majesty. We will suspend at about 9.55 am before starting our substantive business at approximately 10 am.

Let us now begin. I invite Members who have not yet sworn or affirmed.

Members present took and subscribed the Oath, or made and subscribed the Affirmation.

9.55 am

Sitting suspended.

Energy Prices: Support for Business

10 am

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to answer the urgent question, I have to say how disappointed I am that the subject of an urgent question was extensively set out in the media yesterday before being presented to the House. I hope that, as a former Leader of the House who was very supportive of me in criticising Secretaries of State for not coming to the House, the right hon. Member will be especially aware—as I know he is—of Ministers' duties to explain that important policies are first to be heard in this House.

I understand the importance of the matter and the need for our constituents to have the information as soon as possible and, for that reason, I would have been willing to allow a statement yesterday, if I had been asked. I am deeply concerned that I have to make another statement like this only a few sitting days into this new Administration's existence. I ask the right hon. Member and all his colleagues to do their utmost to ensure that this is the last time I have to do so. I am not angry; I am so disappointed, and I hope that we will treat the House with the respect that it is due.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy if he will make a statement on Government support for businesses facing rising energy prices.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): I am delighted to make a statement, Mr Speaker. As you know, I am a great believer that this House should be informed first. I was unaware of any precedent of a statement being made on a day set aside for taking the Oath, and therefore unaware that your generosity would have allowed such a statement to be made. I point out to the House that, in my membership of the House, a statement has not been made by the Government during the taking of the Oath days set aside, nor was any statement made in 1952 on the last occasion when the Oath was taken. I apologise to you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: In fairness, conversations would help to overcome any of these difficulties.

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is why I am saying that I am very grateful, Mr Speaker. I always think it is important that this House gets to know, and your generosity in setting a precedent where statements can be made on the days set aside for taking the Oath is, I think, a good one.

It is vital that businesses have the support that they need to pay their energy bills this winter. His Majesty's Government are determined to grow the economy. We cannot do that if business becomes insolvent thanks to what is tantamount to blackmail by a malevolent state actor. His Majesty's Government announced yesterday that they will provide a discount on wholesale gas and electricity prices for all non-domestic customers, whose current gas and electricity prices have been significantly inflated by global energy prices. That includes all UK businesses and covers the voluntary sector, such as

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charities, and the public sector, such as schools and hospitals. The scheme will apply to fixed contracts that have been agreed on or after 1 April 2022, as well as to deemed variable and flexible tariffs and contracts. It will be applied to energy usage for six months from 1 October until 31 March next year.

As with the energy price guarantee for domestic customers, in order to benefit from the scheme, customers do not need to take action. The discount will automatically be applied to their energy bills from 1 October. In terms of real-world savings, non-domestic users will start to see the benefits of the scheme in their October energy bills, which are typically received in November. The level of price reduction for each business will vary depending on its contract type, the tariff and the volume used.

We will publish a review of the operation of the scheme in three months to inform decisions on future support after March 2023. The review will focus in particular on identifying the most vulnerable non-domestic customers and on how the Government will continue assisting them with energy costs beyond the initial six-month period.

A parallel scheme—based on the same criteria and offering comparable support, but recognising the different market fundamentals—will be established in Northern Ireland. For those who are not connected to the gas or electricity grid, equivalent support will be provided for non-domestic consumers who use heating oil or alternative fuels instead of gas. Further detail on this will be announced shortly.

Jonathan Reynolds: I welcome the new ministerial team to their posts.

The energy crisis poses a severe challenge to businesses of every size, many of which have been desperate for clarity and reassurance. While the Conservative party spent much of the summer distracted by its own internal drama, the Opposition spent that time arguing that the crisis demands a response commensurate with the scale of the challenge, paid for by a windfall tax on the excess profits that have accrued because of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

While I welcome the Government's damascene conversion to freezing energy prices, we must all acknowledge that for too many companies the news will have come too late to save them. Businesses cannot plan on speculation and briefings. It is regrettable that a Minister who respects the role of Parliament chose to avoid parliamentary scrutiny, instead opting for a sparse press release and a short media interview. That is why the Opposition have tabled this urgent question: to get the much-needed clarity on these plans that businesses desperately need.

May I ask the Secretary of State what, specifically, the review after three months will be looking at and what the criteria will be for determining whether to extend the support? Secondly, how will the taxpayer be protected from energy traders inflating prices, knowing that the Government will be picking up a substantial slice of the costs come what may? Thirdly, what support will the Secretary of State be offering to businesses in the long term to protect themselves from rising energy costs through efficiency measures and the transition to renewable energy?

I also ask the Secretary of State to address the elephant in the room: who is paying for this? The Government say that they cannot cost this package, but it is clearly expensive. This Government say that they can cut taxes, increase spending, increase borrowing and magically pay for it through the higher growth that, after 12 years in office, has completely eluded them. This is fantasy economics. It is a threat to British businesses and to the financial stability of the country. What can the Secretary of State say to reassure the country that these plans are robust, responsible and fair, as well as being sufficient to get us through the crisis and better protect businesses in the long term?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Although we have been away for a few months and had a leadership election, the socialist record does not change. Tax, tax, tax and tax again—it is always the answer to every problem.

Let me come to the specifics of the hon. Gentleman's question. The three-month review is taking place to work out who will need support, to ensure that support is properly targeted. What is being done at the moment is an immediate response to an extreme crisis, to benefit everybody, but not everybody necessarily needs the same level of support. What we will do in the review is work out who needs the support. If I can give some early indications, it seems to me that places such as care homes are likely to need longer-term support. That will be covered by the review.

The hon. Gentleman raises the important question of how taxpayers will be protected. I have asked the Public Sector Fraud Authority to look at all our plans, to ensure that whatever we are doing and our mechanisms for paying are as robust as they can be against the speed with which we need to act. It is really important to safeguard taxpayers' money.

We are doing a number of things to help in the futures market. The Bank of England and the Treasury will provide some underlying capital for the futures market so that there is a more reliable futures price, rather than the one set on very low liquidity at the moment. We will legislate in an expedited fashion to ensure that we protect against anybody who commits fraud against this measure.

The hon. Gentleman raises the issue of transition. Gas is a transition fuel. The Government's commitment to net zero remains, but we will need gas to heat people's boilers for the immediate future, and we need to get it as cheaply as we possibly can, using all our domestic resources. Beyond that, there are exciting plans for carbon capture and storage and for hydrogen, which I think present a very attractive future for this country.

The hon. Gentleman asks that the scheme be responsible, robust and fair. It is all those things. It is responsible to protect business; it is robust to ensure that it can be rolled out quickly; and it is fair to our economy as a whole.

Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's package, which is already having an effect in North Yorkshire—Angus Fire, in the small town of Bentham, emailed this morning to thank him for this rapid intervention—but may I ask how quickly businesses in rural areas such as North Yorkshire will hear of the Government's intervention for off-grid customers?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support, and I am glad that businesses in his constituency are already being helped. I also recognise the importance of support for those who are off grid and using fuel oil. That is a specific issue in Northern Ireland, of which my right hon. Friend, as a former Northern Ireland Secretary, has particular experience. We are looking at the comparables, because the heating oil price has not risen by as much as the gas price. We need to be fair to all users, and we are working on that currently.

Mr Speaker: I call the Scottish National party spokesman, Stephen Flynn.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Is it not great to see the Secretary of State in this House, rather than standing in the street filming a statement to the public, surrounded by boarded-up shops and rubbish? What an unedifying spectacle of a man who believes in the pre-eminence of this Parliament—but I am glad he is here, because he has some questions to answer, and it is about time that he did so.

How much does the Secretary of State estimate that this scheme will ultimately cost, including, of course, possible interest payments? Can he confirm that the likes of Amazon will benefit from a scheme that will be built on the back of public sector borrowing? Perhaps most important, can he explain to energy users in Scotland—energy-rich Scotland, where we produce more oil and gas than we can possibly consume and gas accounts for just 14.4% of electricity generation—why Westminster has failed us so terribly badly?

Mr Rees-Mogg: What was it that P.G. Wodehouse said about it not being too difficult to discern the difference between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine? So often SNP Members come here on Thursday mornings with a grievance. It is rather like old times, is it not, Mr Speaker, when I would have an hour on Thursday mornings to discourse with the Scottish nationalists about their general grumpiness. I see that that is one of the constants of British politics. The hon. Gentleman referred to rubbish in the streets of Westminster; let me point out to him that as soon as an administration turns from Conservative to socialist, the rubbish piles up in the streets—as I think it has also been doing under the SNP in Edinburgh.

This scheme is fair to taxpayers and will provide support across the country. As I said, there will be a review in three months to ensure that that support goes to the people who need it most.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the discussions that he and I have already had about steel. He clearly understands the industry extremely well, and I am very grateful to him. Can he confirm that energy-intensive industries will be at the forefront of the Government's mind when we reach that point of review?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Yes, indeed. We are having meetings with British Steel, which will be a beneficiary of the scheme. It is important that we do not burden business in this country in a way in which it is not burdened overseas: we must support great British businesses.

Stephen Kinnoek (Aberavon) (Lab): Following the question from the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft) about steel, may I point out that the energy-intensive industries require co-investment and partnership with Government in order to make the transition to cleaner, greener ways of making steel? Can the Business Secretary confirm that he is committed to co-investing with Tata Steel and our other steel makers to enable that transition to take place, and will he agree to meet the all-party parliamentary group for steel and metal related industries—which I am proud to chair—to set out the Government's plans for this vitally important foundation industry?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I agree with what he says. We are in discussions—my officials are in discussions—with Tata Steel. I should be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman at any time, and I make the same offer to all right hon. and hon. Members. I think it proper for Secretaries of State to make themselves available in response to all reasonable requests for meetings from Members on both sides of the House.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): May I press my right hon. Friend on the position of off-grid consumers? About 40% of my constituents are off the gas grid, as is the case for a similar number in the Prime Minister's constituency, so this is very important. The factsheet updated yesterday suggested that only £100 was going to be provided to such consumers. That does not seem to provide a comparable level of support. Will he update us on when we will have more information? Secondly, do the electricity companies have an accurate database of exactly which customers are on the gas grid and which are not, so that they are able to make those payments?

Mr Rees-Mogg: On the second point, people either have a gas meter or they do not, so that is relatively straightforward. As regards the first point, the price of heating oil has not risen as much as the price of gas. The aim of Government policy is to ensure equivalence, and therefore, inevitably, the support given for those on heating oil will be a lower actual amount than that for those connected to the gas grid—but that will give them equivalence.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): An aspect of this that has not really been talked about is the gas and energy consultancy companies. My constituency has a higher than average proportion of the energy consultancy companies based in the wider north-east region, and they are feeling the impact of the energy crisis really hard. Hundreds of energy consultant jobs have been lost in Gateshead in the past month alone, leading to an exodus of expertise and innovation, which will further harm business in the future. The Government's announcement of a cap on energy prices for the next six months does nothing to promote market competition between suppliers, and leaves brokerage and consultancy companies sidelined. Businesses will ultimately need to return to the market to improve energy contracts, if they are to survive throughout 2023, unless of course the Government intend to change the market model. What plans do the Government have to repair the energy market in 2023 and, importantly, to support those businesses in the north-east in the meantime? Or is it going to be more a case of devil take the hindmost?

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has to learn to ask a question, not make his own statement.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman might like to apply to the Backbench Business Committee for a debate on the subject.

The reason we are going for a cap on the wholesale price is so that the market should remain as open as possible, and therefore there should be opportunities for discussions with companies as to the right level of price at the retail level and all that goes between the wholesale and retail level for the non-domestic sector. I hope that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): May I ask the Secretary of State to clarify a point about park home owners in Winchester, who obviously live under one business owner—the park home owner—and people who live in homes of multiple occupation under one business owner? They were left wondering for a long time about the £400 rebate previously announced by the Government. Where do they stand in respect of this new energy price guarantee? Are they being treated as businesses? If so, they are being treated as business units, not domestic units, which is of course what they are.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking an important question on something that constituents of all of us will be concerned about. We will legislate to ensure that the cut in prices is fed through to residents. Therefore, people running park homes or mansion blocks will have to pass on the benefit. That will be a legal requirement. As we look to the review, I think that it is very straightforward to assume that park homes and mansion blocks will be at the forefront of those who need continued support, because they are residential rather than business users.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Orkney and Shetland already have the highest levels of fuel poverty in the country. We have no access to the mains gas grid, which means that so many more of my constituents rely on heating oil. This morning my constituents are being quoted £1.22 per litre for heating oil. It is pretty clear that the market in heating oil has failed. Why are the Government not acting now to bring heating oil within the price cap mechanism?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The right hon. Gentleman says that the Government are not acting now, but that is not entirely accurate. The Government are acting now to include heating oil. As I have said, heating oil has not risen as much as gas. Obviously, we are working on the basis of the evidence available, and we are looking at the heating oil price.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I very much welcome this statement. Across my constituency there are many small businesses, such as play gyms, gyms and cafés, in former textile mills. Because they pay one fee for everything, all in, how can we make sure that their landlords pass on the benefit of this programme?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We will legislate so that landlords are obliged to pass on the cut in wholesale prices.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): There is still a lack of clarity on the Government's energy support package for non-domestic users. Businesses, faith groups and voluntary organisations in my constituency are especially worried about the potential cliff edge in April next year. It is not viable for those organisations to plan on six-month timelines, so they need more clarity and certainty about the scheme. Will the Secretary of State set out what criteria will be used for those organisations? Who will qualify for further additional support come next April?

Mr Rees-Mogg: That is exactly what the review will cover, and it will be published in plenty of time for 1 April.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): Obviously, across the House we welcome this package. We have seen many similar packages across Europe, but there has been much further debate in Europe about how to constrain demand, particularly on the part of industrial users. We cannot subsidise consumption without also trying to reduce demand, because otherwise we will cause immense risk of blackouts come this winter.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The price signal remains very strong. Even with this support, prices have risen significantly and it is fair to assume that non-domestic users will be rational actors in the market.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): To prevent households being locked into years of fuel poverty, Plaid Cymru is urging the Government to bring forward a street-by-street insulation programme, to be paid for by a higher windfall tax on oil and gas companies. Businesses also need support with energy efficiency measures so that they, too, can permanently reduce their energy bills. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss the proposal from the Federation of Small Businesses for "help to green" vouchers, which would support small and medium-sized businesses to afford energy-saving products and services?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It will be a pleasure to meet the right hon. Lady to discuss these matters. The Government are committed to helping people with insulation projects. That is an important part of the Government's strategy, and she is right to raise it.

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): This support will be very much welcomed by businesses in my constituency, and particularly by high-energy users such as the steel industry, which has suffered from uncompetitive energy prices for years. As welcome as this short-term help is, will my right hon. Friend confirm that he is looking at a long-term steel strategy to ensure that our UK manufacturers can compete in the long term?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am in entire agreement with my hon. Friend. It makes absolutely no sense to make British industry uncompetitive against global industry.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): It saddens me to remind the House that we now have a Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy who has never worked in industry or business—*[Interruption.]* He is an investment banker.

May I tell the Secretary of State that small firms, and big firms, in Huddersfield will go bust due to the cost of energy this winter? Has he seen the front page of the *Financial Times*? This is a crisis for our country, especially in manufacturing. When will he do something and wake up to his responsibility to get out there in the country and talk to manufacturers?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think it is the hon. Gentleman who needs to wake up and pay attention to what has been announced.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): For many businesses, including Jungle Kingdom in my constituency, solar panels are a way to make a significant, tangible difference in the long term, but they cannot secure the permission of their landlord. What measures can be considered to make it work for both parties?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Landlords and tenants need to work together to try to ensure that efficient sources of energy are achieved. Normally it will be in the interests of a landlord to have solar panels applied, particularly if the tenant is volunteering to pay for them, so I think this is something where the market can probably find an answer.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Many small businesses in the Lune valley and Over Wyresdale in my constituency use heating oil. Although the price has not increased as much or as fast as the gas price, it has still increased exponentially and many small businesses are really struggling to know how they will make ends meet. How soon will these businesses get any clarification from this Government about whether they will still be in business at Christmas?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Heating oil is an important issue, for the hon. Lady's constituents, for businesses and, as I mentioned earlier, for Northern Ireland. It is therefore important that we ensure there is a proper equivalent scheme, and that is what we are doing.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Many businesses in my constituency very much welcome these measures. As a number of Members have said, energy-intensive industries, in particular, have borne the brunt of many of the issues we have faced with energy cost rises. So will my right hon. Friend look in particular at industries such as ceramics, at longer-term support and at how we can support them to invest in more efficient and energy-saving technologies?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is a very important point for ceramics, steel and other energy-intensive industries: they want to move to more efficient means of production, and that may require some investment. It is important that the Government help to work on the schemes to ensure that we have vibrant, efficient, profitable and, most importantly of all, globally competitive industries.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Secretary of State's announcements may have finally put a temporary brake on further terrifying price hikes, but they leave huge questions unanswered, including: what is the Government's exit strategy? We need a proper solution to get us out of this crisis, by reducing

our dependence on gas and upgrading buildings for the long term. Just yesterday, more than 100 top businesses wrote to the Government begging them for support for energy-efficiency and large-scale industrial decarbonisation. Can he explain why these businesses were so conspicuous by their absence in the measures he announced today, and will he remedy that now?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The businesses that write can implement their own energy-efficiency measures—that is what businesses do. It is a sensible investment for them, because if they become more energy-efficient, they will save cash on their energy bills. We also need more secure and cheaper supplies of gas, which is why we are going to issue more licences and why we are looking at shale gas. It is really important that people have confidence that gas will flow through the pipes and into their boilers so that they can heat their homes during this and succeeding winters.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): At a time when they are facing substantial increases in a key cost of operating, businesses across the UK have welcomed the measures and, in particular, the speed with which the Government have responded. Did the Secretary of State see the remarks made by Kate Nicholls of UKHospitality, who praised the inclusiveness of this scheme, with it bringing in both small and large companies, and drew attention to how this is going to secure jobs in the long term?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. It is fundamentally important that we have a rapid scheme that protects as many businesses as possible, because the increase is so extreme that, on an immediate view of it, it was hard to see any business that would find conditions easy. Therefore, we had to act quickly and universally, and I am grateful for his support and that of the hospitality industry.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Will the small charities that are not registered with the Charity Commission be eligible for this assistance? I am thinking of those with an income of less than £5,000 a year that cannot register voluntarily and are not required to do so. Will they get help as well?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This proposal will help all non-domestic users, with the only exception being the gas-powered electricity generation operators, which will not get the subsidy for their electricity generation. All other non-domestic outlets will benefit.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I welcome this package, which will provide support to businesses and safeguard jobs in my constituency. The current situation is exacerbated by an energy market that does not work and the need for further investment in nuclear and renewables—I am glad that the Government are consulting on the former and investing in the latter. Does my right hon. Friend agree that public and private investment is needed, along with a functioning energy market, to ensure that we never have to face this situation again?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right; we need a better functioning energy market. There are real difficulties with the liquidity in the futures

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market at the moment. He is also right to say that we need a further and faster roll-out of nuclear energy, which is being worked on, and that offshore wind, which is going at a rapid pace, continues to be a major and growing source of energy within this country.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): The Secretary of State has mentioned Northern Ireland several times, highlighting the fact that he is aware that a large number of small businesses there rely on oil for heating their premises. Will he go further than just a throwaway line and confirm that the inadequate and insignificant £100 being offered to households for oil will be reviewed and that the same figure will not be offered to businesses reliant on oil?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Two thirds of Northern Ireland households are not on gas. Therefore, it is fundamental to ensure that Northern Ireland is treated fairly and as a full part—as it is—of the United Kingdom. That is an absolute priority for the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland does not have the price cap that applies in Great Britain, therefore we will need to bring forward legislation to deal with the issues in Northern Ireland. We will do that as a matter of absolute priority to ensure that a scheme is up and running rapidly. We are very conscious of the fuel oil issue, which other Members have raised.

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): On heating oil, two thirds of my constituents live off the gas grid. I note what the Secretary of State says about being fair to all bill payers, but I urge him not to fall into the trap of thinking that rural areas are wealthy areas. Fuel poverty in my constituency is a serious problem, and so far the only support that has been announced is £100, which will provide heating oil for just 10 days—it will not touch the sides. I urge the Government to rethink on rural areas and heating oil.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Representing a rural constituency, I am well aware that there are areas of our countryside that suffer from fuel poverty. It is all a matter of proportionality; that is what we are striving to achieve, to get the balance right.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): A businessman recently contacted my office extremely distressed about the future of his business—he does engineering, and he was talking about closing his doors for good and laying off 50 people. I hope the Minister accepts that the delay in hearing something from the Government has not only caused emotional distress but had an impact on the local economy. Companies are not making decisions on future investment in their workforce or their business because they are not sure that they have a future. Bearing that in mind, will the Minister offer greater reassurance by giving businesses long-term support to improve their energy efficiency?

Mr Rees-Mogg: A very significant package of support has been announced and brought forward as early as practicable. I mentioned that a review will take place, and the point of that review is to work out who will be in most need of that support.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): I very much welcome this package of support for business, as I welcomed the support for domestic users. However, I was contacted yesterday by Alan, a resident of Orwell Quay, who said he had experienced a 300% increase in the service charge for heating the communal areas. He wanted to know whether the Government have a plan to support leaseholders in places such as Orwell Quay in Ipswich.

Mr Rees-Mogg: We will legislate to ensure that the reduction in the wholesale cost is fed through to people in mansion blocks or whose energy is bought centrally and who are then charged through a service charge. That will be a fundamental part of these proposals.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Calder Millerfield in my constituency has been quoted a 345% increase in its electricity costs alone. Although I appreciate the Secretary of State's plans to help in the next six months, what can he offer Calder Millerfield after the end of that six months? A 345% increase just in electricity costs could put this business under.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady raises the issue of these extraordinary, large rises, which concern MPs on both sides of the House. That is why we have brought forward this package. I am trying to give as much reassurance as I can without pre-empting the review. As I said, we have introduced this measure on a completely broadbrush basis because it is the right thing to do at the moment—it is needed urgently. However, we need to examine in a review exactly who should benefit, and then announce that in plenty of time for 1 April. In that way, we can see what support is needed for the longer term.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): Many businesses in East Devon have already welcomed the support outlined by my right hon. Friend. However, as he well knows, the hospitality industry in particular will need targeted support after that six-month period. Will he commit to continue to work with the industry and the all-party parliamentary group for hospitality and tourism, which I chair, on a wider package that will help pubs and cafés survive after six months?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very happy to consider representations to the review from my hon. Friend and others regarding specific industries.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The trouble with announcing a measure that only lasts six months is that local authorities are, quite responsibly, putting together their budgets for next year now. My local authority has said to me that, because it runs swimming pools, leisure centres, care homes, schools and so on, not renewing this for next year would be the single biggest blow to its finances in 50 years and it would have to start laying people off pretty sharp. Will the Secretary of State make sure that local authorities are given plenty of advance notice of how their budgets can be protected for the next financial year?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have laid out when the review will be and that we will give as much notice as we can prior to 1 April.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, which I know will be welcomed across Newcastle-under-Lyme both in our hospitality industry and at the brickworks in Chesterton, which is energy intensive. Does he agree that we must not be in this position again in the future—indeed, western Europe must not be in this position again—and that that will require investment not only in diversifying our energy but in storage? What will his Department do to work on energy storage?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is right: we must not be in this position again. That is why we want to ensure that we maximise our own domestic sources of energy and look at long-term contracts with friendly nations across the world that are fundamentally more reliable. Yes, there is a great deal more to do, and storage is something that we are looking at.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Scottish Licensed Trade Association has said of the Government's plans that

“when you look beyond the headlines it doesn't live up to the hype, as this new scheme caps the wholesale price and pubs and bars could still be paying 200%-300% higher bills than normal.”

The newly and extensively restored Foundry pub in Inverness had to close its doors a few weeks ago, citing energy costs as a key reason, during the Tory leadership vacuum. Does the Secretary of State accept that what he is offering businesses is too little, too late and does not last long enough?

Mr Rees-Mogg: No, I would not characterise it in that way at all. I would simply say that, if Scotland were independent, it would not be able to afford to do any of this.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Anglesey is known as energy island. We have wind, wave, solar and hydrogen power and, hopefully, new nuclear at Wylfa, yet we have one of the lowest gross value added rates of any constituency across the UK. Can my right hon. Friend reassure my constituents that this package will help protect their jobs and bring much-needed new employment, investment and skilled jobs to Anglesey?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I would be extremely keen to see that happen. I would add that Ynys Môn has a very high-energy dynamo as a Member of Parliament.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I want to follow up on the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) about the position of local authorities. Come December, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will make a spending announcement for local authorities for next year. Does the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy agree that his review of energy costs should be incorporated into that, so that local authorities get one presentation of what the future will look like rather than myriad different ones not joined up together?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is rather looking a gift horse in the mouth. This is providing a very significant reduction in energy prices for the next six months and a review will take place to see what happens

next. Local authorities would be in a very difficult financial situation if this were not being done. The Government cannot responsibly commit to unending expenditure; it has to be done in a sensible and prudent fashion.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I warmly welcome the package of measures that my right hon. Friend has set out. As the number of questions this morning has indicated, the one area that needs more detail and, dare I say it, polish is off-grid support. When he looks at the detail of that for businesses and households, I urge him not to treat it as one, but to look at the disparity in pricing between oil and liquefied petroleum gas, which have very different costs bases and need to be treated separately.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is right: LPG and heating oil have not risen as much as natural gas. None the less, it is important to make sure that there is fairness for everybody, bearing in mind that some houses, and indeed some schools, still depend on coal for their heating.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): Yesterday's announcement provided very little certainty for schools and other public services; it simply pushed the cliff edge back by six months. Schools in my constituency are already facing difficult decisions about cutting support staff. They also need help cutting energy usage. This Government shut down the school energy efficiency loan scheme, which helped them to buy insulation, solar panels and so on. Is it not high time that the Secretary of State looked at reopening that scheme?

Mr Rees-Mogg: On the first point, we are providing considerably more certainty than would otherwise be provided in a fundamentally uncertain energy market. We encourage people to look at ways they can insulate themselves better and are in endless discussions to ensure that we can have the appropriate programmes.

Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): Businesses across Grantham and Stamford will welcome the support announced this week. Lincolnshire's farmers in particular face increasing pressure, owing to the rising costs of inputs such as fertiliser and energy. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that he will remain mindful of the particular circumstances farmers face in the design of any future support packages?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I too represent an agricultural constituency, I am very conscious of the needs of farmers, which should be at the forefront of the nation's care and concern.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): In times of crisis we turn to our civil society organisations to support us with vital services. Across the arts, we are expecting museums, galleries and theatres to provide the public with warm banks. Those critical community and cultural organisations tell me that they face the combined challenges of falling donations and income, rising costs and the continuing impact of covid. What can the Business Secretary tell us to reassure those essential organisations that support for energy costs will extend beyond six months for them?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think I have already answered the question on what happens after six months. There will be a review, and what is going to happen will be announced well in advance of 1 April.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): I welcome the statement by the Secretary of State, on behalf of the thousands of businesses and charities and the 63 care homes and 30 schools in Southend West. When he comes to his review, will he assure me that he will keep in mind the particular needs of special schools? We have brilliant ones in Southend, particularly Kingsdown School; they look after the most seriously disabled children and their energy needs are much higher due to the feeding pumps and hoists. Will he agree to sit down with me and discuss their special needs when he comes to his review?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I would be delighted to discuss that with my hon. Friend. In my own constituency we have the Fosse Way School, a special school that provides a wonderful and caring service to children in very great need.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): The Secretary of State has mentioned that there will be support for the voluntary and charitable sectors. In my constituency we have a number of food banks and food pantries that are struggling to keep their doors open as they provide essential services for people forced into poverty. Can the Secretary of State tell us what level of support beyond the six months will be available to that very important sector?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I have already answered several times the question of what will happen after 1 April.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Businesses in Hinckley and Bosworth will be hugely grateful for the protection the Government have put in place. There is one problem, though: given world events, what is the Government's assessment of the risk of energy blackouts, and should businesses prepare for them?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is a requirement for a study of that to be provided, and I believe a study on our energy security through the winter will be provided in early October.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Parts of Blaenau Gwent are 1,200 feet above sea level and our winters can be bitter. Will there be any extra help for families facing higher bills in constituencies with much colder weather than most, and will the Government also look again at the cold weather payment criteria as part of their upcoming review?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Cold weather payments are not a responsibility of my Department, but I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman's comments are passed on to the relevant Secretary of State.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Like many other MPs, I have spent the summer visiting small businesses and charities in my constituency. They all say that they need to be able to make forward plans. For example, Four Square, a charity in my constituency,

runs a hostel for homeless young people and a women's refuge, and fundraises through a large retail premises. Soaring energy bills may affect its ability to keep the homeless hostel and the women's refuge open. It is simply not practical for Four Square to wait three months for a review; it needs action and information on the Government's long-term plans before three months are up. Will the Secretary of State please seriously reconsider the timing here and listen to the voices across the House urging him to do that?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We have acted extremely swiftly to provide support, and it is proper that it should be reviewed to ensure that it goes to the right people. The timeline is completely reasonable. It seems to me that people are looking for things to harp on about in a package that they broadly welcome.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Many businesses are negotiating contracts with their energy suppliers now, so what does the Secretary of State have to say to those businesses? Should they negotiate just for six months? What will he do, in all urgency, to prevent the next six months from being a period in which businesses are run down and closed?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I have set out, there will be a review and an announcement, giving people plenty of time for 1 April.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Many churches and charities in my constituency will expend more energy over the coming months because they are providing warm banks. What additional support will they be able to apply for so that they can provide the resilience our communities need?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This support is comprehensive across the non-domestic sector.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The Secretary of State has provided the clarity that many companies in Northern Ireland now require, but legislation will now be required to assist businesses. Thousands of businesses in Northern Ireland are small and medium-sized enterprises, and they cannot wait for legislation, so will he commit to an emergency instrument or provision before December of this year?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This House, when called upon, can act remarkably swiftly. The intention is that we should introduce legislation in October, pass it by the end of October, and that it should take effect from 1 October, to ensure that non-domestic users in the whole of the United Kingdom are helped, and that everybody in Northern Ireland is helped. That is the broad timeframe, and I hope that the House will co-operate with it, because it is necessary for expedited legislation.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): So many big energy companies have posted obscene profits while constituents, businesses, charities and schools across my Vauxhall constituency continue to suffer. As the Government were so reluctant to introduce the windfall tax, will the Secretary of State confirm how they will ensure that the energy companies are compelled to pass the subsidy on to businesses?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Of course, that depends on what the hon. Lady means by “energy companies”, because the domestic suppliers have not been making enormous amounts of money. Indeed, many of them have gone out of business over the last few months, so they have not been making vast amounts of money.

Some businesses have been making a lot of money; they pay very significant amounts of tax already. It is important that we do not assume that there is some honeypot of businesses that can be raided—there is not. We need long-term investment in this country to maximise the exploration and production of oil and gas to ensure that we have lower prices and sustainable businesses. That is not aided by putting taxes on at every opportunity, which the socialists always want to do.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The domestic scheme is based on a loan to be repaid out of future bills. If the business scheme is to be repaid in the same way, why would businesses not regard it as a deferred tax rise? If it is not, does the Secretary of State really expect it to be repaid out of general taxation by the rest of the taxpayers? “Tax, tax, tax” is what he is saying.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Economic growth, economic growth, economic growth.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): May I again raise the plight of the hospitality sector? The Secretary of State will know that it went through a tumultuous time during the pandemic, and many small hospitality outlets face extortionate increases in their bills. Those at Howard’s Neighbourhood Bar—a small 60-seat bar in Denton—face bill increases of £2,000 a month, which is just not sustainable for them. Although the support will take them six months down the road, they will be worried about what happens after that. The Secretary of State says that there will be a review, but can he offer a glimmer of hope to businesses such as Howard’s Neighbourhood Bar that they will not face a cliff-edge in six months’ time?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman asks a fair question. I cannot pre-empt the review, but I think I can offer a glimmer of hope. In the review, we will have to see which companies and other non-domestic users need the greatest support—I have indicated some of them. Without going too far, it seems that the hospitality sector is at particular risk in this area. If he would like to make representations to the review, I will listen to them very carefully.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As well as businesses, a number of housing associations have concerns about energy prices. In my small Glasgow constituency I have more than 15 housing associations, many of which have the unique tenement-style properties, which are very difficult when it comes to energy efficiency. Would the Secretary of State be willing to come to Glasgow East and take part in a roundtable with local housing associations to understand the challenges that tenement properties, in particular, face as a result of the energy crisis?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman, as so often, raises a serious point. We are very conscious of the issues facing social housing landlords, particularly those

with rather older housing stock that is the least energy efficient. There are important things to be done to help them make their housing more efficient, and there have been schemes available to do that. I am not sure I can promise a visit, but I would be delighted to discuss the matter with him further.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): Care homes in my constituency are facing soaring energy costs, as I am sure the Secretary of State will be aware. Care homes look after frail and vulnerable people, and it is essential that they are kept warm. I note his comments thus far on care homes, but can he assure us that there will be a real focus on ensuring their ongoing financial viability?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is of fundamental concern to His Majesty’s Government.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): I want to try again on local authorities, because I am not sure the Secretary of State understands that the review is simply too late. Too many councils already face budget holes—Luton Council faces a budget hole of £10 million this year—because of increasing energy costs, inflationary pressures and increasing demands. Has he had any conversations with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities about the budget planning process? Local authorities are required to produce medium-term budgets before April next year.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The degree of certainty that is being offered is greater than in a normal year. We are saying that what will happen will be announced after the three-month review has taken place, in plenty of time for 1 April. Normally, local authorities are dependent on the vicissitudes of the market.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (Ind): Bars, butchers and other small businesses I have spoken to in Glasgow North are already operating on the tightest of margins. If they go out of business, that has a knock-on effect across the local economy, so the poverty rate spirals up rather than wealth trickling down. What assurances can the Secretary of State give these businesses, rather than simply pushing the cliff edge further down the road?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think we have given a very substantial assurance this morning.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): In recess, I met residents at Winton Court sheltered housing scheme in Winlaton, run by Housing 21, and they explained to me how angry they were that they were not benefiting from the domestic subsidy. Can the Secretary of State tell me how he proposes to make sure that those people, most of them pensioners, are not hit by increased energy costs and are in no worse a position than other residents?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who is such an assiduous campaigner for her constituents. She is absolutely right that we have to ensure that these wholesale price cuts feed through to the people they are meant to benefit, and that will be in our legislation.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Because of the Government’s failure to act quickly on energy costs, Smithy’s fish and chip shop, which had

[*Dame Diana Johnson*]

been trading for 38 years on Beverley Road in Hull, had to close its doors. That was not just because of energy cost increases, but because the price of fish has gone up 120% and the price of beef dripping 150%. I would like to know what more the Secretary of State will do to reassure one of the institutions at the heart of our communities—fish and chip shops.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am glad to reassure people about fish and chip shops—the right hon. Lady is right to say they are at the heart of our community—because they will benefit from this universal scheme.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Businesses in Glasgow North West can literally see the turbines that are producing Scotland's renewable energy. They are not feeling supported at the moment. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the businesses that are being supported most through this crisis are the energy producers and the gas and oil companies?

Mr Rees-Mogg: No, that is a complete misunderstanding of what is happening. We are protecting all non-domestic users, in addition to domestic users. We are protecting businesses, individuals and charities across the country.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Lots of SMEs in south Manchester are still worried. I make a particular plea for small and medium-sized bakeries, such as Martins and Barbakan in Chorlton in my constituency, which have been in touch with me and are really concerned. Can the Secretary of State assure us that he is in discussion with those kinds of energy intensive small businesses? Those discussions do not have to wait for three months; I hope they are going on now.

Mr Rees-Mogg: All businesses will benefit, but obviously, the more energy intensive the business, the more it will benefit from this reduction in wholesale prices. As I said, I am very open to receive representations from right hon. and hon. Members to the review that is taking place.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I am a member of the voluntary board of the Scottish Pantry Network, whose shops are significantly affected by rising energy costs. It exists for environmental reasons to stop food waste, but primarily, it exists to provide low-cost, fresh food for people who cannot afford supermarket prices. To keep the food fresh, our shops have walk-in fridges and freezers that cost a lot of money to run. Does the Secretary of State not see that some supermarkets, which my constituents cannot shop in and which are making massive profits, will be helped by this measure, while some of my pantry shops will not be, simply because they signed up to a contract prior to 1 April? Will he remove that date? If not, will he consider including all those non-domestics that signed up to contracts before 1 April in the three-month review?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The major price rises in contracts took place after 1 April, which is why that date was set.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): For the last 12 years, Conservative Governments have had the chance to act on energy supply and infrastructure.

Manufacturing businesses around the country have been saying to me that they are facing a 59% premium against the EU average for electricity. Why did Governments not act sooner, certainly before this energy spike, to ensure the security of UK businesses?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is important for our economy that we have competitive energy prices and that we do not go out of our way to burden British business. I agree: the hon. Gentleman is right to campaign for lower energy prices.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The energy package announced yesterday is fine—as light as it is and as far as it goes. The Secretary of State has heard widespread concerns about the cliff edge in the support in three or six months' time. In view of those concerns, will he give further urgent consideration to additional support for energy intensive business sectors, such as manufacturing and hospitality, as well as longer-term support for investing in energy saving measures?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think we have covered most of that already, and the answer is broadly yes.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The Secretary of State admitted a few minutes ago that we have all known for at least six months that urgent and major Government intervention would be needed. Why has it taken so long? To call on his experience and knowledge of the way things work from his previous post as Leader of the House, who should the House demand come to the Dispatch Box to apologise to our constituents for six months of unnecessary delay?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Most energy is used during the winter. We have plans ready for the winter.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): In response to an earlier question, the Secretary of State acknowledged the importance of farming, but factories and those involved in food production are also important for food supply, as is certainly the case in North East Fife. Further food inflation will affect struggling families more. Although this short-term energy support is welcome, there are other issues for the sector, such as the cost of fertiliser, labour supply and so on. Will he commit to a cross-Government strategy involving the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Home Office, the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to ensure our food supply for the future?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady is right to raise what is going on with the cost of living more generally. Energy is an important part of that, and helping to deal with the energy problem will have an effect on price rises throughout the economy. The Bank of England will say something later today, which is another part of dealing with inflation. I accept her analysis that inflation is a very difficult problem for an economy to face.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his commitment and help for all the different sectors across my whole community. On Monday, I met a business owner in my community who employs more than 200 people. His is an energy intensive factory

business and the cost of energy for a year is a large six-figure sum. He needs help right away to secure those jobs and ensure that the future is secure for him and his company. I ask the Secretary of State to clarify again whether that business owner will qualify for the 50% help toward energy costs, particularly for electricity.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I do not know the circumstances of any individual company, but if the company is on mains gas and electricity, it will benefit, and it will benefit from 1 October. In Northern Ireland, both gas and electricity will be almost identical—slightly different for technical differences, but the same in effect—to what is happening in GB.

Shale Gas Extraction

11 am

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to make a statement regarding the lifting of the moratorium on shale gas extraction.

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): What a pleasure it is to be continuing on this theme—

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Get the right page!

Mr Rees-Mogg: Indeed, the hon. Lady is right to be saying that I need to find the right page because I am having some difficulty in finding the right page immediately, but do not worry. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Is there another copy we can give the Secretary of State? [*Interruption.*] He has got it.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for asking his urgent question. I am glad to be able to announce that the moratorium on the extraction of shale gas is being lifted, and a statement about that has been laid before the House.

As I set out in the previous urgent question, it is important that we use all available sources of fuel within this country. It is more environmentally friendly to use our own sources of fuel than to extract them in other countries and transport them here at great cost, both financially and in terms of carbon. It is therefore something we need to revisit, and we need to revisit the seismic limits to ensure that shale gas extraction can be done in an effective and efficient way.

Edward Miliband: This is obviously a case of “the dog ate my homework”, and it is hardly surprising. Let us start by taking the Secretary of State’s excuse for lifting the fracking ban—that it will make a difference to the energy bills crisis. It will not, because gas is sold on the international market. The current Chancellor said so in February of this year:

“No amount of shale gas...would be enough to lower the European price”

of gas. In an article published yesterday, even the founder of Cuadrilla said that the Secretary of State is wrong. First, why does he not admit the truth that anyone who knows anything about this subject says his claim that fracking will cut bills is nonsense?

Next, let us come to safety. The 2019 manifesto, on which the Secretary of State and every Conservative Member stood, said:

“We will not support fracking unless the science shows categorically that it can be done safely.”

They are lifting the ban, but they cannot supply the evidence, and the British Geological Survey report published today certainly does not do it. So in the absence of the evidence, his approach is to change the safety limits. He says in his written statement laid before this House that “tolerating a higher degree of risk and disturbance appears to us to be in the national interest”.

[Edward Miliband]

I look forward to him and his colleagues explaining his charter for earthquakes to the people of Lancashire, Yorkshire, the midlands, Sussex, Dorset and, indeed, Somerset who will be part of his dangerous experiment. Let me tell the Conservatives that we will hang this broken promise round their necks in every part of the country between now and the next general election.

The Conservative manifesto also said:

“Having listened to local communities, we have ruled out changes to the planning system.”

Does the Secretary of State stand by that promise, and how will he abide by the Prime Minister’s commitment to local consent? The truth is that he does not understand that we cannot escape a fossil fuels crisis by doubling down on fossil fuels. Renewables are today nine times cheaper than gas. The only way to cut energy bills and have energy security is with zero-carbon home-grown power, including onshore wind and solar, which his wing of the Conservative party hates and he continues to block. For communities in every part of our country, today shows that they can never trust a word this Government say again, and he has shown he is willing to break his promises to support dangerous fringe ideas that put the interests of fossil fuel companies above those of the British people.

Mr Rees-Mogg: There was plenty of energy in that, Mr Speaker, but it was, I am afraid, more sound and fury that signifies nothing. We know that shale gas is safe. It is safe in the United States, where it has been one of the biggest contributors to the decline in carbon emissions of any activity that has gone on in that country. We know, even if Labour Members wish to ignore it, that seismic activity of 2.5 and below on the Richter scale takes place millions of times a year across the world. Our standards for ground-level movements for construction work are double those that have ever been achieved by any shale gas exploration in this country. There is a huge margin over what we allow for building work against what has actually happened in terms of shale gas. The right hon. Gentleman seeks to deny the ordinary rules of supply and demand. He ought to be aware that when we increase supply and demand remains steady, that has an effect on pricing, and pricing is always set at the margin. The price of any commodity is set by the final user who demands that commodity. If supply exceeds demand prices fall, and any increase in supply helps to reduce costs.

But there is another point. We have—all of us—constituents with gas boilers, and we are going to have them for many years to come. Do we really want them to be dependent on strange dictatorships that wage war in this world, or do we want to have our own security, and our own supplies? Do we want to maximise what we receive from the North sea and from underneath our feet? This seems to me to be just good common sense. It is safe, it is shown to be safe, and the scare stories have been disproved time and again. The hysteria about seismic activity fails to understand that the Richter scale is a logarithmic scale. It seems to think it is a straight arithmetic scale, which of course it is not. Bringing on the supply will bring us cheaper energy, which we need, and that will help our constituents. It secures our supply, which will ensure that our businesses can continue to operate whatever the weather. This is of such importance, and it is sheer Ludditerity that opposes it.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): There is nothing Luddite about the people of Lancashire or Fylde. I want to say how disappointed I am that Parliament was not informed about this issue before the media was, and that as a local Member of Parliament, I was not given that courtesy, despite having requested information for two weeks by contacting the right hon. Gentleman via his Parliamentary Private Secretary. I have sent letters, I have sent WhatsApps—nothing back. Can we be crystal clear on one thing? At the Manchester hustings—this is a matter of public record and people can find the clip—the Prime Minister made it crystal clear, no ifs, no buts, no caveats, that fracking would take place in the United Kingdom only where there was local consent. That was crystal clear. If the Prime Minister is to remain a woman of her word, and a woman in whom we can believe—and I believe she is—will the Secretary of State outline how that local consent will be given and demonstrated in my constituency of Fylde?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend will have heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in her speech on energy on 8 September, saying that we were lifting the moratorium on fracking. I am surprised that he feels he was not informed, because that has been announced.

Mark Menzies: With local consent.

Mr Rees-Mogg: We obviously want to work with local communities, and it is really important that companies that seek to extract shale gas come up with packages that make what they are proposing to do welcome to local communities. That is of fundamental importance and is what the Prime Minister has set out.

Mr Speaker: I call Stephen Flynn, SNP spokesperson.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): There can be no doubt that this particular political earthquake is absolutely bonkers. The UK faces two problems when it comes to energy: energy prices and energy security. Let us be clear that when it comes to energy prices, producing shale gas will make absolutely no difference whatsoever. On energy security, this Government could and should be turbocharging renewables, and creating a contract for difference for hydrogen, to ensure that we have hydrogen boilers in future and are not reliant on the gas boilers of the past. But luckily, in Scotland there will be no change. There will be no fracking whatsoever. We, unlike the Tories, stick to our word. It is great to know that that will not change, but the one thing that will change is that we will be long gone from the shackles of this place by the time shale gas is produced in England.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is amusing to think that the economics of independence were all dependent upon oil and gas, and now they are not going to have any, which does not seem to me to be entirely consistent. Using our national resources is a sensible and wise policy, and that is what this Government are looking to do.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): There has been no moratorium on fracking for thermal energy and it has continued apace at many sites, but the science is the same, is it not?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Except that thermal energy has no seismic limit on it, whereas there was a 0.5 limit on shale gas, which made it almost impossible. That was a policy that was designed to stop any shale gas being extracted.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State confirm what recoverable reserves of shale gas we have here in the UK? What percentage of global or even national demand would that shale gas be likely to meet, and what impact would that have on the global price of natural gas?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We need to get on with the exploration and the test drilling to see how realistic the forecasts are. A report in 2012 set out the potential for shale gas, which is very large, but the question that the hon. Member raises—how much of that will be realistically extractable?—is the right one, and it requires drilling to take place to find out.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): Obviously, looking to these measures to increase security and supply is incredibly sensible in the long term, not only to get prices down but to deliver energy security. However, for the many constituents of mine still struggling with energy prices now, particularly those off grid, can the Secretary of State outline a few of those measures and say how he intends to go further in offering short-term support?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think we discussed that in the last urgent question, so I will ask my hon. Friend to look at *Hansard*.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I must say that I am fascinated that the Secretary of State thinks that he knows more about the geology of the UK than the geologist who founded Cuadrilla, who said quite clearly that the UK is unsuited to widespread fracking.

My question comes back to the issue of consent. The Prime Minister said that fracking will go ahead only in places where there is support from the local community. That begs the question why on earth the Secretary of State is even pursuing this idea, as there is no support from local communities, but how is he going to measure that, particularly given that this terrible and deeply unpopular decision coincides with the Government's draconian new anti-protest laws?

Mr Rees-Mogg: In relation to Cuadrilla, the gentleman in question I believe left the company 10 years ago, so he is somewhat out of date in terms of the company that he purports to represent. The current management of Cuadrilla are in favour of this.

I think local support is important, and one of the things that companies that want to drill for shale gas will have to do is come up with packages that are attractive to local communities. That will ensure that people get some financial reward from shale gas being extracted near them.

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): I would like to press my right hon. Friend further on how community support will be defined and measured, because I have many concerned constituents who want to know that

they will have a genuine route to rejecting fracking applications that do not have local support, and I am still not clear what that would be.

Mr Rees-Mogg: There are parts of the country, particularly in relation to nuclear, where there is local consent and very enthusiastic support for the development of additional energy sites, so it is perfectly possible to measure and see local support.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The homes of people living near the proposed fracking site at Altcar Moss shook as a result of the tests that the Secretary of State referred to earlier. He said that shale gas was safe, but his Government paid compensation to residents living near fracking sites in Lancashire. The Government's own report says that little progress has been made in reducing and predicting the risks. When is he finally going to admit that fracking is a non-starter in this country?

Mr Rees-Mogg: In relation to seismic activity, there is no particular dissimilarity to that from mining, and mining is not subject to seismic limits.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Despite what the Secretary of State said, is it not the case that forecasting the occurrence of seismic events as a result of fracking remains a challenge to the experts? Is it not therefore creating a risk of an unknown quantity to pursue shale gas exploration at the present time? Is he aware that the safety of the public is not a currency in which some of us choose to speculate?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Unusually, I disagree with my right hon. Friend. It is all a matter of proportionality. As I pointed out, the movement on ground level from construction is about double that we have had from any instance with shale gas. We know what has happened before. There are not limits on mining. There are not limits on ordinary oil extraction. It is only shale gas that has limits, and there is no evidence that shale gas is worse than any of those other activities. So, I think, on a balance of risks, my right hon. Friend is not coming to the right conclusion.

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): It is a bit rich of the self-styled Minister for the 19th century to think that the CEO of Cuadrilla is out of date. The Secretary of State's manifesto said:

"We will not support fracking unless the science shows categorically that it can be done safely."

The science has not proved categorically that it can be done safely, so he is reneging on his solemn promise, which all Conservative Members stood on, to the British people in 2019. This is not a legitimate thing for this Government to do, is it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I must reiterate that the former chief executive of Cuadrilla resigned 10 years ago. He does not represent the company and that is important. The House would be put under a misapprehension if it were to think that he is currently involved. As regards the last manifesto, I happily stood on the last manifesto because I had read the 2012 report that went through most of the myths against shale gas and showed that they were wrong and that the extraction of shale gas is safe.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware of the strong objections many of my constituents have to fracking. The Prime Minister has been quite clear in saying that it will take place only if there is strong local support. However, that poses many questions. What is the local community and how do we define it? How do we ascertain whether it can command local support? What incentives, if any, will be provided to local communities that have fracking imposed upon them? My constituents are understandably anxious about fracking returning to the Fylde coast. When will they receive an answer to some of those questions?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend asks a very important question. It is important for the national interest that we have secure supplies of gas—that is important across the House to all constituents—but this will affect some residents much, much more than others. Therefore, it is only right that they are compensated and receive some financial benefit for the inconvenience. The majority of the inconvenience comes not from the extraction of shale gas, but from the building of the shale gas well in the first place and the associated lorry movements. It is important that people benefit and are rewarded for doing something that is in the national interest.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): What studies has the Secretary of State undertaken of the effect on aquifers where fracking has taken place, which are deeply polluted and run well beyond the local communities he is seeking support from to reintroduce fracking to this country? Surely, he must understand that the dangers will be here for decades to come—long after whatever small amounts of gas have been extracted? It is future generations who will suffer because of this policy.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is no surprise that I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. I refer him to the 2012 report, which went through that and through what had happened in the United States for comparison purposes. First, it found the evidence on the pollution of aquifers was not actually any good: most of the stories were invented or were scare stories. In addition, the UK has a very good regulatory regime. The combination of ignoring the scare stories and decent regulation means that one can be confident that aquifers will not be damaged.

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I welcome this announcement; it is one of the few from Front Benchers that will actually make us a lot richer, if we pursue it. It will also make us more resilient in a very difficult world. The key seems to be what advantage the communities that may be affected can get through financial support. Has the Secretary of State had any discussions with the Treasury? It seems to me that if local people give their consent, that is in the national interest.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful: my hon. Friend makes exactly the right point, both ways around. This is in the national interest and will make the country richer, but it is absolutely right that those affected should be rewarded. To my mind, that means direct financial reward, not a theoretical one. The last time that we discussed fracking, the idea was that communities would be delighted if they got £10 for the village hall. I do not think that is the right way to do it. This needs to be direct, to the individuals who are affected. I have

had preliminary discussions with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, but I do not have a formal thing to announce.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): Residents in the northern part of my constituency are rightly concerned about the impact of tremors on their often older buildings, and they are worried about the impact of the extraction of coal bed methane through fracking on their rural way of life. Will the Secretary of State explain in detail—he has not so far—exactly the mechanism through which communities will be able to refuse consent for coal bed extraction and shale gas fracking? Compensation is not consent.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Compensation and consent become two sides of the same coin. People will be able to negotiate the level of compensation and it will be a matter for the companies to try and ensure widespread consent by offering a compensation package that is attractive. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members howl and wail about this because, actually, we are trying to use market forces. It is amazing—a Conservative Government using market forces!

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should have been fracking our shale gas two years ago? But we are where we are, and the best available time to start is immediately.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend says only two years ago—why such a short timeframe?

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): The Government's figures show that only 17% of the public support fracking. In Barnsley, 3,000 people signed a petition against it. There is no local consent in the area I represent. Given that the last round of fracking licences was for Yorkshire, how will the Secretary of State ensure that northern communities are not disproportionately affected by this outdated and dangerous way to create energy?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is definitely not outdated; it is a very effective, modern way of extracting energy. I would say to people: do they want cheaper and more secure energy or not? If the answer is yes, fracking is going to be part of the answer.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): The Secretary of State has repeatedly referenced a 2012 report that identified considerable potential reserves. How significant might those be in achieving energy security?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend; that is an important and fundamental question. The answer is that we need to do the test drilling first to see whether the reserves can be achieved in the way that the 2012 report hoped, but I cannot give a firm commitment on that, because we have not done enough test drilling yet.

Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): To come back to the 2019 Tory party manifesto, which each Government Member stood on, it states on page 55 that a moratorium on fracking would be lifted only if “the science shows...it can be done safely.”

A change in Tory party leadership is not a change in scientific evidence. Will the Secretary of State enlighten the House as to why the Government think they are above both logic and science?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Because all the evidence says that it can be done safely, as it is in the United States, and as the 2012 report that I have referred to many times indicated.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I have been quite shocked by the luddites on the Opposition Front Bench, who have been quite open in saying that they will weaponise the issue in a general election. For those who fear the unknown, may I tell my right hon. Friend that the 0.5 limit on the Richter scale is nothing compared with the 1.5 limit on the Richter scale that Lichfield is currently enduring from pile-driving for HS2? If we can live with that—though we do not really like living with it, Mr Speaker—we can certainly enjoy the benefits from fracking.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend makes an absolutely right and wise point: Opposition Members' motto for the next election is, "Let's be cold and poor." That is really the prospectus that they are putting before the British people. As regards seismic activity, there are millions of seismic events of a magnitude of 2.5 or lower in the world every year. We should not assume that every seismic event is the San Francisco earthquake.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Lifting the cap on bankers' bonuses while making it harder for working people to access benefits, and now lifting safety limits on seismic events, or earthquakes to you and me, while protecting and subsidising oil companies' excessive profits and accelerating climate change—does not this decision really show whose side this Tory Government are on?

Mr Rees-Mogg: His Majesty's Government are on the side of people who need energy, businesses that need energy and an economy that needs to grow. The Labour party is in favour of no growth, coldness and high prices.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): The Costa Coffee that I visited on Tuesday morning rivalled the House of Commons Chamber this morning for robustness of debate and strength of opinions expressed. I sought to reassure constituents that they would have the opportunity to have their say because local consent was required. I have been listening carefully to the Secretary of State this morning, but I have yet to hear any explanation of how local consent will be determined; indeed, any reference to local consent has been absent. Let me try once more: will my constituents be asked whether they want fracking, or not?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I have said, and as the Prime Minister has said, we will be looking to have the support of local communities. That is important. There will be a responsibility on companies, when they bring forward proposals, to work out how they can get that local consent. It seems to me pretty clear that that will involve giving money to people to encourage them, because they will want to have the benefit locally while they are doing something that helps the country nationally.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): In Wales, we know the cost of dangerous fossil fuel extraction so that others can profit remotely. It is particularly acute today on the anniversary of the Gresford mining disaster, in which 266 men and boys were killed, 200 women were widowed and 800 children were left fatherless. The coal mine was owned by the Westminster and United Collieries Group, which subsequently destroyed the safety records. The men killed remain 2,000 feet down—only 11 bodies were recovered—but Gresford was mooted as a fracking site. Will the Secretary of State confirm that he understands that powers on fracking remain with our Senedd, and that he has no intention of trying to return those powers to Westminster?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am not seeking to upset the devolution settlement.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): Even before Putin's illegal war in Ukraine, fracking had advantages because of the benefits for jobs, for investment, for tax revenues and for the positivity of the balance of payments, which I would rather be accruing here in the UK instead of our sending tens of billions to Qatar and other places. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the carbon dioxide savings from domestic energy supply? It has been calculated that 5 million tonnes of CO₂ are emitted just from the cooling, declassification and transport of liquefied natural gas. That has to be a moral outrage.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and he takes his argument through logically, unlike many Opposition Members. If we wish to reduce carbon emissions, we are better off using gas as a transition fuel that comes from our own resources, rather than importing it. That must be true: we have those resources, we need the transition fuel, and therefore we should try to extract it domestically.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): Today's panicking, Trumpian announcement has been brought about by the failure of successive Tory Governments who squandered the opportunity that coal, oil and gas—our indigenous resources—offered to transform our economy into a carbon-free economy. Will the Secretary of State confirm that on his target list for fracking are areas in Yorkshire and elsewhere in the north which are often described as "red wall", and may I bring to his attention the fact that there is no local consent in those areas for what he is proposing this morning?

Mr Rees-Mogg: It will be important for the companies that wish to extract gas to ensure that there is local support, and to come up with packages that ensure that it is forthcoming. It is important for local communities to welcome the extraction of shale gas, and I think it very likely that they will.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): When we are faced with a Russian leader who uses gas supplies as a tool of warfare, it is entirely prudent to examine again the viability of all our domestic energy resources, but may I encourage my right hon. Friend not to lose sight of some of the other big, exciting potential opportunities that are opening up—for example, floating offshore wind power in the Celtic sea? Will he meet me,

[Stephen Crabb]

and other colleagues with an interest in the Celtic sea, to discuss what further steps he and his Department can take to further those projects?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I should be absolutely delighted to meet my right hon. Friend to discuss that. It is something that the Government are looking at. We are very enthusiastic about examining all possible sources, and I think that floating offshore wind is potentially a very good one. We want to establish whether we can expedite offshore wind projects so that they happen faster and we have supplies coming in. We need to be considering—and we are considering and discussing with other countries—how we can expedite carbon capture and storage and move towards hydrogen. The long-term issues are ones that we are focusing on and dealing with, but we have many years of needing gas, which is why I welcome my right hon. Friend's support for this announcement.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): It is this Government who have made onshore wind less economical, it is this Government who have made solar power and panels less economical, it is this Government who blocked wave and tidal power in the Swansea bay, and it is this Government who have failed to invest; and now they are trying to cover it up with a fracking giveaway for which there will never be any local consent. Will the Secretary of State—and he has been asked this numerous times—confirm that people in local areas will have a say through a local referendum, and that the result will be binding?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This Government have only been in office for about a fortnight. I know that they have been busy and have not quite managed to do everything that the hon. Gentleman suggests. As regards local consent, I refer him to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): I have listened carefully to the Secretary of State, and I have to say that the local consent plans do not seem to wash. It seems to come back to communities' being bought off rather than having a vote. Can the Secretary of State confirm once and for all that residents across Bolsover who are concerned about fracking will be given a vote to object to these schemes locally?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I think I have made it very clear that the companies will have a deep responsibility to develop packages that make the extraction of shale gas attractive to local communities. It is very important for them to succeed in that.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The people of Ellesmere Port have already signalled their opposition to fracking. A planning application was submitted a number of years ago, the local authority rejected it, there was an appeal, many residents gave evidence against the application and after three years it was finally decided that it would not be accepted. Chester zoo, a big employer in my constituency, said today that it was opposed to fracking, and many of my constituents are repeating their objections. There is no local consent in Ellesmere Port and Neston, so will the

Secretary of State send the fracking companies the message that there is no point in their coming to ask, because they will not get our agreement?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Ask, and it shall be given; seek, and ye shall find. It is absolutely important that we try to get local consent, and that will require the drilling companies to be innovative in the packages that they come up with. We should not be ashamed of paying people who are going to be the ones who do not get the immediate benefit of the gas but have the disruption: that is a perfectly logical thing to do.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): May I ask once again how the Secretary of State will measure local consent, because I have absolutely no confidence in Labour-run Kirklees listening to local wishes? It does not even distribute the section 106 payments from planning applications to local communities fairly. How would we ensure that those impacted by any fracking wells get any benefit?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. It is fundamentally important that the cash benefits go not to some faceless bureaucracy but to the individuals affected. In the United States, that has made the extraction of shale gas enormously popular, because people quite like improving their standard of living, and I think that the same is true in this country.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State explain exactly how the UK Government deciding to get rid of the fracking ban aligns with their COP26 commitments?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Using our domestic resources, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) mentioned earlier, reduces our carbon emissions—it is really straightforward.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Fracking is an outdated, dangerous and expensive way to produce energy, and it will not provide the clean, secure energy that our country needs. In my constituency, an exploratory fracking site at Barton Moss needed a police operation, which cost Greater Manchester police £1.7 million in 2014 and involved 150 police officers across five months. Fracking did not have community support, and Greater Manchester police had to pay the heavy price of policing the demonstrations against it. Why are the Government forcing it back on the community in my constituency?

Mr Rees-Mogg: There is a war in Ukraine. We need security of supply.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I wonder if the Secretary of State could advise the House: what discussions will take place between his Department and the Scotland Office on enabling fracking in Scotland?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I regularly have conversations with the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): This cannot be justified on environmental or economic grounds. The investment allowance will give gas producers 91p in

every pound invested in new frack pads. Warwick Business School calculates that fracking could produce 330 billion cubic metres at a maximum—about 100 billion therms. At today's spot price, from about 20 minutes ago, that would be £289 billion. Given that the taxpayers are covering nine tenths of the investment, why should they not get nine tenths of the profit?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is making the argument for fracking. If there is that amount that we can get out, we should get it out as quickly as possible, and then we should ensure that it is distributed properly so that the people who are affected benefit, so that the companies that have invested benefit, and, yes, so that the taxpayer benefits. The oil and gas we get out of the North sea has been an enormous benefit to the taxpayer and has helped us have energy security. It is a beneficial thing to do. As regards the economics, it is straightforward: private companies will not invest if it is not a good deal. That is the basis of economics, and it is the right basis of economics.

Simon Lightwood (Wakefield) (Lab/Co-op): I do not know about you, Mr Speaker, but I am sensing some tremors of dissent on the Conservative Benches. Fracking is expensive and dangerous, but it is also a disaster for our climate. Does the Secretary of State recognise that, if every country matched his plans to extract every ounce of gas, the planet would warm by 3°, spelling climate disaster? Does he not understand that this is a plan born of climate denial and economic illiteracy?

Mr Rees-Mogg: This is an alternative replacement source for gas that we are going to use anyway. It is not increasing our demand for gas, and the hon. Gentleman misses the ABC of economics.

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): Yesterday, the Business Secretary confirmed that his Department will review the level of seismic activity that is permitted to take place at new fracking installations. Meanwhile, the Government's energy security strategy rules out lifting the draconian planning restrictions that were imposed on onshore wind by the Cameron Government. Onshore wind is one of the cheapest, most popular and fastest to roll out forms of energy production available. Meanwhile, fracking, as the Chancellor himself has said, is hugely costly, will do little to reduce domestic energy costs, and risks inflicting immense damage on local communities and our precious natural environment. Will the Secretary of State concede that the Government have got their priorities wrong?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The thing we are lacking at the moment, most acutely, is affordable gas. Gas is the fuel that provides electricity at the margins, so when the wind is not blowing and demand is high, it is gas that provides the marginal unit of electricity. Gas is therefore fundamentally important to our energy security.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The present Chancellor said only a few months ago that "No amount of shale gas" extracted across rural England would lower energy prices, and indeed, that private companies would not sell their shale gas to UK customers at a cost lower than the market price. Ruining our countryside—in Sussex, East Surrey and around Bath—is not the answer. Why

in his first week in office has the Secretary of the State ended the moratorium on fracking but not lifted the de facto moratorium on onshore wind?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We need to get as much energy as possible. Fracking does not ruin the countryside; fracking sites are actually surprisingly small for what they do. We have been expanding offshore wind dramatically—that has been a very big component—and we are continuing with increasing renewables, but we still need the base supply that can be brought on when there is a surge in demand, and that is dependent on gas.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): The public will see this decision as a deceit. There is no economic price advantage to it, as we have heard, while it is damaging to the environment. The claim that the public will have some say in consenting to the proposals will ring hollow in my community, where the district council opposed a 5G mast and that was overridden. Why does the Secretary of State think that there is any advantage to this policy, when we cannot even put in onshore wind in Warwickshire? I believe it is the only county in this country where there is no onshore wind.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The answer is energy security and price.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): The Secretary of State's constituency of North East Somerset borders mine; it would be helpful if he could confirm that we are not expecting any fracking or seismic events in the local community. Small and medium-sized businesses in Bristol South were innovative in green and future energy, but they had the legs cut from under them in 2015 when his Government "cut the green crap". What assurance can he give businesses in Bristol South on future energy development?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The subsidies that are paid, when they are paid, have to be reasonable and proportionate and we are finding that, with some of the old contracts that we have based on the gas price for renewable energy, it has led to very high prices. North East Somerset was the site of the old Somerset coalfields, which were a very successful part of the economy historically. I think everyone in this country will have to do their bit to help with energy security.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I wonder whether the Secretary of State would placate the luddites and publish the up-to-date evidence that enabled the Government to U-turn on both their manifesto commitment and the previous Prime Minister's policy.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I believe that this decision is completely consistent with the manifesto commitment on the safety of shale gas. The reason it has come to the fore now is the very high price increase in gas and the issue of energy security caused by Putin's invasion of Russia. That has fundamentally changed, and so on the balance of arguments and practicalities, with a safe and well-proven technology, it is right now to extract shale gas as far as we can do so.

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): As the 2022 Government security strategy acknowledges, onshore wind is one of the cheapest and easiest renewables to bring on stream. That same strategy is wishy-washy and

[*Dame Nia Griffith*]

lacks any drive for fast-tracking new wind generation. Will the Secretary of State now recognise the urgency of the current situation, revise the strategy, give onshore wind in England the boost that it needs, to complement the investment in wind that Welsh Labour has continued to promote in Wales, and therefore reduce our reliance on electricity produced from gas, which is currently at some 47% of the total?

Mr Rees-Mogg: What we do with renewables is still going to leave us dependent, when the wind is not blowing and when there is a surge in demand, on gas. That is an important part of the strategy; we are building up our wind and nuclear supplies, and we have plans for more nuclear to come on, but for the transition we still need gas, which is what this announcement is about.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Is the truth not more fundamental: when a party stands on a manifesto promise, regardless of what it is, it should stick by that? Can the right hon. Gentleman rule out today any link between the proposal that has been announced and any donations made during the leadership election?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Balderdash.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): Fracking takes huge amounts of water. We have just seen record levels of drought across the entire country, with drier summers predicted for the future. In periods of drought, will Tory Ministers be prioritising precious water supplies to people in their homes or to big fracking companies?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The water for fracking is primarily recycled.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The Secretary of State talks about fracking being in the national interest, but the truth is that fracking is in the corporate interest, which is why this Government are pursuing it. This is going to do nothing to lower people's energy bills. Renewables are nine times cheaper than gas. At the time when we should be moving away from and ending our reliance on gas, is this push not really about serving the interests of those energy giants, many of which have close links to his party? Is it not about time the Government acted in the interests of the people in Yorkshire and across this country?

Mr Rees-Mogg: What is the hon. Gentleman going to say to his constituents when there is no gas going into their boilers to heat their hot water and their homes? This ridiculous hostility to gas as a transition fuel is absurd.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Onshore wind power was, in effect, stopped by the Secretary of State's Government, yet it is proven in the UK, cheap and ready to go now, and it provides zero-carbon power—it does everything that fracking does not. So will the threshold for community support for fracking be as tough as that for onshore wind development, where one objector can stop it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Regardless of the benefits of renewables, we still need gas, which is what today's statement is about.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State has admitted the environmental impact of fracking—the drilling platforms, the wells and the lorry movements—which are significant and substantial. The planning system is best placed to deal with those, so in 2018 the Select Committee on Housing, Communities and Local Government produced our “Planning guidance on fracking” report. We concluded that fracking decisions were best made by elected local planning authorities. We do not know what the Government's view is, as four years after that report we still have not had a response from Ministers to our recommendations. Will he assure us that by the end of October, when we come back, the Government will have responded, four years late, to that report?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House is present, and I think that was very much a business question. I would say that I will make sure it is passed on to her, but I hope that she will feel that it has been passed on in any case.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I have been listening to Members on both sides of the House gradually teasing out what the Secretary of State really meant when he said that “compensation and consent” are “two sides of the same coin.”

Why does he not just come clean and tell it as it is: the Government intend to change the payment of bribes for planning consent from a criminal offence to the official policy of His Majesty's Government?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is a wise and good man, but that point is completely fatuous. Paying people for inconvenience is a perfectly reasonable and commercial thing to do.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The truth is that this will not provide any immediate relief for consumers. When in Wales we have taken measures to try to support our energy security, it was the UK Government who pulled the rug out from under tidal power and tidal lagoons, and who failed to make progress on Wylfa Newydd. Will the right hon. Gentleman be absolutely clear on this? The Welsh Government have issued a moratorium on fracking—this is very clear, with 1,900 submissions to consultation. Will he absolutely rule out attempting to undermine that position and that consent—that view from the Welsh Government?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As I have said before, there is no plan to change the devolved situation, and that is not a matter for my Department anyway, so I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. As regards tidal power, the costings simply were not economic, and that has been a problem with tidal proposals.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Secretary of State has talked a lot about common sense and using our natural resources, so will he explain why the Government are not dropping the moratorium on onshore wind?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We have had an enormous amount of offshore wind come on, and it is a very important part of renewables. It has been a very effective way of

getting very large quantities of power, and that has been the major concentration of Government policy in recent years.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Who, specifically, will be responsible for measuring and determining local consent for fracking?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The matter will be dealt with in a governmental way, as is normally done when we seek to work out what the consents are. There are perfectly proper processes for establishing the views of local communities.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Fracking is the most unpopular and least effective way of producing energy, and it risks substantial geological impacts. Yet there is no evidence that it will reduce the price of gas, according to the Government's own advisers. Onshore wind, solar and hydro, including pumped storage—new cutting-edge technologies—are all much cheaper, much safer and more popular. Why does the Secretary of State dislike these technologies so much, and whose interests are being furthered by fracking?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that I dislike those technologies. I actually think that pumped hydro is a particularly interesting technology, because it can be used with wind power to act, effectively, as a battery. So there is support for these technologies. In this urgent question we are discussing shale gas, but that does not mean that my Department is not looking at all forms of energy. We need a wide range of supply, we need security of supply and we need supply that is cheap, or as cheap as we can get it.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): Residents across the south of England are deeply concerned about the risks of fracking and oil drilling. Why is the Secretary of State not listening to those concerns, or to the concerns of the Government's former chief scientific adviser and the British Geological Survey?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Quite properly, the concerns of this House are being represented by Members of Parliament, so they are being listened to by His Majesty's Government.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): It appears that the only person who believes that fracking will lower our gas prices is the Secretary of State. That view is certainly not backed up by anyone in industry, and there is no question over the environmentally damaging nature of fracking. However, one thing that he is perhaps not aware of is the strength of opposition to fracking in communities such as mine in Lancashire, where sites at Preston New Road and Roseacre have seen huge police presences just to manage the protesting. There is no public support for fracking, so will he make it very clear whether my constituents will be given a decision on whether fracking happens in Lancashire?

Mr Rees-Mogg: A number of people have said that fracking is environmentally unfriendly, but it is more friendly than importing liquefied natural gas from abroad—it has a lower carbon footprint, and that is fundamentally important. I am well aware that there have been objections to fracking, but I would also note

that there have been stories, widely reported, that some of the opposition to fracking has been funded by Mr Putin's regime.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): Does the Secretary of State recognise that he has now put his Government in the absurd position of wanting to impose fracking on communities that do not want it, while not allowing onshore wind turbines in communities that do want them? Onshore wind turbines are cheap and quick to erect, and normally bring about cheaper energy bills for local communities. Will the Secretary of State finally—without reference to offshore wind and everything else he is doing—please answer the question directly: will he lift the ban on onshore wind?

Mr Rees-Mogg: Community consent is important, and the hon. Lady is right to point that out.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Only a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister quoted the Conservative manifesto when she said that she was going to reverse the rise in national insurance because the party had pledged not to increase it—apparently that was a solemn pledge. The manifesto also said that there would be no fracking where there was no local consent, but apparently that was not a pledge. Can the Secretary of State tell us whether local communities will be consulted before testing takes place, and who will pay the bribes? Will it be the taxpayer or, as he says, the market forces?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The socialists do not like people being paid for things. It seems perfectly reasonable to pay people and, if we inconvenience them, to compensate them, and that will be part of the overall package if shale gas can be extracted.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Are the Government aware that fracking not only breaks a promise made to the public in the Conservative party's 2019 manifesto, but will not cut bills? It is a grossly unpopular method, and a method that will warm our planet. Indeed, it is wrapped up in climate denial.

Mr Rees-Mogg: It is actually none of those things.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I have been listening to the Secretary of State's plea for good common sense. I have always believed that good public policy is made from good research and evidence of what works where. He has not said anything—nor has anyone on the Opposition Front Bench—about energy from waste. Energy from waste works successfully up and down our country—in Sheffield, Leeds, Southampton and London—and it not only produces good energy, but heats many, many homes in the community at low cost. When will the Government look at that and stop diverting attention to fracking?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his important point. We do actually export waste, I think, to Denmark for the Danes to turn it into energy. It seems to me that it might be better to do it domestically. He has made a very helpful suggestion. I have already talked about it in the fortnight that I have been in office. If he wants to make further representations to me on it, I would be very open to hearing them.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Can the Secretary of State reassure me and my constituents in North Ayrshire and Arran that the pernicious and insidious United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, or any other sinister mechanism, will not under any circumstances be used to impose fracking in Scotland, against the expressed wishes of the people of Scotland and Scotland's democratically elected Government?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The United Kingdom Internal Market Act is like the Koh-i-Noor diamond; it is one of the jewels of our constitutional settlement.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): My constituents will be extremely alarmed to hear the Minister's remarks about the exploitation of dangerous fossil fuels. They have made it abundantly clear to me that they care about the environment, they care about the next generation, and they take climate change seriously, so I ask him, on behalf of my constituents: will he think again and ban fracking?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady refers to dangerous fossil fuels that people depend on for heating their water and their homes every day, that businesses depend on for being in business, and that people put in their cars to get around the countryside. We need to ensure that we have a sensible transition. Gas is fundamental to that. Simply wishing the world to be a different world will not be a successful policy.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Yorkshire is currently under a hosepipe ban because we simply do not have the infrastructure in place to provide resilience in our water supply. At the same time, when fracking uses an exhaustive amount of water, this proposal does not make sense. Will the Secretary of State publish an impact assessment on our water infrastructure to ensure that there is resilience in the system before he even considers fracking?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Lady raises a fair point. It does depend on the water company. In my area, Wessex Water has done a phenomenal job of ensuring that it did not need hosepipe bans, or even get close to hosepipe bans, because it runs its system effectively. She is right to call on the water companies to run their systems effectively, because it is hard to believe that the United Kingdom is actually short of water.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Secretary of State is well aware of the strength of feeling against fracking in those communities that are likely to have the applications made by the companies. He is also aware of how the planning system works. He talks about having the common consent of the community. If the local authority listens to the community and refuses planning permission, the fracking companies have the option to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. It is not within the remit of the planning inspectors to consider common consent as a material planning consideration. Will he change the planning rules to ensure that that is not the case?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman will know that decisions on planning, when reviewed by the Planning Inspectorate, are made by a Secretary of State acting in a quasi-judicial capacity.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): If the Prime Minister believes that fracking is safe and should go ahead with the permission of local residents, may I ask by which date we can expect to see fracking take place in the sprawling country retreat of Chequers?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am not sure that, geologically speaking, Chequers is a suitable place for shale gas. The question from the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) was more apposite, because it may be more likely in my part of the world than in that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): A few minutes ago, the Secretary of State mentioned hydrogen, which of course is the perfect answer, because when we burn it we get water. It is totally green and totally clean. There are well-developed plans for the production and storage of hydrogen based on the Cromarty Firth. May I cordially invite either the Secretary of State or one of his ministerial team to come north to my constituency to see what we are going to do?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. I think hydrogen is ultimately the silver bullet. We create it from renewable sources, because we have the wind power when people are not drawing on the electricity system; we use it as an effective battery and it can then, with some adjustments, be piped through to people's houses to heat them during the winter. There are real opportunities with hydrogen—[*Interruption.*] We get some heckling from those on the socialist Front Bench, but I point out that everyone accepts that gas is a transition fuel. To get to where the hon. Gentleman wisely wishes us to go, we need more natural gas as the transition fuel, but he is right. I do not know that I can promise a visit in the short term, but in principle I would love to come, and my Ministers are like greyhounds in the slips waiting to get up to his constituency.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (Ind): People in Glasgow North do not want to see fracking anywhere on these islands, so ending what was in effect a UK-wide moratorium on fracking does not exactly speak to strengthening the Union. My constituents would like to know whether the Business Secretary actually believes that we face an anthropogenic climate emergency and, if so, how on earth a rush to fracking-sourced fossil fuels helps to meet the climate and emission reduction targets we have committed to.

Mr Rees-Mogg: As my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) pointed out, using our own resources emits less carbon than importing gas. Therefore, if the hon. Gentleman actually believes what he has just said, he should be supporting this policy.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): This shale gas extraction question has shone a spotlight on the energy crisis and the war that Putin is carrying out against Ukraine. Others have referred to this, but for those who live close by, whose houses will be devalued and whose lifestyle will be impacted, the Secretary of State has referred to compensation but has not quantified it. Will the compensation be a one-off payment for the value of

their house? Will it be no energy costs? Will it be no rates? What does he understand that compensation will be?

Mr Rees-Mogg: As always, the hon. Gentleman waits patiently to ask a fundamentally important question. I am very grateful to him for that and for his assiduous attendance in the House. How the compensation packages will be worked out will be really important in gaining communities' consent. There will be different approaches that work in different areas and different settings, but obtaining the consent must be the right approach. The compensation packages are something that must be developed, and his views on how they could best be developed would be extremely welcome.

Business of the House

12.4 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): Madam Deputy Speaker, before I give the business, I hope you will permit me to place on the record my admiration and thanks for all those who enabled the mourning of Her late Majesty to be so exquisite, including the general public. It was done so well and with much love. We did her proud.

Subject to the House's agreement of the motion on today's order paper, the business for Friday 23 September will be:

FRIDAY 23 SEPTEMBER—The Chancellor of the Exchequer will make a statement on the Government's plans for growth. Subject to the House's agreement, the House will then rise for the conference recess and return on Tuesday 11 October.

The business for the week commencing 10 October will include:

TUESDAY 11 OCTOBER—Consideration of an allocation of time motion followed by all stages of the Health and Social Care Levy (Repeal) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 12 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Bill [*Lords*], followed by a motion relating to the Procedure Committee's recommendations on proxy voting.

THURSDAY 13 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill.

FRIDAY 14 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 17 October will include:

MONDAY 17 OCTOBER—Remaining Stages of the Public Order Bill.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Leader of the House for giving the forthcoming business. I join her in commending the House, Members' staff and Members across the House for working so hard, both on the lying-in-state and on the tributes to the late Queen. I agree that we did Her late Majesty proud. It was an honour to close the tributes with the right hon. Lady.

May I also commend the right hon. Lady for taking up her role as Lord President of the Council so impeccably and so swiftly? She became the first woman to proclaim a new monarch, and she did so with great poise.

I welcomed the Leader of the House's response to my question two weeks ago about the appointment of a new Government ethics adviser. She said then that the Prime Minister would get around to it "swiftly"—well, at least she is planning to appoint one. The Government have been missing an ethics adviser for months now, so where is the urgency? Can the Leader of the House tell us exactly where the appointment ranks on the Prime Minister's to-do list?

An ethics adviser could have offered guidance to the Cabinet Office, which seems to think it appropriate to assist the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) by commissioning legal advice

[Thangam Debbonaire]

on his behalf. Does the Leader of the House think that what looks like interference in the Privileges Committee inquiry was appropriate? Does she expect the right hon. Gentleman to repay any money that was spent by taxpayers?

On legislation, I do not see in the business statement any listing for legislation on the energy bills crisis, and there does not yet seem to be a Bill. Will there be legislation, when will we see it, and when will we debate and vote on it?

On legislation that the Government seem to be planning to bin in their bonfire of Bills, the Prime Minister indicated that the Bill of Rights Bill and the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill will be scrapped, and apparently the Business Secretary has told officials to stop work on the Energy Bill. Can the Leader of the House clarify that by confirming whether the Government plan to drop those Bills?

While we are on broken manifesto promises, we are now told that there is no chance of a trade deal with the US any time soon, despite the fact that it was a No. 1 priority in 2019, that it was then given a deadline of mid-2021, and that there was, apparently, significant progress last summer. I wonder who was the Trade Secretary then, and who was the Foreign Secretary who seems to have messed this up so badly.

I also wish to ask about the swerving of scrutiny. The Business Secretary yesterday announced the fuel bill relief scheme before coming to the House—as previous Prime Ministers and Ministers did—which Mr Speaker had specifically asked the new Prime Minister not to do. Instead of voluntarily providing a ministerial statement, the Business Secretary had to be dragged to Parliament to face questions. Could the Leader of the House have a word with him, please?

The Leader of the House also announced that the Chancellor will make a statement tomorrow—a so-called “mini Budget”—yet it looks as though Members will have only a few hours to scrutinise it, and there are no accompanying briefings from the Office for Budget Responsibility. Just changing the name does not change what the statement is or the need for those economic briefings. What are the Government seeking to hide? Can the Leader of the House tell us why we are getting only half a day, and will any economic forecasts be made tomorrow?

At the end of the day, politics is about choices. This Prime Minister is choosing lifting the cap on investment bankers’ bonuses over putting money back into working people’s pockets. By lifting the ban on fracking, she is choosing to back the fossil fuel lobby over investing in renewable energy. She is choosing to make the British people pay for her energy policy with debt piling up into the future. Labour’s plan to make sure people do not have to pay a penny more this winter would have been funded by a windfall tax on oil and gas companies’ windfall profits. When it comes to choices, the Tories are choosing to side with bankers and oil and gas giants, while Labour is choosing to side with everybody else.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt): I start by thanking the hon. Lady for her kind remarks. It was a privilege to preside over the Accession Council.

The Government have set out clearly their immediate priorities. The Prime Minister will get to the matter of an ethics adviser, but her priorities, as she has stated, have been ensuring that people in this country can see a doctor and a dentist. Members will not have to wait very long to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Health on that matter. Our priority is also about getting growth back into our economy and building a modern economy through supply-side reform—again, the House will not have long to wait to hear about that plan directly from the Chancellor and to question him on the legislative programme that will follow—and dealing with the cost of living issues, which are of major concern to households and businesses. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy gave us his time this morning to talk through his proposals.

Those are the Government’s priorities, and we are acting on them. It was right that we observed a period of mourning for Her late Majesty. This week is the first opportunity we have had to bring these measures forward and present them to the House, and we are doing so. Those are the priorities of the Prime Minister and her Government.

The shadow Leader of the House raised the question of a trade deal with the United States. There is good news and there is bad news. We wanted a tariff arrangement faster than the US was prepared to move, but we will continue to press it on that. The Opposition can help us in that by outlining to their friends in the Democratic party why this is a good idea for both the UK and the US. We have not been idle in the meantime. She will know that we have been pursuing state-level arrangements on removing non-tariff barriers to trade. We have signed two, with a further 25 states interested, and the first eight that we sign will be equivalent to 20% of the US economy. That is the bad news. The good news is that at long last the Labour party supports a trade deal with the United States, and I am delighted to hear that.

Regarding the handling of business, it is incredibly important that the House hears things first. We want to ensure that the House has the time it needs both to question Ministers in statements and to scrutinise legislation. A wise man once said:

“It is a fundamental constitutional right that this House should be told things first”—[*Official Report*, 28 October 2021; Vol. 702, c. 407.]

That was the former Leader of the House, who is now the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and I will hold him to it.

We have some major challenges facing this country because of the war in Ukraine and an incredibly volatile economy. I do hope we can take the mood of unity and co-operation that has been the flavour of this House in recent days and apply it to these problems together, for the benefit of all the people we serve.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Government allow us an early debate on their growth strategy, which will be most welcome, so that Parliament can have an opportunity to put forward good ideas on the obstacles and barriers to better-paid jobs and more investment that still exist under our current panoply of laws?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising these issues. The Chancellor will be making a statement tomorrow, but my right hon. Friend knows

how to apply for a debate on all these issues. It is important that we consult and listen to businesses and our constituents. Governments' best ideas come from people who are doing those jobs and taking those risks, and who want to put growth back into our economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the SNP spokesperson, Deidre Brock.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for her statement. I, too, pay tribute, on behalf of my SNP colleagues and myself, to the staff of these Houses of Parliament for their exceptional work in preparing and carrying out the various ceremonies and duties required after the sad passing of Queen Elizabeth. They were outstanding.

I welcome very much the content of the statutory instruments that we will be debating this afternoon to tighten the sanctions against Putin and his supporters, particularly after his recent threats. I see recently, though, that US intelligence estimates that more than \$300 million dollars of Russian money has been ploughed into influencing politicians in more than 24 countries. It is suggested that that is just the tip of the iceberg, so can we have a debate in Government time about thwarting possible Russian influence on UK politics to reassure the public?

Is it not extraordinary that despite only sitting a handful of times since the end of July, and our constituents facing the biggest cost of living crisis in decades, Members are about to trot off for conference recess rather than debating these problems fully here and now. We can at least expect a short fiscal statement before then, elements of which have been trailed in the media—this Government displaying their customary almost casual disrespect for this place. We have seen some of the rabbits the Chancellor likely intends to pull out of his hat on Friday, but so far they look awfully like leftovers from the discredited trickle-down economics theory that is so beloved of the right wing, but that, as President Biden pointed out recently, has never worked.

I hear, too, that the Government are today lodging their Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill, or, as it was formerly known, the comically named Brexit freedoms Bill. I say comical, but the prospect of this House and the devolved Parliaments being bogged down again for many months in secondary legislation as the zealots on the Government Benches try to extinguish every trace of the EU from UK legislation—threatening protections for workers' rights and food standards, among so many other things—is far from funny. Can the Leader of the House indicate when that Bill will come to the House for debate?

Finally, it is no wonder that data from the latest British social attitudes survey, which is out today, shows that support in Scotland for the Union continues to drop like a stone, as more and more folk recognise that only independence offers them hope and a progressive future.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind remarks to all who contributed to the mourning of our late Queen. I know that the House authorities are considering how Members can express their gratitude towards staff for what they have done, perhaps using the intranet, so that all staff can read how we feel and how proud we are of what they have done.

Our Prime Minister has recommitted us at the UN General Assembly and sent a message to the world that our resolve towards Ukraine will not waver, and that we will continue to lead the charge on combating Russian aggression. That includes the financial measures that we have pioneered and on which we have led others. That will continue, and there will be time for Members to raise this in the general debate today. I reassure the hon. Lady that I, the Chief Whip and others have ensured that the time we have rightly taken to mourn Her late Majesty does not slow down our legislative programme. We are confident that whether it is on the cost of living, on sanctions or on any other matter, there will be no real-world delay to the introduction of those measures.

The hon. Lady asked specifically about the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill. We will bring that forward for First Reading on 11 October, and we will continue to push and speed up legislation, whether it is on growth or on the other measures that we are bringing to the Floor of the House.

I think all the four nations of our United Kingdom have shown over the last few weeks the strength that there is in unity. It has been the most tremendous event—a tremendous coming together and a tremendous welcoming of our new King, King Charles III. I am absolutely confident that public opinion and the strength of the United Kingdom will remain strong in all four nations of this United Kingdom.

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her new role and join her in the tributes that she paid to the staff and others in this place who made the lying in state such a special occasion. She was new to the job, and she acted with incredible dignity and grace throughout.

As Chair of the Procedure Committee, I extend to her a warm welcome to come in front of the Committee on many occasions during her tenure as Lord President of the Council. I thank her for announcing that the Procedure Committee's report on proxy voting will be subject to a vote when we return from the conference recess. Can she confirm that there will be time for a debate on that motion, and will we revert to the traditional way of voting on these matters whereby this is a free vote and a matter for the House to decide?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for her kind remarks. I confirm that we have undertaken to allow a debate on that on 12 October—that is our plan. Clearly, that is a matter for the House and should be subject to a free vote.

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

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement. Obviously, what has been happening in the last few weeks is completely beyond her control, but a significant amount of parliamentary time, and Back-Bench time, has been lost, so it is disappointing that there is no Back-Bench time in the first week back after the conference recess. I understand that the Government want to get on with their agenda, but I gently remind her that enshrined in the Standing Orders is a requirement for a certain

[*Ian Mearns*]

number of days of Back-Bench time. I also remind hon. Members on both sides of the House that we very much welcome applications for Westminster Hall debates, for which we can allocate time as the Backbench Business Committee.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that. I know that it is incredibly important to give good notice not just for allocating time but of when that will be so that his Committee can plan. I am pushing to be able to give him some information in very short order.

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her new responsibilities. I welcome, too, that at the last Prime Minister's questions, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister confirmed that the Government would be bringing back the Online Safety Bill. I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House two things. First, can she make sure that that happens urgently? The Bill has been carried over once already and there is a considerable need to get on with it. Secondly, without wishing to cut across the first point, can she make sure that if the "tweaks" to the Bill that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred to are more than cosmetic, hon. Members in this House can see them before the Bill goes to the other place?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for raising those two important points. I know that the new Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is looking with great urgency at the legislation she wants to bring forward. She will have heard his remarks today, but I shall also write to raise those issues and to ask her to get in touch with him, as he is very knowledgeable about such matters.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Many households in my constituency have seen their energy bills go up by more than 500% because they are on heat networks that are not regulated by Ofgem. The Energy Bill would make Ofgem the regulator and introduce a price cap, but there have been reports that the Prime Minister is set to pause the Bill or scrap it entirely. Can the Leader of the House reassure the House and my constituents that the Bill will not be scrapped and that a price cap will be introduced?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for raising those important points. Business will be announced in the normal way, but I will be happy to raise those points with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and ask that he contact her office.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Can we have an urgent debate on Hinduphobic hate crime? Recent days have seen a number of appalling acts of intimidation and harassment directed against the Hindu community, including a violent mob targeting a temple and tearing down a flag with spiritual significance. It is important that those disgraceful episodes are discussed by Parliament.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising that. We have all seen reported in the news the sad sight of the tensions, particularly in Leicester—a

city that does not have a history of that nature; it has a reputation for being a harmonious place. She can apply for debates in the normal way. The policing issues are a local matter, but I know that the Home Secretary is being kept informed. All that, of course, has played out against the backdrop of national unity, which makes the events even more sad.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I join hon. Members on both sides of the House in congratulating everybody who contributed to the outstanding arrangement of events in this House following Her late Majesty's death.

Parents on universal credit who are full-time carers for children with life-limiting or life-threatening conditions rely on a series of additional benefits that stop immediately if a child sadly dies. That places a heavy financial burden and hardship on parents who are already suffering from extreme stress and grief, as happened to one of my constituents. Will the Government make time for a debate to discuss bereavement support for parents who have been full-time carers for children with life-limiting or life-threatening conditions?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for her kind remarks about staff and others who enabled those amazing events to occur in the last few weeks and for raising this incredibly important issue. She will know that the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has held that portfolio in the Department and was concerned with all aspects of bereavement and ensuring that the welfare system supports people at the right time and is considerate of the grief that they are experiencing. I will raise the hon. Lady's remarks with the Secretary of State and make sure that she has heard them, and the hon. Lady can also raise the issue at the next Question Time that arises.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): This week, at the United Nations General Assembly, President Biden hosted the seventh replenishment conference of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Unfortunately, the United Kingdom Government were unable to make a pledge. As a former International Development Secretary, my right hon. Friend will know the impact of the Global Fund on the eradication of HIV, TB and malaria. Will she therefore ensure that the United Kingdom Government come forward as soon as possible with a statement on their intention to contribute to that replenishment fund?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising the profile of the Global Fund, which does tremendous work. The UK has been a leader in ensuring that it has the funds to carry out that work, which benefits us all, as well as the countries on which it is particularly focused. During that replenishment conference, the Minister for Development restated the UK's strong commitment to the fund. We continue to be committed to it and we will be making an announcement on our pledge in the coming weeks.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware that there have been a number of hospital rebuilds in the pipeline for a long time, but the money does not seem to be forthcoming from the Treasury. The hold-up has been going on for years. There may be some reference to that in tomorrow's

statement, but I do not think that is likely. If there is not, can we have a statement from a Health Minister or a Treasury Minister?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Gentleman can have a statement from a Health Minister in nanoseconds. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will be at the Dispatch Box and he should feel free to raise those issues with her. If he has any difficulty in obtaining clarity—no doubt he is interested in local schemes—I will of course assist him in getting those answers.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Next Tuesday 27 September, I am holding the Erewash jobs and community fair 2022. For the first time since the start of the pandemic, it is an in-person event with local and regional businesses attending to promote their job vacancies and apprenticeship opportunities. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must use whatever levers we have, including job fairs, to promote the importance of a healthy and productive workforce? Can we have a debate in Government time to explore other levers that we can use to ensure that we have the workforce that we need for productivity?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important issue. We have a great track record in this area: we have very low unemployment, we have 2 million more women in work than in 2010, and we have halved the disability employment gap. In addition to the work that the Department for Work and Pensions and other Government Departments have been doing, that is down to local engagement, such as job fairs. I thank her for all the work that she has done in her constituency to support her constituents to find jobs and get into work—sometimes for the first time.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I also welcome the right hon. Lady to her new role. In the light of the leaks to the media over the last few days, could we have a debate to find out why this Government believe that to make the poor work harder or try harder we should cut their benefits, but that to get wealthy bankers to work harder we should increase their bonuses?

Penny Mordaunt: The Chancellor will be in this place tomorrow, and Members will be able to question him on what his policies are rather than speculating about what has or has not been in the media. I hope that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Mr Speaker would approve of that.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Since the death of Queen Elizabeth II, we have witnessed an extraordinary nationwide and, indeed, kingdom-wide response: a moving mix of sorrow and celebration—sorrow at our loss and celebration of a life of remarkable service. So that that mood is marked forever and remembrance can last for generations to come, a fitting national memorial needs to be established. Does the Leader of the House therefore agree that a statement should be made to this House on what form that memorial might take? For me, a statue on the final plinth in Trafalgar Square would be ideal.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for his suggestion. Clearly, these matters will concern many Members, but they will also involve other bodies outside

this House. However, I shall certainly raise it with the DCMS Secretary and ensure that she properly consults Members on their wishes as plans are taken forward.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Evidence of the physical and mental health benefits of greater access to the countryside is overwhelming, yet we have a legal right to roam on only 8% of English land and 3% of rivers. Could we have a debate in Government time on the need to expand the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to cover rivers, woods and green belt, and will the Government support my private Member's Bill—the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Amendment) Bill—published today, which would succeed in doing exactly that?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for raising these issues. I hope, subject to the motion on the Order Paper agreeing recess dates, to be able very swiftly to publish the next schedule of departmental questions to enable hon. Members to raise these issues directly with Departments. I thank her for making us aware of her private Member's Bill.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): On page 31 of the Conservative party manifesto, the Government pledge to protect greenfield sites and prioritise brownfield sites for development, yet in practice planning inspectors are overturning local democratic planning authorities' decisions to refuse building on greenfield sites—most recently at South Road in Wivelsfield in my constituency, while Noland's Farm in Plumpton and Mornings Mill in Polegate are facing a similar fate. Can we have a debate in Government time about the Government's commitment to their pledge in the manifesto, the promise made by the Prime Minister to the Father of the House recently, and the role of planning inspectors in overturning these democratic decisions?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Before I call the Leader of the House, let me say that I want to get everybody in, so it is quite important that questions are brief.

Penny Mordaunt: During the recent leadership contest, the Prime Minister restated her commitment both to empowering local people and to keeping our promises in our manifesto. I hope that will give my hon. Friend some comfort, but she will obviously be able to question the Prime Minister in the usual way, and her voice will have been heard today.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the new Leader of the House, and I look forward to our meeting every week. Could she very quickly make a statement to the House about the welfare of the people who work here? Increasingly, the Members of Parliament who are wearing air quality detectors are picking up that this is not a safe environment to work in, and something should be done about it.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue, and I look forward to our weekly meetings that he promises. I shall certainly take up the issue he raises with the House authorities.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on becoming not only Leader of the House, but Lord President of the Council. In that latter capacity, will she urge the Privy Council not to agree to the proposed change in name of Linacre College, Oxford to that of a Vietnamese billionaire who is proposing to give £155 million to the college? If we want to clean up the dirty money and dodgy donations in this country, that would be a good place to start.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for raising this matter. I will ensure that the Department for Education has heard what he says. I suspect that that is the more appropriate and swiftest way of resolving the issues of concern to him.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Can we have a debate on the treatment of British citizens in Spanish prisons? My Livingston constituent Jamielee Fielding is nearly seven months pregnant and has gestational diabetes, but despite having paid the fine, the Spanish authorities in Tenerife are holding her, removing vital food and medication, and breaching her human rights. She has a very short window to get home to have her baby. Would the Leader of the House press the Foreign Secretary to help get Jamielee home, and to meet me so that I can do everything I can to make sure that she is safe, healthy and home as soon as possible?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for raising the plight of her constituent, and I will certainly do that. I will raise it with the Foreign Office and urge it to be in touch with the hon. Lady.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) in condemning the violent attacks on Hindu temples in Leicester and Smethwick only last night. Next week, the Hindu festival of Navaratri begins, on 24 October we will celebrate Diwali, and the following day is Hindu new year. The Hindu community in this country are seriously concerned about their safety in going about their celebrations, so could my right hon. Friend arrange for an urgent statement to be made by the new Home Secretary on what arrangements will be made to make sure that our Hindu friends and neighbours are able to celebrate their religion in peace and harmony, as they have always done?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. As he stresses, this is also a very timely issue, and I will certainly take it up with the Home Secretary.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): This week, the Government's £150 cost of living payment to disabled people started to go out, but unpaid carers such as Katy Styles have said that that amount "won't...scratch the surface" of what is needed. Katy's husband, Mark Styles, has a rare form of motor neurone disease and, like many disabled people, relies on equipment that uses electricity and on his home being kept warmer so that he does not get chest infections. This is a widespread issue for disabled people and their unpaid family carers, so can we have a debate in Government time so that we can raise these issues with Ministers?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this important issue. It is a matter for the Department for Work and Pensions, and also for the Department of

Health and Social Care. The Secretary of State for the latter Department will be in the House shortly, and the hon. Lady should raise that with her, or in the usual way. However, I shall certainly make sure that both Departments are aware of her concerns.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I agree with my right hon. and hon. Friends who have spoken in praise of the extraordinary scenes we have seen over the past two weeks—nowhere more so, of course, than in my constituency of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine when the world saw the community of Royal Deeside pay tribute to Her late Majesty as she was taken from Balmoral on her final journey. A lot of the ceremony of those two weeks was organised by lords lieutenant across the country, who remain unpaid, so would my right hon. Friend agree to a debate in Government time on the Scottish National party Government's austerity agenda? It is slashing not only millions of pounds from education in Scotland and from local government in Scotland, but tens of millions of pounds from the budgets of the lords lieutenant who play such a crucial role in our national life, as has been proven over the past two weeks.

Penny Mordaunt: The Scottish National party is clearly obsessed with issues that are of little concern to the people of Scotland—public services, their ability to access healthcare or get their bins emptied, or any of the other things on which the party is dropping the ball. However, I do think that the services provided—focal points for communities and the link to our royal family—are incredibly important and should be preserved and cherished.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The Leader of the House must be alarmed about what happened in Hong Kong on Monday evening, when a citizen who paid their respects to Her late Majesty the Queen was arrested under the sedition laws. Have any representations been made by this Government to the Chinese embassy about what seems to be a terrible way to treat a citizen in Hong Kong?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that appalling event, which I am sure will have dismayed every Member of this House. I shall ask the Foreign Office to contact him to confirm what has been done in the wake of that event.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): I add my thanks to those of all Members of the House for the brilliant national commemorative events, and I wish also to thank those who worked so hard to make our local events in Southend West so dignified—the mayor, council officers, community groups, church leaders, police and the scouts. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) who asked for a national debate on a permanent tribute to Her late Majesty. Does the Leader of the House agree with Chalkwell Lifeguards who are already suggesting a Queen Elizabeth II lifesaving award in honour of their late patron?

Penny Mordaunt: I join my hon. Friend in thanking everyone across the country who did so much to enable all our communities properly to pay tribute to and mourn the loss of our great Queen. She is gone, but her values remain with us, and there will be huge interest

not just in a permanent memorial to her, but in many schemes that strengthen our communities and bring people together, as she did in life.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Many of my constituents in Lewisham East live in buildings with district heating networks. They are not covered by the energy price cap, and some are paying 13 times the energy cap. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), I was alarmed by reports that the Energy Bill, which could put in place regulation for heating networks, may be halted or dropped. Will the Leader of the House ask the Business Secretary to come to the Floor of the House to clarify the future of that Bill, and specifically that issue?

Penny Mordaunt: Many hon. Members put questions to the Business Secretary earlier today. I will raise that specific issue with him, and business will be announced in the usual way.

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my deep concern about the decision of PayPal, the online payments company, to cancel the accounts of certain organisations, including UsForThem, which campaigned against the covid lockdowns and—perhaps most ironically—the Free Speech Union, which appears to have been targeted because of its views on sex and gender? As we move towards a cashless economy, those companies form part of the essential infrastructure of ordinary life. Will the Government take steps to ensure that such companies cannot discriminate against individuals or organisations on the basis of perfectly legal political views?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend may have more information than I do about why PayPal has cancelled those accounts and removed that facility from the organisations he mentioned. From what I understand, the Free Speech Union and other organisations are still in the dark about exactly why they have had those services removed, despite making great efforts to find out. That is a common theme in the casework of many Members of the House, whether that is cancelling contracts or trying to get an error resolved with firms, and it is difficult for people to speak directly to someone to try to get a situation resolved, or to reorganise how they will make those payments. That is a good topic for debate, and I encourage hon. Members who are concerned about customer services in some of these organisations to bring the issue forward and ask for a debate in the usual way.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Some 6.7 million households across the UK already live in fuel poverty, with a current cap price of £1,971. Will the Leader of the House make a statement to set out whether she believes that the energy cap rising by another £600 will help householders such as those in my constituency who already cannot afford to pay their energy bills, as well as those who will shortly find themselves adding to the soaring numbers of those in fuel poverty as a direct result of the new increase in the price cap?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Lady will know that we have acted swiftly to bring forward measures to help households and businesses with the rising cost of energy. The Government will also address the underlying issues

that are exacerbating the problem. One of those has been announced today, and the Business Secretary has answered an urgent question on that. I urge all Members of the House to concentrate on issues that will help us to increase supply of energy, as well as controlling the costs.

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): The air ambulance is a vital service for many areas of the United Kingdom, and none more so than the rural areas of mid-Wales. Wales Air Ambulance is a great charity that is very dear to the hearts of my constituents, and something we support all year round. The bases are being reconfigured, however, and the air ambulance at Welshpool airport, of which we are very proud, looks to be moved further north. May we have a debate in Government time on the funding and coverage of air ambulances? The service is incredibly important to rural Wales, and we must keep it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. A quick reminder that Members must be brief, as I want to get everybody in.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important issue. We often forget that that incredible service is provided across the country by many organisations that are, in fact, charities. It is right that local people have input into how such services are run in their area, and he will know that the Government have changed their treatment of air ambulances to ensure that they are able to thrive financially.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Do the Government still intend to bring forward legislation in this Parliament to amend, repeal or replace the Human Rights Act, or to constrain the independence of the judiciary by further restricting judicial review?

Penny Mordaunt: All future business will be announced in the normal way.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Historic Boars Hill in my Oxford constituency is facing the prospect of a grossly inappropriate development. Peking University HSBC Business School, which is owned by the Chinese Communist party, has submitted a planning application to expand vastly the campus at Foxcombe Hall. The planning committee narrowly approved the application, weighing economic benefit against the loss of the green belt. As far as I can see, however, the main beneficiary of any economic activity is the Chinese state, not the local area. Our hope now sits with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, who has the right to call in the application, but with recesses, no questions and many letters written, I am desperate for a meeting with him and his officials to explain why this is the wrong choice both locally and nationally.

Penny Mordaunt: I am aware that the hon. Lady has made a formal request for the planning application to be called in for consideration by the Secretary of State, and that may limit some of the conversations she might be able to have with him. I will write to him seeking guidance from his Department about the most appropriate

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way for the hon. Lady to engage with this matter. Further to the comments I made earlier to my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), she should also raise the matter with the Department for Education.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The Prime Minister's chief of staff has been interviewed by the FBI in connection with electoral bribery in Puerto Rico. May we have a Government statement on that to consider whether any UK laws may have been broken, whether the FBI interview has affected the chief of staff's security status, and whether the Prime Minister was informed of the FBI interview before her chief of staff's appointment was confirmed?

Penny Mordaunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to statements that have been issued on this matter. I do not think it an issue that should be debated at length on the Floor of this House. I assure him that everything he would expect to be done is being done, but it is not a matter for debate here.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Trussell Trust figures from this summer show that four in 10 of those on universal credit were already skipping meals. Given that there will be another price hike in the next few days, does the Leader of the House expect to be timetabling in yet another fiscal statement, or does she expect our constituents to simply starve?

Penny Mordaunt: I suggest that the hon. Lady comes to the House tomorrow and raises those issues directly with the Chancellor. I know it is his intention to set out the plan for growth and how that will assist her constituents, and she will have ample time to question him then and in the future.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I would like to ask about the Government's commitment to transparency and the protection of whistleblowers. Whistleblowers such as my constituent Paul Calvert are being left in limbo and suffering great stress. Many bereaved families are questioning the decision to appoint NHS insider Dame Marianne Griffiths to lead the review of systematic cover-ups by the North East Ambulance Service. Can we have a statement or a general debate in Government time on the whistleblower protection and ensuring transparency in the public service, so that we can learn any lessons that need to be learned?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Gentleman raises an important constituency matter, which I will be happy to raise with the Secretary of State for Health, but he is right: we owe whistleblowers a huge debt, and they need to be protected.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): There used to be two trains an hour from Penge West and Anerley stations in my constituency to London Bridge. Now there are none, and the number from Sydenham and Forest Hill stations has halved. Govia Thameslink tells me that, due to a reduction of Government funding in the 2021 spending review, it has had to cut capacity, but that is having a huge impact on my constituents'

ability to access employment, education and healthcare. Can we please have a debate in Government time about support for regional rail networks?

Penny Mordaunt: This Government have done a huge amount, not just to support existing rail but to build new schemes and help our towns and cities to connect in ways that they have not before. I would urge the hon. Lady to raise this at the next Transport questions, on 13 October.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Several of my constituents have contacted me to complain that the Financial Conduct Authority has failed to protect them from false investment scams, including so-called mini-bonds, despite flags being raised. The FCA has accredited and listed companies despite their directors not being real people. The FCA rules are clearly unfit for purpose. Can we have a debate in Government time on how to reform the rules and provide genuine protection for those who have been targeted?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue that I am sure will be of concern to many Members in this House. I would urge him to raise this at the next Treasury questions, on 11 October, and I shall certainly make sure that the Treasury has heard what he has said today.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House will be aware that thousands of constituents in Cardiff South and Penarth live in apartment blocks that are affected by fire and building safety defects. As well as needing to get the defects fixed, many are unfortunately facing spiralling insurance costs and also a failure by lenders to implement the Government's guidance, which affects their ability to get mortgages and so on. May we have an urgent statement from the new Minister for Housing or one of the Treasury Ministers so that we can debate these important issues?

Penny Mordaunt: I encourage the hon. Gentleman to raise that matter with both Departments, but some of the issues that he touches on are devolved.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The death of Mahsa Amini in Iran for allegedly breaking hijab rules was shocking, as was the Iranian authorities' response to the subsequent protests. Can we have a statement from the Government on the support they are providing to human rights activists in Iran, including those who have to seek asylum here in the UK?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sure that all Members of this House would want to echo the hon. Lady's comments. It was the most barbaric and appalling act and has caused huge amounts of disquiet, and clearly repercussions are now unfurling in Iran. I shall make sure that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office responds to the hon. Lady's concerns, and I would encourage all Members who want to put a spotlight on what is going on, and to send a message to people who are struggling against a very repressive regime, to apply for a debate in the usual way.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House may be aware that there have been almost 3,600 cases of monkeypox in the UK, one of the highest numbers in Europe. Experts, including the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV, the Terrence Higgins Trust, the National AIDS Trust and PrEPster, have said that, without urgent action, monkeypox could become endemic in the UK. The Government's public health response has been far too slow. Can we have an urgent statement so that we can get a grip on the situation and ensure that no one is left behind?

Penny Mordaunt: I shall certainly make sure that the Secretary of State for Health hears what the hon. Lady has said. The Government have clearly done some things on this matter, in particular to try to raise awareness and give health advice, but I shall raise it with the relevant Department and ask the new Secretary of State to get in touch with the hon. Lady.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Another couple of weeks have elapsed, so can I ask the Leader of the House when the Government intend to lay a second remedial order on bereavement support payments for cohabiting couples? Given that the courts decided four years ago that these payments should happen, will that remedial order be laid before recess tomorrow?

Penny Mordaunt: I have raised this matter, from memory, with the relevant Department. I will follow that up and make sure that the Department is in touch with the hon. Gentleman's office.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): May I welcome the Leader of the House to her new position and urge her to use it to secure a debate in Government time on levelling up? It was the mantra of the previous Administration, and those of us with local authorities that have bid for the latest round of the levelling-up fund are keen to be able to promote our schemes. In particular, I want to promote Tameside Council's scheme for Denton, Denton, Denton, so can we get that chance?

Penny Mordaunt: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman for doing precisely that this afternoon. He will know that the Prime Minister is still committed to this agenda, and he will have an opportunity tomorrow to raise any issues he wishes with the Chancellor, because clearly this is also about growth.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): A survey by Child Poverty Action Group has found that scrapping the benefit cap is twice as popular as scrapping the cap on bankers' bonuses. Axing the benefit cap, which has been frozen since 2016, would put an average of £65 per week in families' pockets. Can we have a debate in Government time on the importance of supporting struggling families in Glasgow Central, rather than the Tories helping their wealthy banker pals in the City of London?

Penny Mordaunt: Again, I would encourage the hon. Lady to show up tomorrow and put her questions directly to the Chancellor. I would also urge all hon. Members not to get too excited about things they read in the press, but to wait till they hear what the Chancellor has to say.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): A 1993 rule introduced by the then Government said that inheritance tax does not have to be paid on the transfer of assets from one sovereign to another. At the time, the then Leader of the Opposition, the late John Smith, asked:

"although it is accepted that assets held by the Queen as sovereign should not be liable to inheritance tax, will the Prime Minister explain why all private assets passing from one sovereign to the next should also be exempt?"—[*Official Report*, 11 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 1114.]

This remains a legitimate question, so would the Leader of the House allow time for discussion on this matter?

Penny Mordaunt: If the hon. Gentleman would like to write to me with the specifics of what he is concerned about, I would be happy to find the best way that we could raise this as an issue and give him some certainty, so that he can apply for a debate.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The Conservative manifesto promoted levelling up, but now the Government seem, without a mandate, to be pivoting their focus to trickle-down economics. Given that the International Monetary Fund has said that making the rich richer does not drive growth and that President Biden has tweeted:

"I am sick and tired of trickle-down economics. It has never worked",

can we have a debate on the utter failure of trickle-down economics, as favoured by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher?

Penny Mordaunt: I would point, first, to our £37 billion support package to enable people to cope with the cost of living, which could not be described as a trickle in any respect. I think that, rather than a lot of commentary about economic plans, what the people of this country want to see is action, and that is what they will get tomorrow, and I would encourage the hon. Gentleman to come to the House and listen to the Chancellor.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The sharp rise in short-term holiday lets over the last few years, and particularly the last few months, is fuelling the housing crisis in York and also the cost of living crisis. Can we have a debate to discuss the licensing that needs to be introduced to curb the industry and ensure that our constituents have preferential access to housing?

Penny Mordaunt: I will certainly raise this with the relevant Department. I would encourage the hon. Lady, when the next schedule of questions is published, to come to the House and ask the Secretary of State.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (Ind): I welcome the confirmation from the Leader of the House that a statement on the UK's contribution to the Global Fund will be forthcoming, but I wonder whether we could have a wider debate on UK aid spending, in particular on the pressures on the budget, given the decision to go from 0.7% to 0.5%, and on how we can ensure support for Ukraine is additional to, not instead of, existing aid plans.

Penny Mordaunt: Again, the hon. Member has an opportunity tomorrow to raise those issues directly with the Chancellor. We have had fairly recent debates

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on the aid budget, but I am sure that, when the announcement, which is imminent, on the Global Fund is made, there will be further opportunities to question Ministers about that.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Lab): The Edenfield Centre mental health unit in Prestwich in my constituency is to be subject to a police investigation following a “Panorama” investigation due to the mistreatment of patients. Following those devastating announcements, will the Leader of the House be able to arrange for either a statement from the Health Secretary or a meeting with me, so I can discuss those concerns moving forward?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Member raises a very important point. The Department of Health and Social Care has done a lot of work in recent weeks on ensuring care settings for individuals are appropriate for them. Clearly, this is an immediate case for him and I urge him to raise it directly with the Secretary of State. I shall make sure that she is aware of his concerns.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month and I am grateful to Members across the House who have signed my early-day motion noting that. It is unsurprising that they have done so, because this issue, sadly, affects every constituency in Scotland and across the UK. There have been improvements in outcomes for children with cancer, but they have not been significant enough and some treatments have not advanced in 40 years. Can we therefore have a debate in Government time on how the UK Government can support the improvement in, and increase in, levels of research, and whether Members across the House will support Wear It Gold Day tomorrow to support Childhood Cancer Awareness Month?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Lady for raising awareness of that important day. I am sure all Members will want to support the aims she sets out. The Government have clearly done a huge amount to advance partnerships in life science involving academic institutes but also the charitable sector, for example, with reforms on shared intellectual property. We will continue to do that as part of our growth plan.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): I welcome the right hon. Lady to her new position and hope that the last few months of inertia will finally be behind us. Among the many important issues committed to in the Government’s 2019 manifesto, but on which we have seen scant sign of any progress, is the long promised employment Bill. Can the Leader of the House outline when we can expect to see this important legislation timetabled, so we can end the race to the bottom in employment rights in this country, exacerbated by our current economic crisis?

Penny Mordaunt: First, I challenge what the hon. Lady says about this country’s record on employment rights. We have tended to lead the world, and certainly Europe, on that. I also challenge her description of a summer of inertia. On the first occasion possible, we have brought forward measures on the cost of living

and tackling the cost of energy, she will shortly hear a statement from the new Secretary of State for Health on our plans to assist health and social care, and the plan for growth will be unveiled by the new Chancellor tomorrow. That has not just been pulled out of a hat. A huge amount of work has been done across the summer, including by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, now Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and it will be announced in the normal way.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Leader of the House for making time today to debate the situation in Ukraine, but in the last few weeks we have seen an escalation in military violence between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and on the border between Kosovo and Serbia. We know there has been some Russian involvement, although not directly, in those conflicts. Will the Leader of the House make time to debate wider conflict zones in Europe and central Asia?

Penny Mordaunt: I am sure all hon. Members will have been very disturbed by the reports of violence but also violation of dead bodies—very horrific things. I shall certainly make sure that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is aware of Members’ concerns and I encourage the hon. Member to put those questions directly to the new Foreign Secretary.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): Verified videos by Human Rights Watch graphically illustrate the brutality and barbarism of Azerbaijan’s recent attack on Armenia, showing an elderly Armenian civilian decapitated with a knife and his head mounted on the carcass of a pig, and the mutilated corpse of a female Armenian soldier, with her eyes gauged out and replaced by stones. It should be noted that Azerbaijan is also backed heavily by NATO member Turkey, with one Turkish political leader stating last week:

“I remind you once again the Turkish nation has the power to erase Armenia from history and geography.”

Can we have an urgent debate in Government time on the illegal attacks by Azerbaijan on the democracy of Armenia and a statement from the UK Government condemning all those who support those horrific actions and hate speech?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for being the second Member to raise those issues. I will certainly take that up with the new Foreign Secretary.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): Today, the National Education Union and the *Daily Mirror* have relaunched their “No child left behind” campaign, which calls for urgent action on child poverty. Will the Leader of the House call on the Secretary of State for Education to roll out free universal school meals to at least all children in primary schools, to prevent children from going hungry?

Penny Mordaunt: I will certainly raise what the hon. Lady says with the new Secretary of State. I also encourage her to put those questions directly to him at the next round of questions.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): In the light of the Bank of England’s statement this morning that interest rates are to go up again, food inflation

going through the roof and the burgeoning Government debt, which is dragging us all down, will the Leader of the House make it a priority for us to debate in Government time how we are going to pay this debt back? Will it be our grandchildren, or the grandchildren of our grandchildren who will be able to pay back the enormous debts that the Government are accruing this week through their decisions?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Lady will know that the Chancellor will be here tomorrow to take questions from all Members in this House. In addition to the very considerable support packages that have been put in place for both households and businesses, the answer to the problems she raises is about getting growth back into our economy. That is what the Government will be focused on and what she will hear from the Chancellor tomorrow.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I know the Leader of the House shares my appreciation and gratitude for the life of service given by Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth. She was a lady of great faith who greatly respected people of other faiths. Will the Leader of the House provide time for a statement on what our Government plan to do to advance the rights to freedom of religion or belief, the interconnectedness of freedom of religion or belief to all human rights and its relevance to foreign policy and trade?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that important matter. Yes, Her late Majesty the Queen was a beacon for that not just within the United Kingdom but throughout the Commonwealth and the wider world. I shall certainly encourage the Foreign Secretary to get in touch with him on how we can continue the work of the envoy we have appointed on religious freedom and the FCDO's other programmes.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Back in June, the Leader of the House's predecessor joined me in congratulating a teen boxer from Blantyre in my constituency. Will the Leader join me in congratulating young Jacob Naismith again after his historic win in the 46 kg EUBC schools boxing championships in Turkey this summer, making him the youngest competitor ever to win that crown? Can we have a debate in Government time on the importance of local youth sporting groups in our communities across the UK?

Penny Mordaunt: I am delighted to be able to join the hon. Lady in congratulating Jacob on his achievements in one of the toughest sports going. The new Secretary of State at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is very passionate about the sporting agenda, particularly for young people and children, and will want to ensure we are building and bringing forward schemes to encourage physical activity and excellence in sport.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Leader of the House for answering the business questions.

Health and Social Care Update

1.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I am pleased today to set out to Parliament our plan for patients. As the Prime Minister said on the doorstep of Downing Street, she had three clear priorities: growing the economy; tackling energy security and support for households and businesses; and the NHS, with patients being able to get a GP appointment.

Patients are my top priority and I will be their champion, focusing on the issues that most affect them or their loved ones. Most of the time, patients have a great experience, but we must not paper over the problems that we face. We expect backlogs to rise before they fall as more patients come forward for diagnosis and treatment after the pandemic, and the data shows, sadly, that there is too much variation in the access and care that people receive across the country.

The scale of the challenge necessitates a national endeavour. As we work together to tackle these immense challenges, I will be proactive, not prescriptive, in our approach as we apply a relentless focus on measures that affect most people's experience of the NHS and social care.

Today, we are taking the first step in this important journey by publishing "Our Plan for Patients", which I will lay in the Libraries of both Houses. It sets out a range of measures to help the NHS and social care perform at their best for patients. The plan will inform patients and empower them to live healthier lives; place an intensive focus on primary care, the gateway to the NHS for most people; use prevention to strengthen resilience and the health of the nation; and improve performance and productivity.

To succeed, we will need a true national endeavour, supported by our making it easier for clinical professionals to return to help the NHS, as well as drawing on the energy and enthusiasm of the million people who volunteered to help during the pandemic by opening up opportunities for them to help in different ways. That could be by becoming a community first responder, or by, for example, strengthening good neighbour schemes across the country. We will also explore the creation of an ambulance auxiliary service.

The plan sets out our work on the ABCD of priorities that affect most people's experience of the NHS and social care. First, on ambulances, I want to reduce waiting times for patients and apply a laser-like focus on handover delays, so that ambulances get back on the road and to patients, where they are needed most.

Our analysis shows that 45% of the delays are occurring in just 15 hospital trusts. That is why the local NHS will be doing intensive work with those trusts to create more capacity in hospitals—the equivalent of 7,000 more beds—by this winter through a combination of freeing up beds, with a focus on discharge, and people staying at home and being monitored remotely through the sort of technology that played such an important role during the pandemic. In addition, when patients call 999, the speed of answering is critical, so we will increase the number of call handlers for both 999 and 111 calls.

Next is the backlog, where the waiting list for planned care currently stands at about 7 million, exacerbated by the pandemic. This summer, we announced that we

[Dr Thérèse Coffey]

have virtually eliminated waits of over two years, and we remain on track to reach the next milestones in our plan. To boost capacity, we are accelerating our plans to roll out community diagnostic centres as well as new hospitals, and we will maximise the use of the independent sector to provide even more treatment for patients.

As well as capacity, we are also getting more people on the frontline, making it easier for people to work in and help the NHS. We know that people are leaving the workforce for a variety of reasons. We have listened, and we are responding and addressing a number of those reasons. For instance, pension rules can currently be a disincentive for clinicians who want to stay in the profession or to return from retirement and help our national endeavour. We will correct pension rules relating to inflation; we will expect NHS trusts to offer pension recycling; and we will extend until 2024 measures that will allow people to stay or return to the NHS.

I can announce today that we will extend the operation of the emergency registers for health professionals for two more years. That is, of course, on top of commitments to boost the health and care workforce, such as our manifesto pledge to recruit 50,000 more nurses by 2024. That will sit alongside the design and delivery of our forthcoming workforce plan.

C is for social care. At the moment, one of the key challenges is discharging patients from hospital into more appropriate care settings to free up beds and help improve ambulance response times. To tackle that, I can announce today that we are launching a £500 million adult social care discharge fund for this winter. The local NHS will be working with councils with targeted plans on specific care packages to support people being either in their own home or in the wider community. That £500 million acts as the down-payment in the rebalancing of funding across health and social care as we develop our longer-term plans.

I know that there is a shortage of carers across the country. We will continue to work with the Department for Work and Pensions on a national recruitment campaign. In addition, since last winter, we have opened up international recruitment routes for carers. We will support the sector with £15 million this year to help to employ more care workers from abroad. We are also accelerating the roll-out of technologies such as digitised social care records, which can save care workers about 20 minutes a shift, freeing up time for carers to care.

Finally, D is for doctors and dentists. I am determined to address one of the most frustrating problems faced by many patients: getting an appointment to see their doctor, or getting to see a dentist at all.

Starting with doctors, we are taking five steps to help make that happen: first, setting the expectation that everyone who needs a GP appointment can get one within two weeks; secondly, opening up time for more than 1 million extra appointments, so that patients with urgent needs can be seen on the same day; thirdly, making it easier to book an appointment; fourthly, publishing performance by practice to help to inform patients; and fifthly, requiring the local NHS to hold practices to account, providing support to those practices with the most acute access challenges to improve performance.

Clearly, clinicians are best placed to prioritise according to the clinical need of their patients. In July, 44% of appointments were same-day appointments, but too few practices were consistently offering appointments within a fortnight.

To help free up appointments, we will ease pressures on GP practices by expanding the role of community pharmacies. I am pleased to announce that we have agreed a deal for an expanded offer over the next 18 months. Pharmacists will be able to prescribe certain medications rather than requiring a GP prescription. As well as other measures involving community pharmacists, we estimate that that will free up 2 million appointments. We are also changing funding rules to give freedoms to GPs to boost the number of staff to support their practice. We estimate that that measure could free up 1 million GP appointments.

For patients, we will make it easier for them to contact their practice, both on the phone—we are making an extra 31,000 phone lines available this winter, followed by further deployment of cloud-based telephony—and online, particularly through the NHS app. As I set out, we will also correct pension rules so that our most experienced GPs can stay in practice. By extending the emergency register, we are creating opportunities for people other than GPs to undertake tasks such as vaccinations.

On dentists, there are too many dental deserts. That is why we are setting out an ambition that everyone seeking NHS dental care can receive it when they need it. We have already started changing the dental contract to incentivise dentists to do more NHS work and take on more difficult cases. I pay tribute to my predecessors in this role for their success in beginning to tackle this long-standing issue.

We will also streamline routes into NHS dentistry for those trained overseas so that they can start treating patients more quickly. We will make it a contractual requirement for dentists to publish online whether they are taking on new NHS patients.

These measures, across a number of important areas, are the start, not the end, of our ambitions for health and care. They will help us to manage the pressure that health and care will face this winter and next, and they will improve these vital services for the long term. My priorities are patients' priorities, and I will endeavour, through a powerful partnership with the NHS and local authorities, to level up care and match the expectations that the public rightly have. Whether you live in a city or a town, in the countryside or on the coast, this Government will be on your side when you need care the most. I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

1.20 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State and her team to their new posts. I thank her for advance sight of her statement, but if any evidence were needed of a Government and party out of ideas, out of time and without a clue about the scale of the challenge that our country faces, the statement would be it.

The NHS is facing the worst crisis it has ever seen, with patients waiting longer than ever before in A&E, stroke and heart attack victims waiting an hour for an

ambulance, and 378,000 patients waiting more than a year for an operation—and that was in the summer. We have gone from an NHS that treated patients well and on time when Labour was in office 12 years ago to an annual winter crisis, and now a year-round crisis under the Conservatives. But don't worry: the Health Secretary has a grip on the key issues. She does not have an answer on the workforce, but she has sorted out the Oxford comma. I am sure that the whole country is breathing a sigh of relief about that.

The Health Secretary promised a digital revolution in the NHS. Well, Conservative Health Secretaries have promised a digital revolution 17 times since 2010. *[Interruption.]* Oh, apparently she did not say that—she is not promising a digital revolution. That is good news, because I do not think that the staff who are slogging their guts out in the most difficult conditions in history will be particularly impressed by the introduction of that cutting-edge modern technology, the telephone. The NHS can finally axe the carrier pigeon and step into the 20th century. I am sure that staff are absolutely delighted.

Madam Deputy Speaker,

“these measures will not come close to ensuring patients who need to be seen can be seen within the timescales set out...they will have minimal impact on fixing the current problems that general practice is facing over the winter”.

Those are not my words; they are the NHS Confederation's verdict on the Secretary of State's plans. Are they not the truth? The Secretary of State says that patients will be able to get a GP appointment within two weeks, but her party scrapped the guarantee of an appointment within two days that Labour introduced when we were in government. She made it clear this morning that it is not a guarantee at all, but merely an expectation—and what is the consequence if GPs do not meet her expectation? As we heard on the radio this morning, her message to patients is “Get on your bike and find a new GP.” Are patients supposed to be grateful for that?

Who will deliver the appointments that the Secretary of State is promising: the 6,000 GPs her party promised at the last election but will not deliver, or the 4,700 GPs her party has cut over the past decade? Where will these GP appointments take place? Certainly not in the 330 practices that have closed since the last general election alone. The Conservatives promising to fix the crisis in the NHS is like the arsonists promising to put out the fire that they started.

As if that were not bad enough, the super-massive black hole at the heart of the Secretary of State's plan is the lack of a workforce strategy. She has no plan to provide the doctors that our NHS so desperately needs. Despite her “Sesame Street” approach to politics, in her A, B, C, D plan—by the way, last time I checked, S was for social care—she has missed the N for nurses. I say to the Secretary of State that without a plan to tackle the staffing crisis, she does not have a plan for the NHS. What is she going to do about the staff shortage of 132,000 in the NHS today?

The Secretary of State talks about £500 million to speed up delayed discharges. Is that a new investment or a re-announcement? She is right to say that if patients cannot get out the back door of hospital because care is not there in the community, we get more patients at the front door and more ambulances queuing out at the front. That is exactly where we are under the Conservatives

today. But she misses the crucial point: unless the Government act on care workers' pay and conditions, employers will not be able to recruit and retain the staff they need. What is her plan to address that?

Patients will have been concerned to read reports that after the Conservatives failed to hit the four-hour A&E waiting time target for seven years, the Health Secretary is planning to scrap it altogether. I notice that she was not brave enough to say that today; I hope that she will not do so. Can she reassure the House and patients across the country that her response to the crisis in the NHS will be not to lower standards for patients, but to raise performance instead?

The Secretary of State is the third Health Secretary in less than three months. The faces change but the story remains the same. There is still no plan that comes close to meeting the scale of the challenge—no plan for staffing and no real plan for the NHS. It is clear that the longer the Conservatives are in power, the longer patients will wait. As Dr. Dre might say: time for the next episode.

Dr Coffey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his warm welcome to my ministerial team and me. It has been just two weeks—[HON. MEMBERS: “Twelve years!”] Forgive me. Well, in those 12 years there have been more doctors and nurses working in the NHS than ever before. We have record funding going into the NHS. The money that the Government spend through the Department of Health and Social Care is about 40% of our day-to-day spending. That is the reality of the Conservative party investing in the long-term health of our nation.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a variety of things. I can absolutely say that there will be no changes to the target of a four-hour wait in A&E. I believe that it matters. I will give the House a recent personal experience. In July, I went to A&E myself; I waited for nearly nine hours to see a doctor, and I still did not get any treatment. I was asked to go back the next day, so I went to a different hospital just three miles away and was seen and treated appropriately. That is the sort of variation we are seeing across the NHS, and it is the reason for my approach.

Only last week we started getting some data from NHS Digital about what is happening practice by practice, so we can start to understand it and start to use experts in the local NHS to prioritise helping those patients who are not getting the service that they should rightly expect, while giving freedom to those other GPs who are doing a fantastic job of supporting patients in their practice. That is why I do not intend to be prescriptive, but I am determined on behalf of patients to drive up the performance of those who need help to do things better.

On ambulances, I am very conscious of the issue. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we have been in power for 12 years, and I am conscious that I have been working for a decade on improving things for my constituents as well. With a particular focus on ambulances, I think it would be helpful for the House to learn about our recent analysis showing that 45% of the handover delays are concentrated in a part of the country. Even so, I appreciate that that is not good enough.

I also understand that although similar numbers of ambulance calls are being made, there are many more category 1 and 2 calls and our fantastic paramedics are

[Dr Coffey]

treating more people at home without needing to take them to hospital. Nevertheless, that brings me the challenge of how we can do more to help ambulances get back on the road so that they can treat patients. As with many other emergency services, we also need to consider the potential extension of volunteers through auxiliary services or community first responders. In London alone there are about 120 community first responders, but I think I have more than that in my constituency of Suffolk Coastal. It is about recognising that for the million people who volunteered to help, we can find a way for them to help us during these particularly challenging times, as well as working with the NHS to tackle the fundamental issues.

On access to GPs, I am conscious that Labour introduced the 48-hour target when it was in power. We were told by the NHS and by doctors that of course they met it—I expect that was part of their contracts—but that it did not necessarily mean better outcomes for patients at their practice; indeed, they got into a routine of not booking appointments more regularly. It is important that we address that.

I am very conscious that the plan for patients has only just been published. I deliberately tried to ensure that we held back important aspects of it, such as the £500 million adult discharge fund, for the House's interest rather than speaking about them before coming here today.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I am very happy to continue to work in partnership with the NHS. Keeping the focus on patients is critical, as is building on the existing NHS winter plan, developing the workforce, and all the plans and strategies that need to be carefully considered as we set about the long-term improvements that I think he will enjoy and will want me to champion on behalf of patients.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, Jeremy Hunt.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State to her new role. As I know, it is the hardest job in Government, but she has a zen-like calmness which means that she is well suited to dealing with the pressures that lie ahead.

There is much to be welcomed today, particularly the pension rule changes, the additional funds for social care and the new powers for pharmacists, but may I ask the Secretary of State to rethink the new two-week access target for general practice? If targets were the answer, we would have the best access in the world in the NHS, because we have more targets than any other healthcare system in the world. GPs alone have 72 targets, and adding a 73rd will not help them or their patients, because it is not more targets but more doctors that the NHS needs. Will the workforce plan to which the Secretary of State recommitted herself—I welcome her commitment to publishing it—include hard numbers, so we can know how many doctors we will need in 10, 15 and 20 years' time and whether we are actually training them, and will she publish it before Christmas so that staff can at least go into the winter knowing that there is a plan for the future?

Dr Coffey: I thank my right hon. Friend. I remember supporting him from the Back Benches in his passion for the NHS, and I am absolutely committed to continuing that.

I think my predecessors may have committed themselves to publishing aspects of, or conclusions from, the workforce plan, but I assure my right hon. Friend that now that I have spent time focusing on the priorities, work on the plan is already ongoing and I hope to make progress on further elements today, working alongside my new ministerial team, so that we can maximise that progress.

One of the key things that I want to do is make it more straightforward for people—wherever they are in the world, as long as they are of sufficient quality—to be able to come and practise in England. I was astonished to learn that we cannot even allow people who are accredited in Scotland to come here straight away and practise as dentists. We will be laying regulations on the day we return from the recess, which will enable the General Dental Council, for example, to accelerate this aspect of streamlining so we can ensure that when high-quality doctors and dentists are accredited, anywhere in the world, we can take that into account and enable them to help patients in this country more rapidly.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Scottish National party spokesman, Martyn Day.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Let me start by welcoming the Secretary of State to her new role and thanking her for advance sight of her statement.

There is no doubt that the NHS, in all four nations, is facing an incredibly difficult winter, with possible rises in covid infections alongside winter illnesses and increases in slips and falls, all of it while recovering from the dire effects of the pandemic and, now, an energy crisis. An inflation-busting uplift is vital to getting our health systems back into good shape, enabling them to get through this winter and support those in need. It has been estimated that the cost of living crisis will add £3.7 billion a year to the cost of social care alone, with far higher rises across the NHS generally. How does the Secretary of State justify her Government's prioritising of bankers and tax cuts for the rich at a time when investment in public services is more essential than ever, and will she support the SNP's call for an NHS uplift greater than inflation?

Dr Coffey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I think that one of the benefits of the United Kingdom is our ability to learn from each other, even with a devolved NHS. For example, we are borrowing, or copying, the pharmacist elements, and we will enact those in this country too. As the hon. Gentleman will know, owing to the Barnett formula the amount per head of population for the Scottish NHS is considerably higher—the health money passed over—but it is at the discretion of the Scottish Government to decide how to use that money to help patients.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware of our ongoing challenge: we want to work together as a United Kingdom in tackling global pandemics, and I look forward to working in preparation for that. He will also be aware that we accepted the recommendations of the independent NHS Pay Review Body in making our own pay recommendations. Let me pursue an example that he

has just highlighted. When the Prime Minister was on the doorstep of No. 10 Downing Street she wanted to talk about growing the economy, because it is vital for us not to have managed decline, which would be challenging for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Obviously the Prime Minister was already minded to ensure that we had a generous package in respect of energy bills, but one of the tasks that confronted me and on which I worked was ensuring that that was extended to businesses and the NHS, and we have made it happen. One of the biggest concerns with which I was presented when we arrived was the possibility that people's inability to afford energy bills would worsen the situation. I should like to think we have already addressed that, and today I have explained why it is important for us to focus on the ABCD to ensure that patients, too, receive the service that they deserve.

Dame Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I am deeply grateful to my right hon. Friend for her excellent statement. These are issues that are of concern to my constituents, especially the issue of primary care. I welcome my right hon. Friend's approach of not providing prescriptive solutions to some of these problems, but, while ensuring that there is more access to data on waiting times for primary care appointments in particular, will she also consider more carefully whether patients should be allowed to move to a different surgery if they are unable to access such appointments on a timely basis? Otherwise, the data that she is producing will not result in any action for patients themselves.

Dr Coffey: I thank my right hon. Friend, and I agree with her that access to GPs is important. At present, we only publish data at the local NHS level—the integrated care board level—which is why I want to go further in relation to general practices. I know that the Minister responsible for primary care, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), wants to try to make it easier for people to change general practices. Of course, where people already have choice that may be possible now, but, understandably, I want to ensure that that fairly basic standard of provision for patients is a high priority across the country.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The statement from the new Secretary of State contained three paragraphs on care but not a word about care workers' pay. I am gobsmacked, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether the Secretary of State has read the report produced by the Government's own Migration Advisory Committee, which states:

“Persistent underfunding of the care sector...underlies almost all the workforce problems in social care...Higher pay is a prerequisite to attract and retain social care workers”.

Will she come back to the House with a workforce plan for care workers that will finally give them a decent pay packet?

Dr Coffey: As the hon. Lady will know, people access care, or work in the care industry, in different ways. That is why I am keen to continue the national recruitment programme, working with the Department for Work and Pensions. As for the £500 million that I have announced today, the local NHS, working with local trusts and local councils, will clearly be in a better position to decide, in a more differentiated fashion, on

the best way of spending that money through not just buying packages but support for the sector. Let me also remind the hon. Lady that since last year we have changed the universal credit taper rate so that people keep much more of the benefits they may receive. However, I am also conscious of the need for us to continue to try and encourage people to come into the care sector, and that is a joint endeavour.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her new post, and I welcome her statement. I especially welcome the social care discharge fund, but, as she knows, the problems of under-capacity in the care sector, which filter into the whole NHS, are not just a winter crisis but a chronic problem. May I therefore urge her to take seriously a suggestion from the leaders of the care sector—I know it is on her desk at the moment—that something equivalent to the Teach First system should be introduced in social care, so that we can get some of the brightest and best young people to take it up as a career in their early years of work? That would not solve the whole problem by any means, but it would be a significant step towards raising the status of the profession.

Dr Coffey: My right hon. Friend is correct to raise this strategic challenge, which I am confident that the Care Minister my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), will be looking at carefully. Recognising the challenge, the Prime Minister has set out clearly that she wants to see a rebalancing of funding within the health and social care system. I am sure we will make progress on achieving that, informed by how the £500 million fund will be spent and the outcomes it will produce.

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to her place and thank her for the four-page ABCD statement, but there were two letters missing from it: M and H—mental health. She is the fifth Health Secretary in my five years in the House, and in those five years I have seen hundreds of desperate families trying to access mental health services for young people in Kent. It can now take between two and four years to secure even an initial assessment. Many young people are sent out of Kent—to Leeds, Hertfordshire and Manchester—putting an additional strain on families already at breaking point. Please will the new Secretary of State help me and other Kent MPs get at least beds or assessments for our desperate constituents?

Dr Coffey: Of course, the statement and the plan published today build on many of the other activities already under way. For me, it is about setting up priorities on how I think we can best help the majority of people in this country. I am very conscious of the challenges on mental health and provision. I have seen them myself locally as a constituency MP. The Minister responsible for mental health and public health, my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), will be focusing on this important aspect. On the hon. Lady's local situation, I think it is a case of trying to sort a meeting with the integrated care board to address how it will be delivered locally.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I know that my right hon. Friend is committed to reducing the NHS backlog—the B in her plan. Does she agree that it is far

[Maggie Throup]

better for patients and productivity to prevent ill health, and that robust policy to tackle obesity, a condition that is proven to increase the chance of suffering from diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, has an important role to play in addressing the B of her ABCD? Will she commit to focusing on prevention as a key part of her strategy as we move forward?

Dr Coffey: Indeed. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who was successful in being a Health Minister. I am conscious that ABCD has caught the attention of many people because it has aspects of real focus, but prevention is of course at the heart of what we do so that people do not need to turn to the health service at all for treatment. That is why we will continue with aspects of the strategy to make sure that people have better care and that it is both strong and resilient for their physical and mental health.

Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to her new responsibilities, which, as she has pointed out, are very challenging. I agree with her that there are too many dental deserts. She will perhaps be aware of recent BBC research that revealed that one of those dental deserts is the whole of the Liverpool city region, where not one dental practice is taking on new NHS patients. What measures will she be taking—in the short, medium and long term—to address this disgraceful situation?

Dr Coffey: I set out in the plan today what we are seeking to do with dentists. First of all, it is the role of the local NHS—the ICB—to take responsibility for such provision, and I expect it to do so. I alluded to the contract earlier. We have started to make some changes—only very recently, admittedly—whereby, instead of it being more profitable for a dentist to do NHS care only on extraction or cleaning of teeth, rather than the more complicated elements, we need to make sure that more dentists are offering NHS provision. On other dental practice features, we need to make sure that people are using their qualifications to their full extent by undertaking particular procedures. For example, some people might not be full dentists, but they will have trained as technicians and will be able to undertake care of children. There are different levels and we need to continue to go into the detail, but, practice by practice, I am going to have to work with the NHS locally a lot more in order to unveil that opportunity.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Obviously, many colleagues want to contribute, but if we are going to get everybody in, that will require brevity. I call Steve Brine.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I warmly welcome the Secretary of State to her role and wish her all the best. Her predecessor talked about a new cancer agenda. Could she indicate whether that is in the offing, and will it be accompanied by a genuine cancer workforce plan? Will it involve what my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup), the former public health Minister, rightly mentioned about prevention in respect of obesity, the

second biggest cause of cancer in this country, and, obviously, smoking, the biggest preventable cause of death in this country?

Dr Coffey: I thank my hon. Friend. The Prime Minister has said at the Dispatch Box that we will proceed with the cancer plan. I will, of course, be looking carefully at the other plans with my colleagues. Indeed, the Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), has agreed to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) to talk this through further.

Sir Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State and will miss her visits to the Work and Pensions Committee. I welcome her recommitment to the four-hour A&E waiting time target—I think she is right about the importance of that. She mentioned in her statement the forthcoming NHS workforce plan. When does she expect to be able to publish it?

Dr Coffey: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his warm welcome and I will, of course, miss our interaction on DWP issues. As I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), my predecessors committed to publishing the conclusions of the plan. I am still looking into this particular matter, and we still need to finalise and develop it.

Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her two new jobs. That is absolutely excellent. I speak on behalf of South Derbyshire residents. She may not know this, but a seventh of all new houses built in England last year were built in South Derbyshire. Could she please use South Derbyshire as a pilot for rolling out more GP services and more dental services?

Dr Coffey: I thank my hon. Friend and appreciate her warm welcome. The House will be aware that, in effect, GPs and, indeed, dentists are private and independent practitioners. This is important. On primary care, we have already seen reasonably good success with the NHS getting doctors right across the country. I think there is a lot more to be done on dental care.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): This is not a plan; it is an ABC of Conservative failures. GPs are now seeing almost 12% more patients than they were just five years ago; the GP sector is facing a retirement timebomb; and one in five patients can only see a GP for less than five minutes. Patients need to have more fully qualified GPs. The Government set themselves a target of 6,000 by 2024. Have they now just given up?

Dr Coffey: No.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): It is not the fault of successive Conservative Secretaries of State that every time they come forward with a plan, the queues just get longer, the NHS asks for more resources, and more people have to be imported from abroad. The fault is with the system: the last example of collective planning and socialist central control, and ever more targets, like today. It simply does not work. Will the Secretary of State—the Conservative Secretary of State—have an open mind to looking at the social insurance

systems of France, Germany and Italy—[*Interruption.*] Opposition Members can mock but, to be frank, the health outcomes in those countries are far superior to ours. People are fed up with paying all their life and being at the end of the queue. It should not just be the rich who can access private healthcare.

Dr Coffey: I understand why my right hon. Friend makes that point, recognising that many other countries in Europe take that approach. However, that is not the approach we are going to take under this Government.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): My constituents face intolerable delays in A&E, for an appointment, for referral for mental health treatment, or for an ambulance. Those who work in the NHS face plummeting morale, effective pay cuts and staff shortages. The Secretary of State's response is to aspire to a GP waiting time that is seven times longer than Labour actually achieved. Is it not the case that the NHS is not, has not been, and never can be safe in Tory hands?

Dr Coffey: I do not agree with the hon. Lady at all.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State to her place. As she considers her priorities, does she agree that we still need to focus on early intervention? I particularly commend the Start for Life programme, which is designed to help young mothers in family hubs. We should not lose sight of that priority as she tackles the other issues in the NHS.

Dr Coffey: I thank my hon. Friend, including for the work he undertook as a Minister in the Department of Health and Social Care. I am conscious of the importance of that care and would be very happy to meet him, along with my right hon. Friend who contacted me today about that issue, in order to make sure that we provide not just emergency services but, as my hon. Friend rightly points out, some of the clinical care where an extended intervention is needed, to make sure that we get proper care overall.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): For some years now, and at any given time, my local hospital has had the equivalent of around one ward of patients who cannot be discharged because of a lack of social care for them. London has the largest shortfall of care workers of any region in the country. It is September—we are on the edge of winter. How will the Secretary of State's plan ensure that local authorities are able to meet pay and conditions expectations in order to fill that shortfall of care workers and enable our hospitals to concentrate on new patients, as they should?

Dr Coffey: I decided to diagnose, in effect, what is happening care by care, and that is really important. Nevertheless, more generally, I will of course be introducing the £500 million care fund to make sure that that happens.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It may be helpful if I explain that I am trying to call people first in this statement who perhaps did not get in during the last statement.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): North Devon has a more elderly than average population, with very low unemployment. While I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's plan for patients, will she detail how we can recruit for the numerous vacancies we have in dentistry, pharmacy, nursing and social care, especially given the lack of affordable housing available, mostly driven by the surge in holiday lets and second homes.

Dr Coffey: I assure my hon. Friend that she will be hearing from the local NHS in order to make those functions happen.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to her new role. I heard her say earlier that she wants to encourage people to go into social care. Does she appreciate that the main thing discouraging people from going into social care is the very low wages, and that this is a particular issue during a cost of living crisis?

Dr Coffey: That will vary according to the provision that has been in place. I am sure the right hon. Lady will want to be careful and considerate in how she addresses the local NHS in order to tackle the issue of patients who do not need to be in hospital, in order to help them with some of the features that they enjoy.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Does she agree that although we are terribly grateful to people from overseas who are among the very best, kindest and most compassionate of carers, we must ensure that we grow our indigenous workforce, and that to do so, it has to be financially competitive for those people to work in the care sector and a professional career structure must be open to them? If that does not happen, we will not make any inroads into the 13,500 beds that are currently occupied by people who should not be in hospital—who need to be in homely settings in the community—ambulances will continue to queue around the block, and frail elderly people will not get the care they are entitled to.

Dr Coffey: My right hon. Friend is right to consider the issue on a broader scale, but of course, we will be focusing on that with the local NHS. There are certainly some parts of the country where there is not the same provision and discharges are not happening to capacity, while in other parts of the country there are extraordinary amounts. That is what we need to focus on locally.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Yesterday, the County Councils Network produced a statement saying that there is a crisis in social care, which echoed the findings of the Select Committee on Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The Secretary of State's announcement of £500 million is welcome, but all it does is replace the funding stream that was cut in April, and will do exactly the same job. When is she going to recognise the enormous financial gap that councils are facing and the poverty pay that is not attracting care workers into the sector, and actually come forward with a real policy? If she wants the money, why not cancel the cut in corporation tax and use that funding to create real benefits for people in social care?

Dr Coffey: That will work depending on local areas. I am conscious that, as Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Gentleman takes a broadbrush approach, but I think it is important that we have a local NHS to achieve that.

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): I strongly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. It has been great to see how elective surgery hubs around the country are helping to tackle the backlog; however, we are yet to have one in Nottinghamshire. I ask my right hon. Friend to look kindly on Nottinghamshire's bid for a new elective surgery hub. Will she meet me to hear the many merits of its case?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend is right to appreciate those hubs. It is fair to say that we have not responded to that bid, but my Ministers will address it very soon.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to her new role. With nine out of 10 dental practices in England not accepting new NHS patients and over 2,000 dentists having left the NHS in the past year alone, NHS dentistry is in crisis. While today's small changes are welcome, as were the minor tweaks announced back in July, they are underwhelming given the scale of the crisis. When will the Secretary of State complete a full reform of the contract, with prevention at its heart, so that my constituents can access an NHS dentist when they need one?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and I completely agree with her: it is a real problem. We have started making some changes already, but we need to do so in more detail right across the country. My hon. Friend the Minister responsible for dentistry will be looking into that more intensively.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): In Gloucestershire, the inability to discharge people from hospital because of inadequate social care is the primary reason why we have ambulances queuing, so I welcome the adult social care discharge fund that the Secretary of State has announced. Can she set out how that £500 million is going to be allocated, so that Gloucestershire's local NHS will know how much it can expect and can work with Gloucestershire County Council to improve matters for my constituents?

Dr Coffey: My right hon. Friend is correct to raise that question. We are still working on the detail of where that funding will be allocated across the country.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Some 41% of my constituents with a cancer diagnosis are now waiting more than two months for their first treatment. We know that every four weeks that people with a cancer diagnosis wait for treatment means a 10% reduction in their chance of surviving it—this is killing my constituents every single day. There are quick, sustainable fixes that could make a difference, one of which is an up-front investment in radiotherapy now. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me, the all-party parliamentary group for radiotherapy and key clinicians, so that we can help her get to grips with this problem and save my constituents' lives?

Dr Coffey: I thank the hon. Gentleman, whom the primary care Minister will be meeting.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I warmly welcome my constituency neighbour to her new dual role. I am grateful for her statement and, in particular, her commitment to work closely with the independent sector. She will be aware that figures show that as many as one in 10 adults in England have used the private sector in the past 12 months. Does she agree that without that waiting lists would be even higher? Will she therefore consider the reintroduction of tax relief on private medical insurance, which was first introduced by Ken Clarke in 1989 and was scrapped by the Labour party?

Dr Coffey: It is great to see my hon. Friend; our constituencies cross the River Deben. I will look into that matter for him and respond to him.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Secretary of State spoke about the importance of prevention and the impact of the cost of living crisis on health and wellbeing. Will she therefore work with colleagues across government, including those from the Department for Work and Pensions and from local authorities, to maximise the take-up of the Healthy Start scheme, which can address both maternal and child health and wellbeing, and help families with living costs?

Dr Coffey: Of course we will.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, particularly her focus on access to GPs and on tackling ambulance waits, and her recognition of the importance of social care, including with the £500 million discharge fund. Will she also assure me that she will be taking forward our reforms to social care, not only the cap on social care costs, but increasing the scrutiny of care locally, to drive up quality and make sure that care workers are paid fairly?

Dr Coffey: I appreciate the requests from my hon. Friend, and it is important that we get through this. It will be done on a local level. I cannot specifically say when that will be confirmed, but I know that in Kent, in particular, there is a lot of work still to be done.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Two weeks to see your GP—is that a target or joke? I know how many of my constituents will see it. Surely the Health Secretary will understand that we must first address the underlying rampant health inequalities in many of our cities. In that regard, will she lend her support to Bradford's levelling-up bid for £20 million for grassroots, transformational, community-led health centres, which will make sure that we make a real difference to tackling health inequalities in our district?

Dr Coffey: I am not aware specifically about Bradford; we are still at a very early stage of going through that data and analysis. But of course I expect the local health service to work carefully with local GPs to make sure that people who need care receive it.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State meet me and other Members, no doubt including my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler), whose areas face particular difficulties over access to general practice as a result of tens of thousands of new houses having been built, with more coming, without the commensurate increase in general practice capacity?

Dr Coffey: I know that my hon. Friend has been concerned about this issue for some time. As I have set out, GPs are, in effect, independent and we cannot force people to be in a particular part of the country. However, I know that the NHS has been working to target and bring doctors into places where there are not that many other doctors. I know that the primary care Minister will be happy to meet him.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): Anyone marking the Secretary of State's A, B, C, D homework would give her an F—an F for failing—as nothing we have heard today addresses the biggest threat to our NHS: the workforce crisis. The shortage of doctors, nurses and care workers is compromising patient safety and driving morale through the floor. So will she explain why the Government are yet again failing to address that and why she has talked today about volunteers and medics coming out of retirement, as surely the Government should be investing in a proper workforce strategy and also increasing the amount of people going through training?

Dr Coffey: We already are.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I strongly welcome the statement and congratulate the Secretary of State. She will be aware that Princess Alexandra Hospital has among the highest A&E levels per head in England and that we are in the first wave of the new hospital programme. Will she set out the timing of that programme? Will she meet me and my neighbouring MPs, one of whom is the Deputy Speaker in the Chair at the moment, to discuss the hospital programme and set out the timetable, so that the residents of Harlow can be assured about it?

Dr Coffey: I am sure that the Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) would be happy to have a meeting on this occasion and to investigate that. It is important that Ministers get on with the creation of both new diagnostic centres and hospitals. I intend to work on Project Speed to make sure we get these hospitals right across the country under way.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): In the past year, I have witnessed a seven-year-old having to be locked in a classroom because they were a danger to other pupils and heard from the mother of a nine-year-old who hospitalised their sister. They, along with thousands of other children across the country struggling with their mental health, are languishing on waiting lists for months, if not years. So when the Secretary of State says, “this Government will be on your side when you need care the most”,

those words are meaningless to the parents who come to my constituency surgery week in, week out. Will she give them hope, and make the mental health of children and young people a priority for this Government?

Dr Coffey: The Prime Minister set out during the summer that she intends to make sure that there are mental health practitioners available in local GP practices and in schools.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I welcome the Minister's priorities on GP appointments, pharmacies and dentistry, which are important for Islanders. May I make her aware of the specific needs of what her Department calls “unavoidably small hospitals”? We have 12 in England and Wales, covering 20 mainly Conservative constituencies, of which St Mary's is the most isolated. We have done good work on improving funding, but there is more to be done to ensure fairness and equality. So will she or her Ministers meet me and other right hon. and hon. Members to discuss what more can be done to ensure support for these small hospitals, which are so important for our communities?

Dr Coffey: I believe it is in the Isle of Wight where we have a particularly difficult challenge as many patients are still in hospital who do not need to be there. I know we have asked the local NHS to start working with the council on how we can get that discharge going, and I know how important it is to make sure that the hospital can function readily.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): This year, I have been in acute care, as have two members of my family; we were in four great Yorkshire acute hospitals. In many encounters with staff, whom I thank deeply for the work they have done, it was clear that they are universally wonderful but that the system is under stress. They were emphasising to me two basic principles of the NHS. The first was that nobody should make a profit from another person's illness. The second was that the speed of treatment should be directly related to the gravity of the illness and not to the size of someone's wallet. Will the Secretary of State confirm that she stands by those two principles? Finally, when will those staff get a rise?

Dr Coffey: GPs, dentists and pharmacists are all independent contractors, and it is up to them how they best manage and help patients. I am setting clear expectations on that. Furthermore, on pay uplift for people in the NHS, the Government have accepted the independent pay review body recommendation, and that is what we will be doing.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for her excellent statement and her focus on the A, B, C, D. But none of that will be delivered without E—effort. I refer to the effort our vital nurses put in to keeping the NHS rolling, which will be vital in delivering on her plan. Will she join me in thanking them and encouraging them to get behind this plan as soon as possible?

Dr Coffey: I thank my hon. Friend, and I agree. We recognise and accept that, after the pandemic, there are still significant issues to address, and that is why this national endeavour is really important and why we want people to help. That is also why we have extended some of the measures we had during covid for a further two years, so that people can come back more readily to help the NHS. It is important that we strain every sinew to make that happen.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before we proceed, it will be obvious to everyone present that the Secretary of State has now been at the Dispatch Box for an hour—normally, statements run for an hour. I am going to let this one run for a little more than an hour, but I give notice now that not everybody who wishes to speak will have an opportunity to take part. That is simply not practical, so I say two things. First, if you are not very enthusiastic, go now and you will be able to save up your brownie points for tomorrow and the next day. Secondly, the briefer the questions, the more people will get in. I have noticed that the Secretary of State has played the game by giving some very brief answers—thank you.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): I note the Secretary of State's comments about hospital discharge. As she will know, the Government legislated through the Health and Care Act 2022 for a process known as discharge to assess, whereby people's social care needs assessments can take place after they have been discharged from hospital, rather than before, and that model was already being used under the Coronavirus Act 2020. However, when I asked the Government last May what assessment they had made of the number of patients who had been readmitted within 30 days, I was told that they did not hold the data centrally. It is vital that the Government understand the clinical outcome of this policy, so will the Secretary of State please commit to gathering and publishing that data?

Dr Coffey: I hear what the hon. Lady says, but I will not go specifically into more data. I have set out the approach we will take—particularly looking at the local NHS with local councils—to make sure we discharge more effectively.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement today. Healthcare providers in Runnymede and Weybridge tell me that the biggest challenge they face is recruitment and retention. Driving that is the fact that staff are being poached by London. London can offer London weighting, but we face equal, if not sometimes higher, living costs. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the NHS needs more flexibility when setting staff remuneration, and will that form part of the measures she will announce in the upcoming plan on expanding the workforce?

Dr Coffey: I am conscious that there is London weighting, but it is up to the local NHS, including NHS trusts, to make decisions about how they reward people and encourage them to work in their hospitals.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Under the last Labour Government, patients were guaranteed a GP appointment within 48 hours, but when the Conservatives came to power they scrapped that standard. This is all part of the managed decline of our NHS. After 12 years, GP numbers are down, and more than 300 GP practices have closed since 2019 alone, with many of my constituents unable to get a GP appointment when they want one. Does the Secretary of State agree that the 2019 Tory manifesto promise to deliver an extra 50 million GP appointments and over 6,000 more GPs is not worth the paper it is written on?

Dr Coffey: We are actually on track with getting the extra 50 million appointments already.

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): I welcome the statement today. The majority of GPs—75%—now work part time. That is an understandable choice for them, but we need to be honest about the impact it is having on the availability of appointments and the cost of training. Will my right hon. Friend look at what she can do to address the barriers to more GPs working full time?

Dr Coffey: It is a choice for GPs whether they work part time or full time. I am conscious that some of the different things we are doing, including on pension flexibilities, should help, as should diverting people so that they do not have to go to GP appointments but can use pharmacies and other approaches.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): This morning I met the Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Trust regarding its bid for a new hospital in Warrington, which is desperately overdue. Our bid is through to the final stages of the Government's tendering process, but there is concern that timetables are increasingly slipping, putting the bid at risk and driving delays in treatment because the current facilities are not fit to meet the need we have locally, despite the best efforts of our NHS staff. Will the Secretary of State therefore please confirm that the Government still intend to honour the previous Government's plans for new hospitals and that these decisions will be made without further delay?

Dr Coffey: We are still considering all the proposals—the different business cases—that are coming through, and we will respond in due course.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. The NHS in Cornwall faces a unique set of circumstances, because we are a rural peninsula with an ageing population. However, the impact of tourism also means that, in terms of pressure on the NHS, it is always winter in Cornwall. Does the Secretary of State recognise the unique challenges we face in Cornwall? Will she or one of her Ministers meet me and other Cornish MPs at the earliest opportunity to discuss what support we can give the NHS, not just to get through this winter but to get ahead of the summer season next year?

Dr Coffey: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, who has responsibility for secondary care, will be visiting Cornwall to meet the ambulance trust—indeed, he will be meeting trusts more broadly.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Last month, my constituent Alan Suthers phoned 999 at 7 in the evening. His wife had suffered a stroke. He knew the signs—face, arm, speech, time—and the urgency of medical care. That care arrived five hours later, at 1 o'clock in the morning. The Health Secretary can have all the ambitions, expectations and targets she likes, but does she agree that she will not have the human resource to achieve them unless she addresses the workforce strategy and the 132,000 vacancies that currently exist in the NHS?

Dr Coffey: I am sad and concerned to hear about the case the hon. Gentleman has just mentioned—it is unacceptable. However, I have already set out to the House aspects of how to improve ambulance responses, and it is my intention that those will be delivered right across the country.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): I welcome this plan for patients, which recognises the importance of data in the NHS in England. My right hon. Friend will be aware of extreme concern over the state of the NHS in north Wales. Will she therefore affirm her commitment to UK-wide compatible and interoperable data in the NHS and the potential for the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill to bring that about?

Dr Coffey: I thank my hon. Friend, who is a practising GP and who is very committed to his constituents as their MP as well. He will recognise that the NHS in Wales is run by the Labour Government there. However, he is right to point out that it is important that we work across the United Kingdom by sharing information and putting patients first, and we will continue to work to try to make sure that happens.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I was about to draw matters to a close, it being 17 minutes past 2, but I appreciate that those on the Opposition Front Bench might point out that the people for the next debate are not yet present. Therefore, I will extend the statement for a very short while, but I should note that it is not very good practice not to be here.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): As one exasperated constituent put it, having not been able to get a GP appointment,

“It seems there are too many patients and not enough doctors and this has gotten worse over the last few years.”

My constituents can grasp the workforce issue, but it seems that the Secretary of State cannot. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) that it is deeply worrying that the new Secretary of State did not mention the pay of care staff, when that is the crucial issue if we are to tackle the 160,000 vacancies in the care sector. Will the Secretary of State tell me why the Government are choosing not to tackle the shortage of doctors, nurses and care staff, which is leading to such long wait times for my constituents?

Dr Coffey: We are getting more clinicians—doctors and nurses—into the NHS, and I have already shared with the House the approach on care.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): I welcome the greater use of pharmacies to ease pressure on GPs. However, with ongoing treatment, it is essential for patient safety that GPs can see what has been prescribed through the pharmacy module on the GP system. At present, community pharmacists do not have access to it. Will the Secretary of State unlock it?

Dr Coffey: I thank my hon. Friend. Yes, I will ask one of my Ministers to look into that issue.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I welcome the Health and Social Care Secretary to her place. As chair of the all-party parliamentary health group, I have been hearing from people right across the United Kingdom that it is face-to-face appointments with GPs that are really required. Communication by telephone or Zoom is difficult especially in relation to clinically sensitive issues and mental health issues and also for people with autism who find it very difficult to speak through those modes of communication. Can she reassure the House that face-to-face appointments will be a priority going forward?

Dr Coffey: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, but I trust doctors to have that relationship with their patients directly, rather than my prescribing or mandating a particular approach. With greater transparency and the publication of a lot of this data, we will gradually see that happening more and more, but it is important that I do not directly say that x, y or z have to be seen by a doctor. Clinical need should be what matters.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is welcome to hear that D is for dentists. As a constituency neighbour, my right hon. Friend is very much aware that there is a crisis in NHS dentistry in Suffolk. There have been some improvements, and it is welcome, as she has said, that work has started on a new NHS dental contract. Can she confirm that she is committed to root and branch reform, which also includes fair funding, a strategic long-term approach to recruitment and retention, a proper prevention policy and transparent and full local accountability?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend is right. In his constituency—in Lowestoft in particular—there has been increasing provision. Meanwhile, in Leiston, not a single dental practice will take up the opportunity to provide NHS dental care at the moment. I entirely accept that the matter needs sorting. That is why we will be putting the priority on the local NHS to make sure that we avoid these dental deserts. In terms of other aspects of the contract, they will continue to evolve.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I will now draw matters to a close with one last question from Dan Jarvis.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. When someone has cancer, every day is an emergency. Weston Park Cancer Centre in Sheffield does outstanding work, treating patients not just from my region, but from right around the country. I have been grateful to previous Secretaries of State and other Ministers for their engagement on securing the investment needed for the urgent refurbishment of Weston Park. Will the Secretary of State give me an undertaking that, along with her Ministers, she will continue to work with me to do everything that we can to support Weston Park in its important work?

Dr Coffey: I do not have specific details about that matter, but I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State would be happy to follow up on that with the hon. Gentleman. I am very conscious about the impact

[Dr Coffey]

of cancer. That is why, instead of having a 48-hour target, which would predominantly be predicted by emergency diagnosis from GPs, I want that to be a broader target, so that people who are showing symptoms and are concerned about seeing their doctor have that assurance that they will be seeing their GP, so that diagnosis can start as quickly as possible, particularly on issues such as cancer.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Thank you. That concludes the statement.

Point of Order

2.22 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Today's Order Paper specifically stated that the Committee of Privileges' report relating to the opinion of Lord Pannick QC in relation to my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) would be published this morning at 11 am. Mysteriously, that is no longer on the Order Paper. It appears that the report will now not be available until after the House has risen tomorrow. That would mean that there will be no opportunity for Members to raise questions in the House on these serious matters, including the resolution of the House of 19 March 1997, until 11 October.

Given the precedent for Chairs of Select Committees to answer questions on the publication of reports, would it not be in order, and necessary, for the Chair of the Privileges Committee to tell the House what is in the report and that it will be available tomorrow, in good time, before the House rises for the recess?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I am sure the whole House understands his concern and may well share it. As far as the Order Paper is concerned, I am reliably informed that there is in fact an error and that there was not an expectation of the report being published at 11 am today. I am also reliably informed that the report will be published in due course. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has made further points and stated his opinion on the matter, but he will understand that that aspect is not one for the Chair. I am sure that the report will be published in due course.

BILLS PRESENTED

ECONOMIC CRIME AND CORPORATE TRANSPARENCY BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Suella Braverman, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Brandon Lewis, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary James Cleverly, Mr. Secretary Rees-Mogg, Graham Stuart, the Attorney General, Andrew Griffith and Tom Tugendhat, presented a Bill to make provision about economic crime and corporate transparency; to make further provision about companies, limited partnerships and other kinds of corporate entity; and to make provision about the registration of overseas entities.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 154), with explanatory notes (Bill 154-EN).

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE LEVY (REPEAL) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by the Prime Minister, Chris Philp and Richard Fuller, presented a Bill to make provision for and in connection with the repeal of the Health and Social Care Levy Act 2021.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 155), with explanatory notes (Bill 155-EN).

RETAINED EU LAW (REVOCATION AND REFORM) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr. Secretary Rees-Mogg, supported by the Prime Minister, Nadhim Zahawi, Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris, Secretary Alister Jack, Secretary Robert Buckland and the Attorney General, presented a Bill to revoke certain retained EU law; to make provision relating to the interpretation of retained EU law and to its relationship with other law; to make provision relating to powers to modify retained EU law; to enable the restatement, replacement or updating of certain retained EU law; to enable the updating of restatements and replacement provision; to abolish the business impact target; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 156), with explanatory notes (Bill 156-EN).

Business of the House (Today)

2.25 pm

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Peter Bone): I beg to move,

That at today's sitting the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on:

(1) the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the situation in Ukraine not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this order, and

(2) the Motions in the name of Penny Mordaunt relating to (a) Sittings of the House (Friday 23 September), (b) Sittings in Westminster Hall (11 October), (c) Election of Select Committee Chairs (Notice of Election and deadline for nominations), (d) National Security Bill: Programme (No. 2), (e) Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill: Programme (No. 2), (f) Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill: Programme (No. 2), (g) Financial Services and Markets Bill: Programme (No. 2), (h) Business of the House (Private Members' Bills), (i) Ten Minute Rule Motions and (j) Business of the House (Health and Social Care Levy (Repeal) Bill not later than one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the first of those Motions;

such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings on those Motions may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.

This motion provides three hours to debate the situation in Ukraine. It then groups a series of procedural motions to provide time for a debate of up to one hour.

Question put and agreed to.

Ukraine

2.26 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces and Veterans (James Heapey): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the situation in Ukraine.

This is a timely debate. Since my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary last updated the House on 5 September, the Ukrainian army's counter-offensive has made rapid progress along three axes—west, north and east of Kherson. In lightning advances through the eastern region of Kharkiv, the cities of Izyum and Balakliya have been liberated. In the east of Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine has now secured bridgeheads on the east bank of the Oskil river where Russia is attempting to consolidate its defences. Most recently, the Ukrainian authorities report that a village close to the eastern city of Lysychansk has been recaptured. That is a significant achievement as it means that Russia no longer has full control of the Luhansk region—the self-proclaimed “people’s republic”.

So far, Kyiv says that as much 6,000 sq km of territory has been recaptured. Russia's forces withdrew from the region in the face of the Ukrainian advance, while a significant number of troops deserted or surrendered. The withdrawal was anything but orderly, with large quantities of munitions and equipment abandoned. Russian airborne forces have also suffered substantial losses and fear being cut off from the main Russian force. As the Russian army attempts to consolidate on a new defensive line, poor logistics mean that its troops are without food and supplies, morale continues to plummet, and the Kremlin is worried about how to stop widespread desertion.

On day 211 of a five-day operation, none of Russia's initial objectives has been achieved. Its attempt to take Kyiv was thwarted. Its efforts to weaken NATO have backfired. Indeed, with Finland and Sweden joining, as a direct result of Russia's aggression against its neighbours, the alliance has never been stronger. Not only do Russian casualties continue to climb, with an estimated 25,000 Russian dead, but tens of thousands have been injured and tens of thousands more have already deserted. Russia's war machine is now severely depleted, with more than 3,000 armoured and protected vehicles destroyed, more than 400 artillery pieces decimated and scores of fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles downed.

Seven months into this conflict, Russia lacks sufficient manpower in the field to achieve any of its objectives and the mood of Moscow is changing. Voices from across Russian society are speaking out against the military command and making barely veiled criticism of Putin himself. The reality is that Ukraine is winning. That is the context in which we should understand Putin's latest escalation yesterday.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Minister spoke about the mood in Moscow. We saw President Putin's ludicrous recent announcement that he would consider any attack on any areas that he now considered Russian to be an attack that could be met with a nuclear response. Will the Minister reaffirm the conviction of this House that we will not be bullied by President Putin, that the Ukrainians have our complete support and that, if Putin wants to bring an end to this violence, he can do so at any moment—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I think the Minister has got it.

James Heapey: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the nuclear sabre-rattling—that is what it is—is the act of a desperate man who knows that this is not going his way. We will not be deterred from doing what we have done so successfully for the past nine months.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): My right hon. Friend speaks of sabre-rattling. Clearly, there is a great deal of bluff and threat and Putin is trying to break the alliance between Kyiv and the west. Are the Government saying that it is their belief that this is purely bluff?

James Heapey: My hon. Friend, more than anybody in the House perhaps, will know that the Government's exact intelligence assessment is not something to be shared in the House. However, as I said in response to the previous intervention, we believe it is sabre-rattling and that it is designed to drive a wedge into the cohesion of the western alliance and to deter us from supporting Ukraine at the exact moment when Ukrainian troops seem to have the upper hand.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): If I may pursue that a little further, we have always known that Russia sees what we used to call tactical nuclear weapons as war-fighting weapons rather than strategic ones. Although NATO has said it will not be bullied, in truth, NATO is not directly involved in this conflict. What does my right hon. Friend think might happen if Russia were to use one of those weapons as a way of deterring it? What does that do to the alliance's position?

James Heapey: I hope my right hon. Friend will allow me, but I am not going to discuss nuclear doctrine at the Dispatch Box.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): In response to the intervention by the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins) about not being bullied, what discussions are the UK Government having with our American counterparts, who are saying they want a negotiation without specifying what the baseline of the negotiation is? Will we be making it clear that the baseline is that Russia has to get out of all occupied Ukraine as the basis for the negotiation?

James Heapey: I suspect my hon. Friend knows that we speak to our American and Ukrainian counterparts daily at every level, from the military operational level through to heads of Government. The UK and the US are entirely aligned in their view that this ends on President Zelensky's terms; it is for him to define what the end state is. I have heard nothing from Washington to suggest that that is not also their view.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Nevertheless, will my right hon. Friend accept that unless we are going to defeat Russia in classical terms, which is unlikely and undesirable, there has to be an off-ramp to allow Putin to construct a narrative that will go down well among his population and through the media, which of course he controls? It is not acceptable

to say that we cannot offer Putin something out of this that will enable him to save face and get whatever it is through with his population.

James Heapey: I am not sure I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. If Putin were looking for an off-ramp, he has had plenty of opportunities to de-escalate and claim victory at some point along the route. In the 48 hours immediately following a mobilisation of Russian society—a clear escalation—I am certainly not going to stand here representing His Majesty's Government and say that he deserves any further opportunities for an off-ramp, when he has made his decision on what should come next.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Recent shocking reports of war crimes and mass graves discovered in newly liberated areas of Ukraine are further evidence of the appalling conduct of Russian forces and the need to hold them to account. Can the Minister confirm what support our Government are providing to Ukrainian prosecutors and international efforts through the International Criminal Court to document, investigate and prosecute those crimes?

James Heapey: From memory, it is the Canadians who have taken the lead on that internationally, but the Ministry of Justice is engaged in supporting their efforts. Obviously, as we work with the Ukrainians and see evidence of those outrages, through the closeness of our relationship and the way we are sharing information so freely, we are passing the information on outrages, when we find them, to the appropriate international bodies to ensure that they are prosecuted.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

James Heapey: I would like to make some progress if I may, but I will come to the hon. Gentleman later.

Vladimir Putin has been forced to announce a partial mobilisation, breaking his own promise not to mobilise parts of his population. He has brought in amendments to the criminal code, increasing penalties for desertion, surrender and refusal to fight, and he has agreed to imminent sham referendums in Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, effectively annexing those territories.

Russia is unlikely to be able to muster the 300,000 mobilised reservists quickly, let alone deploy them as an effective fighting force. Indeed, Putin's remarks sparked mass panic in Russia yesterday, with one-way flights out of Moscow immediately selling out. Putin is rattled and his tactics transparent. He is implicitly acknowledging his heavy losses and his armed forces' inability to achieve any of their objectives. His false narratives, escalatory rhetoric and nuclear sabre-rattling are all, bluntly, admissions of failure.

It is clear that Putin and his Defence Minister have backed themselves into a corner. They have sent tens of thousands of their own citizens to their deaths, ill-equipped and badly led, and they are now to send hundreds of thousands more—with little training and no winter uniform—into the teeth of the Ukrainian winter against an opponent that is motivated, well equipped and succeeding. Neither Putin's nor Shoigu's lies, threats and propaganda can disguise the truth: Russian conscripts are going to suffer horribly for the Kremlin's hubris.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): A key consideration as Russia mobilises will be atrocity prevention. That will be essential. Will the Minister ask the Prime Minister to make it a matter for the National Security Secretariat and ensure that it is at the very heart of the UK's strategy?

James Heapey: The straight answer is that atrocity prevention has always been at the centre of our strategy, trying to deny the Russians the ability to take Ukrainian territory in order to commit those atrocities. Our priority since Ukrainian territory has been taken is to give the Ukrainians the means to retake that territory as quickly as possible, so that they can get in there and investigate what has been done.

Jim Shannon: I reinforce what the Minister has said, but I also want to outline the human rights issue and all the atrocities taking place in the occupied territory. For instance, 400 Baptist churches have been destroyed and pastors of Baptist churches have gone missing—they have disappeared and we do not know where they are. Families have been displaced and believers have had to move. That is an example of the barbarity and violence of the Russians against churches and against the right to freedom of religious belief.

James Heapey: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right and I know he speaks with real conviction on matters of freedom of religion. It is extraordinary to me, every day that we read of a recaptured town or village, to hear what has been happening, on our continent, in 2022. It is all the motivation we need to maintain course and speed and keep doing what we are doing to support Ukraine so it can retake its territory as quickly as possible.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): As the Kremlin grows more desperate, the disinformation grows more dishonest. What more can we do to ensure that the false narrative the Kremlin is seeking to peddle—namely, the complete dishonesty and fallacy that there are NATO troops in Ukraine—is entirely exposed for the sham that it is?

James Heapey: I think we have been clear throughout that NATO is not an active participant in this conflict. Putin tries to claim daily on Russian television that it is, but in reality, all that NATO has done as an organisation since February is to reinforce its eastern flank to guard against contagion in the conflict. It is purely a false narrative peddled by President Putin to say anything otherwise.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the safe return of the Ukrainian prisoners of war, including the five British nationals?

James Heapey: I absolutely will. I place on the record our enormous gratitude to the Ukrainian Government, for it is they who negotiated that release. We are hugely grateful to them for doing so.

In the face of—

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

James Heappey: I was nearly there. I will give way one last time.

Alicia Kearns: I thank my right hon. Friend for that point about the hostages. However, Paul Urey's family will have found yesterday incredibly difficult because he did not come home alive. Will the Minister please reassure me that the Government are doing all they can to hold Russian proxies to account for Paul Urey's murder—it was exactly that—by a state?

James Heappey: We certainly are doing all we can. If my hon. Friend has any particular concerns, I would be very happy to meet her to discuss them.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

James Heappey: One last time.

Philip Dunne: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way just before he winds up. The Prime Minister reconfirmed earlier this week the United Kingdom's leadership across the western alliance in undertaking that the British Government would maintain their commitment to supporting the Ukrainian Government with both munitions and finance. Before he finishes, is there anything the Minister could add to her statement to elaborate on what that means?

James Heappey: Oh that I were approaching the wind-up of my speech—although I will attempt to accelerate. The detail that my right hon. Friend is hoping for is a few pages away: we will get to it.

In the face of such irresponsible language, we must show our resolve. Ukraine and the international community will never accept the outcomes of those referendums. The UK, alongside the international community, stands united behind Ukraine, and we will continue to do all we can to support it. Russia must be held to account for its illegal invasion and continued crimes against humanity.

As we have already discussed, the evidence of these crimes continues to mount. Within the past week, the Kremlin has fired long-range missiles at Kharkiv and used missiles to strike Pivdenoukrainsk, Ukraine's second largest nuclear power plant. A dam on the Inhulets river at Kryvyi Rih has been attacked for no ostensible military value, and a psychiatric hospital has been fired on, killing patients and medics. In the pine forests of Izyum, we have seen once more appalling evidence of war crimes—as we seem to every time Russian troops are driven out of an area.

So far, the UN has verified that at least 5,916 civilians have died, including, sadly, 379 children. The complete toll is almost certainly higher and millions more have been displaced because of Putin's actions. Meanwhile, Russia's reckless behaviour around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant—the biggest of its kind in Europe—has continued. Currently, all six of the plant's nuclear reactors are offline, and the situation remains precarious despite repair to one of the power plant's power lines, which provides vital electricity to cool the reactors.

Putin's callous actions are having a devastating effect not just inside Ukraine. Russia's weaponisation of Ukrainian grain supply has had global ramifications, undermining food security and causing rising food prices.

The brokering of the Black sea grain initiative between the UN and Turkey—assisted by the UK's diplomatic efforts—is now having an impact. To date, some 165 ships bound for Europe, the middle east, Africa and Asia have left Ukrainian ports, carrying around 3.7 million tonnes of food.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

James Heappey: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will make progress just so that I do not test Madam Deputy Speaker's patience.

That has in turn precipitated a drop in global food prices, but it is essential that the current deal is extended beyond its initial 120 days and that Russia does not renege on that agreement. Unsurprisingly, food security is high on the agenda as world leaders meet at the United Nations General Assembly in New York this week. Russian aggression is causing hundreds of millions of people in the global south to go hungry, or even starve. Putin must answer for that.

The destructive effects of Putin's war underline why it is essential that it ends on President Zelensky's terms, and why the UK must maintain its unstinting support. The UK is proud to have been the first European country to provide weapons to Ukraine, and proud of our efforts to help it to defend itself from land, sea and air. To enable our Ukrainian friends to better protect themselves against Putin's brutal use of long-range artillery, we have sent them the multiple-launch rocket system with hundreds of missiles, which can strike targets up to 80 km away with pinpoint accuracy. These continue to have a major impact on the battlefield. I place on the record the UK's thanks to Norway, which donated three platforms to the UK, enabling us to send more of our own platforms to Ukraine.

To date, we have also gifted more than 10,000 anti-tank missiles, almost 200 armoured vehicles, 2,600 anti-structure munitions, almost 100,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, nearly 3 million rounds of small arms ammunition, 28 M109 155 mm self-propelled guns, 36 L119 105mm light artillery guns and ammunition, 4.5 tonnes of plastic explosives, maritime Brimstone missiles, six Stormer air defence armoured fighting vehicles fitted with Starstreak anti-air missiles and hundreds of missiles, and thousands of integrated air defence systems, uncrewed systems and innovative new electronic warfare equipment. We have also deployed a British Army squadron with Challenger 2 tanks to Poland to backfill for the T-72 tanks that Poland has donated to Ukraine.

The funding package that we announced on 30 June is being used to deliver further matériel, including more than 100 logistics support vehicles, more armoured fighting vehicles, a further 600 short range air defence missiles, an additional 30,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, more integrated air defence systems, uncrewed systems and innovative new electronic warfare equipment, and more than 20,000 sets of winter clothing. In all, the UK has spent £2.3 billion, and is the second largest donor in the world.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I thank the Minister for giving way. I think there is strong cross-party support for the assistance that the British Government have given. The Ukrainians themselves say

that they want longer-range missiles and more tanks, particularly from Germany. What is the Government's position on that, and what are they doing to encourage other countries to respond positively to those requests?

James Heapey: I speak to my Ukrainian counterpart each week—often numerous times a week—as does the Secretary of State. At the military level, we are speaking all the time. We have a good understanding of what the Ukrainians need, and in reality, it is all those things. There is a sort of baseline of ammunition to keep them in the fight tomorrow, the day after and the day after that. Then there are the things they need to build a force capable of retaking territory. We are working on delivering it all, not just by ourselves but with our partners around Europe. Ukraine will continue to get all the support that it needs as it seeks to mount a counter-offensive this autumn and beyond.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): It is very important to the war effort in Ukraine that Ukrainian culture is seen and appreciated in the UK. Earlier this year, I raised with the previous Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), the support needed to allow musicians from Ukraine, such as the Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra, to perform at the BBC Proms. That performance by the musicians who had fled the war in Ukraine was made possible by a visa fee waiver and support with visa processing. As there is now uncertainty, will the Minister discuss the issue with the Home Secretary so that she can confirm that that essential support will be extended to other Ukrainians who are looking to enter and perform in the UK?

James Heapey: I am grateful to have been asked to speak to the Home Secretary, because although I have some expertise on where in the world 152 mm ammunition is manufactured, that is something I had not heard of. I will speak to the Home Secretary and come back to the hon. Lady as quickly as I can.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): We all warmly support the effective military support that this country is giving to Ukraine, but is the Minister addressing the obvious depleting of our own reserves of available missiles?

James Heapey: We absolutely are. Under the previous Prime Minister and under the current one, the Treasury was given very clear instructions, which it has been delighted to follow, to replace everything that we give on a new-for-old deal. We are grateful to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for agreeing to that.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Providing the cash is very welcome and necessary, but is there not a fundamental problem with equipment manufacture and particularly supply chain vulnerabilities, which do not just apply to the UK? What steps is the Department taking to mobilise the defence industry and its supply chain to ensure that those obstacles are overcome, and rapidly, for our supply as well as Ukraine's?

James Heapey: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and he is expert in these matters. It is certainly the case that countries have depleted their own stockpiles to support Ukraine, and as a result of a profoundly changed

global security situation, everybody has committed more money to defence. Although that is great news for the defence industry in the medium term, it brings with it more demand than current manufacturing capacity can supply. The former Minister for Defence Procurement, my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin)—sadly, he left the Ministry of Defence in the latest reshuffle, but he has been brilliantly replaced by the new one, my right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke)—worked hard to make sure that that new manufacturing capacity is brought online as quickly as possible.

Training is as important as military hardware. Here, too, the UK has been in the vanguard, busily establishing a network of camps to train 10,000 Ukrainians. This has been accompanied by specialist armed training across a number of countries in Europe. To date, we have trained more than 4,700 troops from the armed forces of Ukraine in the UK, and our units are being joined by forces from Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Lithuania, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway and New Zealand. Our training offer is already making a difference to Ukraine's combat effectiveness, and it will continue for as long as Ukraine wishes.

Ukraine has proven its capability not just to halt the invasion but to roll the Russians back. Those who contended that the support provided by the UK and our international partners was futile have been proven wrong, but Ukraine now needs more support to get through the winter, to push home its position of advantage and to recover its territorial integrity. That means helping Ukraine to replenish its stockpiles of equipment and ammunition as well as service its existing kit. It means helping Ukraine to plug its capability gap and refurbish the equipment captured in recent offensives. It also means making sure that as temperatures plummet to minus 20° and below, Ukrainian soldiers remain warm, well fed and motivated while Russian soldiers freeze without any concern from their leaders in the Kremlin.

At the beginning of August, at the invitation of the Danish Government, the Secretary of State co-chaired a conference to discuss further support for Ukraine on training, equipment and funding. At that conference, the Defence Secretary announced that the UK would establish an international fund for Ukraine to ensure the continued supply of essential military support throughout 2023. Last week, partner nations met again to reaffirm our commitment to supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes, and to maintaining momentum on planning and co-ordinating our continued support to Ukraine throughout the next year.

In addition, the Prime Minister, speaking at the UN General Assembly, has pledged that this Government will match or exceed the £2.3 billion of support that the UK has given to Ukraine since February. This further cements our leadership internationally and our resolve to stand behind Ukraine as it retakes sovereign territory currently occupied by the Russians.

It is vital that we maintain our momentum in support of Ukraine. There will inevitably be those who, given the rising impacts of Putin's weaponisation of energy, argue that we should seek to normalise relations with the Kremlin on Putin's terms and return everything to the way it was, but we must be honest with the public. We cannot succumb to Putin's scaremongering and threats of blackmail. This Government are doing everything they can do address the energy crisis, and on Wednesday

[James Heapey]

my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary brought forward an unprecedented package of measures to address those issues.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend make it very clear that however this war ends, Putin and his henchmen who are responsible for it can never escape from the sanctions imposed on them personally, and those responsible for war crimes will be held accountable for their actions?

James Heapey: On the last point, I can certainly confirm to my right hon. Friend that there is every intention to make sure that people are held fully to account for the outrages that they committed or that were committed in their name. On his former point about the ongoing imposition of sanctions against those who were involved, I know that colleagues from the Foreign Office and the Treasury will be keen to make sure that that is absolutely the case.

What we cannot do is turn back the clock. The consequences of appeasing Putin would be catastrophic not just for Ukraine, but for security in the Euratlantic as a whole. Russia would continue to threaten the prosperity of the UK and its allies, and indeed the entire rules-based international system.

We should not assume that Putin's ambitions would stop at Ukraine. If we fail to maintain western resolve, Putin could seek to expand his ambitions beyond Ukraine and into NATO territory in the Baltics or against our other partners. An emboldened Russia would also mean an emboldened President Xi in China. In other words, relaxing our resolve would make the next 20 years on our planet far more uncomfortable, dangerous and expensive.

It is therefore to the enormous credit of the British public that in the face of significant personal financial challenge, they continue to overwhelmingly support the Ukrainian war effort. Their support sends a more powerful message to Putin than anything I, or any other Minister, could say from the Dispatch Box. Let us make no mistake: His Majesty's Government will not falter and Putin's latest pronouncements will not change our course. We will continue to stand up for and with Ukraine for as long as it takes. We will continue to provide the Ukrainian people with all the support they need to rid their land of the Russian occupiers.

2.55 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I start by welcoming the wonderful news of the release of British prisoners of war overnight. It is welcome that they are returning home, but we recognise the pain and hurt of all the families involved, because not everyone is returning safely.

I also welcome the Minister's new job in the Cabinet. Before the last reshuffle, the shadow Front Bench team said to the Front Bench team that we were hoping that he and the Defence Secretary would stay in their positions, and they have. I also welcome the new Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton), to her place.

Seven months on from Russia's criminal invasion of Ukraine, we have reached a new and critical phase of the ongoing conflict. We should all be inspired by the

remarkable resilience of the people of Ukraine, who have refused to bow to Russia's oppression. I recognise the extraordinary Ukrainian counter-offensives that have taken place in recent weeks, which the Minister set out in such detail.

Our argument has never been with the Russian people but with the dictator in the Kremlin. Overnight, we have seen brave Russian civilians stand up to the authoritarian state that curbs their freedom, restricts their voice and keeps the people in poverty while the oligarchs count their yachts and villas. Today, possibly thousands of Russian civilians are in jail, arrested simply for exercising their human right to protest. As we have stood with the Ukrainian people against aggression, I make special mention in the House of the courage of those protesters.

The horrors of war that we have seen in the newly liberated areas remind us of the atrocities and the pain that many Ukrainians have suffered in the past weeks. I join the Minister in setting out a clear determination that those responsible must be prosecuted and brought to justice for the hideous war crimes that we are seeing unfolding.

Dr Murrison: It is welcome news that a load of generals and colonels have been sanctioned and placed in The Hague's waiting room, as it were, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need to go much further down the food chain than that? Each and every one of the individuals involved in those atrocities needs to have their card marked. They have dishonoured the profession of bearing arms and need to be dealt with sooner or later.

Luke Pollard: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Anyone who perpetrates war crimes against civilians must know that, in the 21st century, they will be prosecuted and followed in the pursuit of justice from the day they commit that atrocity to the day they die. We must not leave any space, justification or excuse for war crimes—at all, anywhere, ever. That is a message that will be sent from hon. Members on both sides of the House to those people, regardless of rank, who have persecuted civilians and committed war crimes against them.

Alicia Kearns: One of my grave concerns is the prosecution of sexual violence in conflict. The issue is that, often, we cannot get the evidence, because by the time the prosecution has come—once the shame has been allowed to pass and there has been discussion—it is too late to collect that evidence. I would welcome the hon. Gentleman's thoughts on a special tribunal formed to collect evidence and prosecute sexual crimes to ensure that, in all conflicts, evidence is collected at the start to ensure prosecutions at a later stage.

Luke Pollard: I am grateful for that intervention. The shadow Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), and I were in Kosovo only a few months ago, where we witnessed the effects of the horrible sexual violence that was used as a weapon of war. The determination of the international community then was that it would never be repeated, but it has been in conflicts ever since. We need to make sure that not only is the evidence collected, but the victims are given the support that they will need,

in many cases, for the rest of their lives. As we made it clear that killing civilians will not be countenanced, so we make it clear that using rape and sexual assault as a weapon of war will not be countenanced. We will come after those people as well.

Bob Seely: In the Syrian war, the Russians and their Syrian allies targeted hospitals as primary targets. Does the hon. Member agree it is regrettable that at the time we did not say and do more and that the international community did not say and do more to hold responsible those senior army officers who were responsible for the deliberate targeting of hospitals, which is one of the most basic breaches of the Geneva conventions?

Luke Pollard: I am grateful for the hon. Member's intervention, and I do tend to agree with him. As a country, we need to take stock of the freedom that Putin has been given over many years—not just in Syria or parts of the countries bordering his country, but in Crimea—because the tactics the Russians are using in Ukraine now have been perfected over many years and the space the international community has given him to do that has encouraged the use of many of those tactics. We need to look carefully at how we stand up for such individuals in the future, but we will do that by standing firmly with the people of Ukraine at this time. I will make some progress before I give way again.

It is clear that Vladimir Putin is a bully. His partial mobilisation announcements along with his sham referendums to illegally annex large swathes of Ukraine are shameless. They are a cynical attempt to justify a war that has gone badly wrong for Russia. We should view partial mobilisation as weakness—an attempt to hide the fact that, so far, Russian strategy has failed, weapons have failed, command and control has failed, and none of Russia's war objectives has been met. Putin's latest miscalculation will lead to more Russian families losing their sons, more Ukrainians being killed and more suffering. The mobilised forces sent to Ukraine will be on the receiving end of high-end western weaponry, and a determined and morally just Ukrainian military defending every inch of its country. In these circumstances, with the poorly equipped Russian conscripts facing cold weather, it is perhaps not surprising that we are seeing so many reports of desertion and troops being unwilling to fight. That means Putin will, I regret, resort to more and more fear to try to achieve his objectives.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I think the cross-party support we are hearing today for Ukraine and for the victims of murder and sexual violence sends a very powerful message. Does the hon. Member agree that the next challenge, even though it feels early to be thinking this yet, is to be preparing to win the peace? Quite often in the past, when we have left military successes—Iraq would be the outstanding example—we have not laid strong foundations to win the peace. Does he agree that we could use our soft power and places such as Wilton Park to hold conferences with the Ukrainians about what sort of democracy and peace we can help them create after this is all over.

Luke Pollard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I agree with him that our commitment to the people of Ukraine has to be long term—ensuring not only that they win and Putin fails, but that they can

rebuild a nation that is proudly sovereign, proudly independent, safe and secure, and able to stand tall on the international stage, which is precisely what Vladimir Putin would fear the most. That is what our commitment must be, and I share the hon. Gentleman's view that that commitment and determination is cross-party—from every single party in this place.

The actions and rhetoric we are seeing from Vladimir Putin are not new, sadly. I agree with the Minister when he says that Putin's words on the use of nuclear weapons is sabre rattling, and it is a weakness of his argument that he is resorting to it. These are the actions of a desperate man clinging to power at the helm of a pariah state. His threats should not only be condemned by every party in our Parliament, as they are, but by every country—every peace-loving country—on this planet. His actions show how desperate he is, how weak he is and how much he has miscalculated, and those actions show that he must fail.

We must not downplay the seriousness of the situation. People at home and abroad, having heard those words, are understandably worried about the gravity of the threats that have been made by Russia. In this House, however, we must be careful not to fan the flames of Putin's information war of fake news. I think I speak for everyone in this place when I say that now is not the time for the UK to weaken or dilute our resolve for Ukraine, but to remember that at heart Putin is a bully and the only way of standing up to a bully is by making sure that we do so firmly and determinedly, and that such a commitment is long lasting.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I completely agree with what my hon. Friend is saying about Ukraine now, but we could have been saying it back in 2014. One problem is that we did not take this issue seriously enough in 2014, because that emboldened Putin and now we see what we see. I worry that sometimes we focus exclusively on things that Putin says about nuclear weapons, and not enough on the warfare in which he has already engaged with this country through cyber, targeting many Members of the House and the political establishment. Do we need to do far more to ensure that we are protecting ourselves?

Luke Pollard: I agree with my hon. Friend. His has been a siren voice that has been warning this House and the public about Putin's actions for a great many years, and we must ensure that those lessons are learned. Putin has been telling the international community what he wants to do for many years, and he has been engaging in economic warfare, cyber-warfare, disinformation and political interference for many years. We need to strengthen all our fronts if we are to deter that type of behaviour, not only from Russia but from other states that wish to do us harm in the future.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): To follow on from the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) was with me in Kosovo a couple of months ago where we heard about a Russian disinformation, misinformation, and hacking centre that employs thousands of personnel in Serbia. Do we also need to take this fight to third countries that are facilitating Russian misinformation, disinformation and hacking, including in Ukraine, the Balkans, the Baltic states and around the world?

Luke Pollard: My hon. Friend is right. The cyber-campaigns against the west and against freedom and democracy are not contained only to bot factories in St Petersburg; they are deliberately being deployed around the world through, in many cases attempts of deniable cyber-warfare. We know that is coming, and we must ensure that we strengthen our own defences—political, military, economic and cyber—against that. At this very moment there are probably enormous numbers of posts on social media feeds across Britain that are seeking to spread misinformation. We must be alive to the reasons why they are there, to why Russia is investing in that capability, to what effect they are seeking to create in our society, and we must counter that. That is a job not only for ourselves, but we must also support our allies in doing so.

We need a long-term joined-up strategy. We know that despite Putin's strategic miscalculation, Russian aggression will continue. The Government have had Labour's full backing to provide military support to Ukrainian troops, and they will continue to have that. We welcome the new Prime Minister's confirmation that this year's military funding for Ukraine will, as a minimum, be matched over the next year. However, we now need to set out a clear strategy for what military, economic and diplomatic support for Ukraine will be. In summer the Government said that they would set out a roadmap for that, and I would be grateful if, when he responds to the debate, the Minister said when he expects that to be published.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one important aspect of that is that a great many other eastern European countries and former Soviet states along the Russian border have been carefully watching what happens in Ukraine with some trepidation? It is as important to have a long-term strategy for Ukraine as it is to reassure those countries of NATO's commitment to their future.

Luke Pollard: I agree with the hon. Lady. Our commitment to our allies in eastern Europe must be concrete and long-term, and we must also consider the tactics and strategies used by Russia in Ukraine to update how we plan to defend and deter any aggression. We have seen with the development of pinpoint accuracy artillery fire and loitering munitions that some of the tactics we once thought we would deploy may need to be updated to ensure that we can deter any threat and, if a threat moves to actual military conflict, that we can win in those circumstances. I am grateful for the hon. Lady's intervention.

The strategy that I hope the Minister will outline should set up long-term, politically broad support for Ukraine in the future, because only a long-term strategy will reassure the Ukrainians, and also the British people, that we will stand unwaveringly with their country. It will also send a clear, unmistakable message to the Kremlin that Britain will continue to stand with Ukraine and our NATO allies for as long as it takes to see off Russian aggression, not just in Ukraine, but in the Baltic states, in Bosnia and Kosovo, in the Mediterranean and the middle east, in the north Atlantic and the high north, and on social media as well.

That means that we need to look at the Prime Minister's announcement in updating the integrated review. The Prime Minister's commitment to match the funding for

military assistance to Ukraine next year is welcome, but we are yet to see the action plan that will give us the detail. We need to see that in the context of the UK's wider defence arrangements. A few weeks ago, the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Defence Secretary visited the British Army's outstanding training program for Ukrainian forces, meeting the brave Ukrainian troops who are by now on the frontline, fighting in the Donbas, having been armed with British skill on that training program. This is a vital training program for the Ukrainians, which should be expanded and extended throughout next year and beyond, if the Ukrainians need it, and should also include cold weather training.

This week the Prime Minister also confirmed that the Government will update the integrated review of foreign and defence policy in response to the ongoing situation in Ukraine. I welcome this U-turn, which is good news. While Labour has been arguing for months for the need to update our defence plans, 20 of our NATO allies have already rebooted their defence plans and their spending since the invasion of Ukraine started in February. The decision that has now been taken should have been based on national security, not the Conservative leadership contest, but it is a welcome U-turn. Labour is ready to contribute and happy to support the Government in making sure that the next integrated review corrects the mistakes of the current one. However, if we want to pursue the persistent global engagement that was so present in the last integrated review, we must not cut 10,000 troops from our Army, and should look again at scrapping Hercules military transport planes, the plans to cut 10% of the reserves and our failure to have a war-fighting division able to be contributed to NATO until 2030.

An updated integrated review must also make British industry and our peacetime defence procurement systems a major priority. We cannot support Ukraine in the long term or ensure our own UK security when, on day 211 of this conflict, the MOD has still not proved capable of signing the contract to produce replacement stocks for the highly valued NLAW—next generation light anti-tank weapon—missiles that the Ukrainians are using to defend against the Russians. I would be grateful if, in summing up, the Minister set out when the Government expect that contract to be signed and when those missiles will be delivered, because depleting our stockpile is not a good strategic answer.

Wayne David: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Does he also agree that it is essential that, at this crucial time especially, the Government do not make snide remarks about our European partners? It is very important to have the maximum unity in opposing what Russia is doing in Ukraine.

Luke Pollard: Rebuilding our European relations is a key part of making any integrated foreign policy review work. Those of us on the Opposition Benches can say very clearly that our friends across the channel are our friends. They are not our foes—there is not a question mark about it—and we stand with them in the face of Russian aggression. This is not a political game to be played. When the Kremlin can find division between the allies of the west, it will exploit it. We must stand firmly with our allies against this.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the armed forces' incredible contribution on display last week during the late Queen's state funeral. As a Plymouth MP, I am

especially proud of the contribution of forces based across the south-west of England. I would like to put on record Labour's thanks for the armed forces' steadfast dedication to our country. They really have shown the best of Britain, and we are incredibly grateful for the part they played and continue to play in supporting Ukraine against Russian oppression. It was an honour to meet today, on a cross-party basis, some of the pallbearers who carried the Queen's coffin.

Finally, on the Labour Benches, we are taught, as part of the trade union movement, that unity is strength—that we stand together and we are not divided. I say to the Minister that this is now a cross-party sentiment in this place, because it is the strength of Westminster when the party that I represent, the party now in government and every other party stand together in the face of such aggression, and we will continue to do so until Ukraine is free.

3.14 pm

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): It is now seven months since Vladimir Putin launched his vile, illegal and unprovoked war against an innocent European country. In those seven months, his actions have cost almost as many Russian casualties as were sustained in the whole 10-year Russian invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. If he continues at this rate, it will not be that long before Russian losses in Ukraine exceed American losses in the 20-year Vietnam conflict. And that is before we have counted the Ukrainian losses in the past seven months and the catastrophic suffering that Putin has inflicted on those people: the torture, systematic rape, mass murder and deliberate targeting time after time of apartment blocks, schools, kindergartens and hospitals.

In all those seven months of horror that this modern Moloch has personally unleashed, he has not attained a single one of his objectives in a war that, let us not forget, was meant to be over in days. He has not overturned the Ukrainian Government or captured the capital city. He has not even secured the Donbas—far from it. Instead of coming to terms with the reality of his mistake—I mean his complete misunderstanding of what Ukraine is and what really motivates Ukrainians, which is a simple love of their country—he has decided to double down on disaster. He announced the mobilisation of 300,000 more young Russians, a move that has caused such panic among people about to be fed into the meat grinder of Putin's warzone that yesterday, in a single day, the price of a one-way air ticket from Moscow to South Africa went up to \$50,000.

Those potential conscripts can see that what began as a war to rebuild the Soviet empire has collapsed into a shameful war to save Putin's face. They have no desire to be sacrificed on the altar of his ego. At the same time, as Members from both Front Benches have pointed out, he is threatening to hold sham referendums in the territories he has occupied and then to defend those territories with every weapon, as he says, in his arsenal, in words that he hopes will make our flesh creep and weaken our resolve. He will fail in that pitiful bluster, because he can see and we can see that he is escalating his rhetoric not because he is strong, as has been said, but because he is weak. He is transparently a problem gambler who takes more risks not because he is winning but because he is now terrified of losing.

Chris Bryant: Putin did exactly the same, of course, in 2014. He held a fake referendum in Crimea and, unfortunately, the will of the west weakened. How do we make sure that people such as Orbán in Hungary and those who are preaching disinformation in Italy do not win the day and that we maintain the united strength of the west?

Boris Johnson: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his point and I will come directly to what happened in 2014 in just a minute. He should not underestimate the continued unity of the west. That is one of the signal achievements of Vladimir Putin in the past seven months: he has seen a more coherent and unified western alliance, and a stronger NATO perhaps, than at any time in the last 20 years.

Dr Luke Evans: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Boris Johnson: If I may, I will just make some progress, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you wanted me to keep within 10 minutes. I will do my best.

Thanks to the heroism of the Ukrainian armed forces, thanks in part to the weapons we are proud to be offering—I congratulate the Minister for the Armed Forces and Veterans, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heappey) on his description of the work of the UK armed forces and the huge list of weapons we are sending—and thanks, too, to the inspirational leadership of Volodymyr Zelensky, the Russian forces have, in recent days, been expelled from large parts of the north-east of the country around Kharkiv. They are under increasing pressure in Kherson in the south. I have no doubt whatever that the Ukrainians will win, because in the end they have the inestimable moral and psychological advantage of fighting for their country in their country against an enemy that is increasingly demoralised and confused about what they are meant to be doing in that country and what they can hope to achieve.

At this turning point in the war, it is more vital than ever that we have the strategic patience to hold our nerve and ensure that Ukrainians succeed in recapturing their territory right to the borders of 24 February and, if possible, to the pre-2014 boundaries, because that is what international law demands. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is correct: it was our collective failure to insist on upholding international law eight years ago that emboldened Putin to launch his disastrous invasion this year.

If Putin is going to double down on his aggression, we must double down in our defence of the Ukrainians, and we must be prepared to give more military assistance and more economic support, so I welcome warmly the announcements from the Government this week. We must work with our friends and partners, as well as the Ukrainians, to ensure that we provide that country with the long-term assurance they need on their security and defence that we have failed so far to provide in the 31 years since independence.

If anyone has proved the absolute necessity of those guarantees, it is Vladimir Putin and his war. We must close our ears in the months ahead to the absolute rubbish he talks. This is not some nuclear stand-off between NATO and Russia, as he seemed to pretend yesterday; this is a war of aggression by Russia against an innocent neighbour. We are helping with equipment and training, as we might help a neighbour to fight a

[*Boris Johnson*]

fire when their house has been attacked by an arsonist. NATO is not engaged in a war against Russia. We are not engaged in a war against Russia, let alone against the Russian people.

By the way, we are not concerned here with regime change in Moscow, as Vladimir Putin egocentrically likes to claim. Whatever politics may hold for Putin may be the subject of an interesting debate, but that is not the issue at stake. There is only one objective: the sovereignty, independence and freedom of the people of Ukraine. That is our objective and we must acknowledge that the months ahead will be tough for Ukraine, Britain and the world.

For all the latest Ukrainian successes, Putin is still the possessor of almost 20% of Ukrainian territory and it may well be time-consuming and costly to winkle him out. I have no doubt that in the hard winter months ahead, with the price of energy continuing to inflict hardship on people in this country and around the world, there will continue to be some who draw the false conclusion that the Ukrainians must be encouraged to do a deal, to trade land for peace, to allow Russian gas to flow to Europe. Even if it were politically possible for Volodymyr Zelensky or any Ukrainian Government to do such a deal—which I very much doubt—there is absolutely no sign that Putin either wants such a compromise or can be trusted to deliver it, because he would continue to remain in position and could invade that country in the future.

As I have told the House many times before, any such deal or compromise would send a signal around the world that violence does pay off, that might is right and that when the going gets tough, the great democracies will not have the stomach to stick up for freedom. That is why we have absolutely no choice but to stay the course and to stay resolute. We should be confident because, with every week that goes by, our position gets stronger and Putin's position gets weaker.

Although times are tough for families now, we should be in no doubt that this country has the economic muscle not just to help people with the costs of energy caused by Putin's war, but to provide the long-term resilience of a secure and independent UK supply—including more nuclear, much more wind in the transitional period and more of our own hydrocarbons—to ensure that we are never again vulnerable to Putin's energy blackmail.

It is a measure of Vladimir Putin's giant strategic failure that he has not only united the west against him—the strength of that unity is remarkable, and by the way he has encouraged two hitherto neutral countries, Sweden and Finland, to join the NATO alliance, which would have been unthinkable a year ago—but decisively alienated his most valuable western customers from his most important Russian exports, oil and gas, with incalculable consequences for his people's economic future.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Further to the right hon. Gentleman's point about economic resilience, does he think that enough was done during his time as Mayor of London, and indeed during his time in this place, to deal with the issue that London has become a laundromat for dirty Russian money? Does he think that there are lessons to be learned from that period that he can share with the House?

Boris Johnson: I think the whole House will agree that since the invasion on 24 February the UK has led the world in imposing sanctions on Russia and in mobilising diplomatic, political and military support for the Ukrainians. I think that most impartial observers around the world—and I meet a lot of them—believe that if it had not been for the actions of the UK Government, things might have been different. I am delighted to see this Administration continuing with the commitments that we began; the financial commitments in particular are extremely important.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Boris Johnson: I am just about to conclude.

If it were not for Putin's inability to see what is really happening—if he were not locked, as it were, in a windowless dungeon surrounded by bodyguards, spies and sycophants in a sort of Lubyanka of the mind—he would see the tragedy that he has unleashed. He would withdraw from Ukraine before he is pushed out—and he is going to be pushed out.

In the past seven months, the sufferings of Ukraine have moved the world; I know that they have moved everybody in this House and in this country. We grieve for the people of Ukraine, and we open our hearts to them as few other countries have done. We know that, thanks to their bravery and sacrifice, their day of freedom is coming. When that day comes, we will rejoice with Ukraine, and that rejoicing will echo around the world. Until that day comes, I am sure that this House and this country will stand in unshakeable support for the people of Ukraine.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. It will be obvious to the House that a great many hon. Members wish to speak, but we have only two hours left. There will therefore be an immediate time limit of five minutes for Back-Bench speakers—but not, of course, for the spokesman for the SNP, Mr Stewart McDonald.

3.28 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I nodded along in agreement with much of what the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) said. I think it fair to say that when the February invasion took place, he and his Government, particularly the Defence Ministers on the Front Bench today, got the calls on Ukraine right. It is important to acknowledge that. Based on his remarks, I think he will do well in his new role as my warm-up act here in the Chamber.

I pay tribute to the new Under-Secretary of State for Defence—the hon. Member for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton), who is not in her place right now—and congratulate those colleagues who have managed to stay in position amid the many changes. I also wish the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) well as the new Minister for Security. He was formerly the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, of which I am a member; I think we will be in for various auditions for his replacement as this afternoon's debate goes on.

Before I come to the crux of my remarks, I should also draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

It was a pleasure, just two weeks ago, to be back in Ukraine and back in Kyiv—with some colleagues who I hope we shall hear from this afternoon—a country and a city that I have come to know and love over a few years now. On this occasion I was there to attend the annual YES—Yalta European Strategy—conference, which brings together civil society, political leaders, military leaders, academics, and others from around Europe to discuss Ukrainian and European security. There were many facets to the fascinating set of discussions that we had during the two days that our delegation spent there. It was also a real pleasure to meet members of Ukraine's armed forces—who have so heroically not just fought for their country, but fought for what we all stand for and have cherished since 1945—and of course, the man himself, President Volodymyr Zelensky, who, as the former Prime Minister said, embodies everything that is noble in Europe right now.

Here we are, seven months on from this wave of a war that started in 2014, in which we have witnessed a level of barbarism and butchery that few of us could have imagined. Hospitals, schools and people's homes have been the targets. We have seen, in Bucha and also more recently, evidence of some of the most heinous war crimes imaginable.

Wera Hobhouse: I did not have the opportunity to ask the former Prime Minister about his commitment to treating sexual crimes as war crimes. Can we all, on both sides of the House—including the hon. Gentleman—come together in viewing sexual violence as a war crime like any other?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Yes, I think we can come together and agree on that. I am sure that other colleagues will want to discuss it in great detail.

So here we are, seven months on from this invasion, and—as was mentioned by the former Prime Minister—much in the world has changed. Sweden and Finland have joined NATO, unity among western countries is something like never before, and, indeed, unity in this House is something like never before. In fact, we may have been only partly joking with our Ukrainian counterparts, during a recent visit, in saying that supporting Ukraine might well be the only issue that unites this House. Given the noises coming from the new Government, I suspect that that will be even more the case, but it is important for that unity to be maintained and developed in support of Ukraine.

Back in February the German Federal Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, told us that not just his country but all of Europe was at a turning point: a *Zeitenwende*, as they say in Germany. Seven months on, however, it seems to me less like a turning point and more like Gramsci's interregnum, in which the old is dying but the new cannot yet be born. At the moment, we are in a messy flux. While I think that the unity of purpose that we have is serving us well to get through the tumult that we are going through and Ukraine is going through, I also think that there is much in our own record—the record of all of us in the House and across the west—that we need to assess, going back, yes, to 2014, but also to 2008. I have to say to the former Prime Minister that we should consider the issue of how Russian money has been treated in this country.

I think it takes a lot to admit it when one has got things wrong, and I think it only fair that we, as staunch partisans at times, give our opponents the space to make that admission. It is easier said than done, but if the new world that is incubating in the messy time in which we are currently living is to be born, that is the way in which I think we have to approach it.

There is another important point to be made. As the winter bites and energy prices go through the roof, and as what in some quarters has been called “Ukraine fatigue” may start to settle in, there is a particular group of people in society of whom I think we should be mindful: those whom the Germans call the *Putinverstehers*, the “Putin whisperers”, who would seek to apologise for, or contextualise, or somehow make excuses for Russian “legitimate” interests in Ukraine. They should be thoroughly ignored. Since the February invasion, they have, temporarily and rather embarrassingly, been silent, but they are undoubtedly starting to rear their heads again.

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many of those people are being fed by Putin's cyber-warfare and that this country and our allies really need to invest in counter-offensive material?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Yes, I agree. The hon. Lady is absolutely spot on. One of the most insidious arguments from that particular group—and they can be found on the extreme left or the extreme right, in every country and in Parliaments, National Assemblies, the media, think-tanks and elsewhere—is that we should stop arming Ukraine. I am sure that I speak for everyone that I was in Ukraine with recently when I say that we could see and hear up close what a difference arming Ukraine is making.

That support has to continue for three main reasons, which I will outline as briefly as possible. First, I do not believe that it is possible to negotiate with Vladimir Putin. We should look at his record not just in Ukraine right now but in Georgia and Syria. This is a Government who practise the famous double-tap strike, whereby the Russian armed forces hit an area, wait for the first responders to arrive and then hit it again. I do not think that it is possible to negotiate with a regime that carries itself in that way.

The former Prime Minister is absolutely right to say—this is another important point—that anything we do going forward has to be on President Zelensky's terms. Ukrainians do not want to negotiate with the regime in the Kremlin. We only have to look at the sheer joy on their faces when Ukrainian armed forces turn up in their towns and villages to liberate them and save them what has been experienced in Bucha, Mariupol and Kherson. The emotional scenes that we have seen and, I am sure, will continue to see tell us that we have got our support for Ukraine right. They should also put paid to the ideas of extremists—that is the only way to describe them—who would seek to divvy up Ukraine on a map. I would love to hear them tell me which towns they would like to see handed over to the Kremlin.

When we were in Ukraine, we met a young 15-year-old guy and his father. I am sure that Members will have read about Andriy Pokrasa and his father. When Russians were surrounding his village, he had the bravery and ingenuity to launch his own drone into the air to take

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photographs of Russian positions and send them to the Ukrainian armed forces. Members can imagine what happened to those Russian positions soon afterwards. He is now back at school studying. It was an honour to meet him. I would love to see one of these armchair extremists tell him that he should instead have gone out and negotiated with the Russians at the end of his street. Imagine what would have happened had he been caught. They knew the danger, but still they did everything they could to defend not just their own hometown but their country as well.

Lastly, the war is not just a war on territory. It is a war on values, liberalism, democracy, sovereignty and everything that we have cherished since 1945. I do not think that that is the kind of thing that can be negotiated away lightly. The Putin whisperers must be ignored. They must feel the complete contempt of those of us who want to see Ukraine win. The war could stop tomorrow if Russia stopped fighting, but if Ukraine stops fighting, the country will cease to exist. A Russian victory would be a disaster for everyone in Europe, and it is something that we should not even consider. Russian soldiers and now this latest group of conscripts will be fighting solely for their wages, while Ukrainian soldiers fight for their future and for ours. We all remain united in this House. Ukraine must win. We must continue to support them. And it is in that vein that I offer that support to the Government this afternoon.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. We have an immediate time limit of five minutes.

3.39 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Ind): I also pay tribute to our armed forces, and their contribution to the incredible events that we saw play out on television over the past few days. It was no easy feat, and we can salute all our armed forces, but particularly those pallbearers who did such a magnificent job. I believe that a worthy way to immortalise Queen Elizabeth and what she did for our country as our longest-serving monarch would be to rename one of our bank holidays to Elizabeth day. That debate is for another day, but I hope we can return to it.

It is an honour to follow the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). He and I did not see eye to eye on everything, but in the case of Ukraine, I hope he recognises that I have always supported what he has done, and indeed, the nation can be proud of it. As I have seen on all my visits to Ukraine, the work Britain has done in stepping forward, more so than many other NATO nations, is recognised. Thanks are due to my right hon. Friend for leading that charge.

I want to step back from what is happening in Ukraine for a second and look at the bigger picture. We must ask ourselves a fundamental question, one that I pose on a regular basis: is our world likely to become more or less dangerous over the next few years? I think the answer is very clear: it is the former. This is not just about Ukraine, but a worrying growth in authoritarianism versus democracy across the globe, and the emergence

of a new alliance—one that is not so obvious yet—between Russia and China. They share a mutual disdain for not only our international rules-based order, but for the west and the United States in particular. They are challenging the status quo that we have enjoyed since the end of the cold war. We have enjoyed that relative peace for three decades, but we have become complacent in nurturing our democratic values, and authoritarian states are becoming bolder and more assertive in promoting their own agenda. Consequently, our world is becoming more siloed and more protectionist, and we have become more risk averse.

Our actions now—what we do and how we handle Ukraine, given that the conflict is now moving into a darker chapter—will determine how the next decade plays out. China is watching our response carefully, given that it has its sights on Taiwan. Seven months on from Putin's unprovoked invasion, the west is, I think, starting to wake up to the reality that state-on-state aggression is back, but our institutions built to constrain rogue actors are vulnerable, and new technology has given autocrats new forms of leverage. The art of conflict itself is consequently changing, with not just cyber-attacks, as mentioned already, but economic attacks, including the unprecedented use of international sanctions. All those things have global consequences for the way we do business.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Do we therefore need to look again at what constitutes going to war, not least because we can now destroy other societies without a single bullet being fired—through the use of cyber, for instance?

Mr Ellwood: This is moving into the area of Clausewitz and what exactly war is—whether it is simply the military on the battlefield, or the politics and the economics. We have not really woken up to that, but Putin is using politics and economics to harm the rest of Europe with oil and gas, as well as grain. There is an irony here: we will have a debate in this place tomorrow, as we absolutely should, about supporting people through the cost of energy crisis we are facing here, but many of our problems are actually in Europe. Sorting those out would be a huge step towards dealing with some of the local problems we are facing.

We need to work more collectively and be less risk averse. We get spooked by some of the rhetoric that comes from Putin, and he has done it again by wanting to go down this avenue of using nuclear weapons. As has been touched on before, Russian doctrine includes the use of tactical nuclear weapons, and we need to understand that doctrine. The Minister refused to answer the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith)—others are saying, “Quite right.”

We need clarity on what our doctrine is because it needs to be confirmed with our allies as well. We could cross a threshold here and we would not necessarily know what to do. I am afraid that Putin has taken advantage of our risk-averseness and of the fact that we have put red lines in, such as over chemical weapons in Syria, and then not responded. People can shake their heads as much as they like. This is an awkward conversation that needs to be had as to what Britain, NATO and the United States will do if a low-yield tactical nuclear

weapon is used in the Donbas region. I pose that as a question. We can take it behind the scenes and not discuss it, and then it will actually happen and we will look at each other and say, "What do we actually do?"

Russia needs to know that we are willing to stand up to what Putin is doing, otherwise he will continue, as will other adversaries, to take advantage of our collective weakness. We have done well to provide the weapons systems to Ukraine to advance it in what it is doing. We now need to take it further and leverage that ability to push forward, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip said, to make sure that we can conclude what goes on in Ukraine. If we do not put out this fire in Ukraine, it will spread elsewhere.

3.45 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I rise to pay tribute to the unparalleled courage and steely determination of the Ukrainian armed forces, to condemn the barbaric imperialism of Vladimir Putin, and to call on the UK Government to go further and faster in their work to isolate the Kremlin. The Ukrainian armed forces have done what nobody thought was possible. Their audacious and expertly executed counter-offensive on the north-eastern front has seen them take back in six days what it took Russia six months to conquer, and the Putin occupation has become a humiliating retreat. His forces are demoralised and shambolic, weaknesses that will certainly not be addressed by calling up a few hundred thousand extra amateurs. But let us be clear: we should never have allowed things to get to this point.

For more than 20 years, the west was naive and complacent in its response to the authoritarianism and imperialism that was becoming the dominant world view in Moscow, but the weakness of the reaction to Putin's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was particularly unforgivable. Indeed, it is striking that seven of the Russians now subject to British sanctions were awarded so-called "golden visas" after the invasion of Crimea. This negligence was based on the deeply mistaken view that trade should take precedence over geopolitics and the utter failure to recognise that, if you give a bully an inch, he will always take a mile. With a brutal war now taking place in a country that is just a few hours from London, with our energy bills going through the roof and with Russian state-sponsored assassinations on the streets of Britain, we have truly learned our lesson the hard way.

As director of the British Council in St Petersburg at the time of the Alexander Litvinenko poisoning, I witnessed at first hand the iron fist of the Russian Federation under Putin. The relationship between the UK and Russia had utterly broken down. The Russian state had already attempted to close my office once and my staff were soon being subjected to terrifying harassment and intimidation. It was utterly chilling, but none of that compares to what our Ukrainian allies are facing now.

Although it has been heartening to see the west coming together since 24 February to take a more robust and resolute position, we must go further and faster. More must be done to isolate Russia, as that is the only way in which we will see the Russian people beginning to turn against the Kremlin in meaningful numbers. We must do all we can to support those brave anti-war protesters we saw on the streets of Moscow and St Petersburg last night.

First, let us look at the army of lawyers, bankers, accountants and estate agents in London who are doing the Kremlin's dirty work. They set up the shell companies that enable dirty Russian money to flow through our country, enriching the corrupt Russian elites who have profited handsomely from the reign of Putin and who are bankrolling his war machine. The Government must ensure that the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill closes these loopholes and closes down the facilitators who have turned London into the money laundering capital of the world. However, as a Foreign Affairs Committee report of this June pointed out, for sanctions to work, enforcement bodies need teeth. Currently, Britain spends just 0.042% of GDP on funding economic crime enforcement bodies, so it is unsurprising that money laundering prosecutions have dropped by 35% in the past five years. In addition, the British overseas territories are awash with dirty Russian money. Under the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018, public registers of beneficial ownership were meant to be in place by the end of 2020, but the new date given is the end of 2023. This is too slow, and it is a gift to Putin's cronies.

Secondly, we were all deeply touched and inspired by the fact that well over 200,000 households volunteered to host Ukrainians fleeing the horrors of war, but somehow the Government managed to turn that uplifting story of British generosity into a bureaucratic nightmare. Now, as the cost of food and energy spirals, there are real fears that many Ukrainians will be made homeless. The Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities must therefore grip the issue with urgency.

President Zelensky is the leader of the free world. He is on the frontline in the global battle between democracy and autocracy. His people and armed forces have stood firm and resolute in this battle, and thousands of them have tragically made the ultimate sacrifice. We owe them a debt of honour and gratitude that simply must be settled. Of course there is an economic cost, as Putin will continue to weaponise Russia's energy supplies to Europe, but we cannot put a price on freedom. We on the Opposition Benches therefore urge the Government to strengthen and intensify their support for the heroes of Ukraine both on and off the battlefield.

3.50 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I begin by congratulating the three Front-Bench spokesmen on the eloquence and unanimity that has been displayed. In studying the depravity of dictators, one quickly understands that cynicism has no limits and hypocrisy no boundaries. Putin likes to draw parallels with the second world war, and there are indeed parallels to be drawn. For example, the false flag operations go back to the very outbreak of that war. On 31 August 1939, Hitler would have had it that the war began because Poles attacked a radio station at Gleiwitz, on the east German border. They were in fact Nazis dressed up in Polish uniforms, and they even left the dead bodies of concentration camp victims as props in that scheme. It is a sign that Putin's comparisons are insufficiently accurate or insufficiently free of hypocrisy that he does not recognise that what started that war was Stalin's pact with the Nazis to divide up Poland between them.

This is necessarily a short debate, which is just as well, because I side with those who do not think it is a very good idea for us to discuss military strategy in an

[Dr Julian Lewis]

ongoing campaign on the Floor of this House. What we can observe is that one complicating factor in a dictatorship such as Putin's Russia is that there are no mechanisms whereby a leader who is unethical, irresponsible, incompetent and indeed murderous can constitutionally be removed. That has to be a factor in our considerations.

If it were not too flippant, I would be tempted to remark that it is truly a sign of desperation and indeed substandard propaganda that a cheerleader for Putin yesterday threatened a nuclear strike on London if we continue to help Ukraine defend territory that is being illegally annexed. Given the extent of the property portfolios of so many of Putin's oligarchs in the centre of this great city, they would, I think, have a word or two of objection to a Russian strategy of that sort.

The beginning of the invasion left quite a few people thinking that resistance was unlikely to be successful. Indeed, it probably would not have been successful but for the supply of complex weapons systems that had taken place since the earlier invasion of Crimea. As a result, we have seen the Russians' air arm neutralised, the Russian fleet's major surface unit in the area sunk, tanks and other vehicles destroyed, and ground troops decimated. The only tactic that has been left to the Russian dictator has been the physical destruction—usually by long-range artillery—of territory that the Russians cannot take and hold.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I totally agree with the comments of my right hon. Friend. I am sure this is happening, but combat supplies and spare parts need to be reinforced, because complex weapon systems go wrong and need to be repaired. While we are at it, as we come into winter, it would be good to provide the Ukrainian armed forces with simple little things such as face masks so they can go through the winter, because they probably do not have them.

Dr Lewis: Not for the first time, my right hon. and gallant Friend anticipates my next but one point. I will make the next point first, which is that, because the only tactic left is destruction, the area of doubt is how far Putin will go. Will he simply think that by escalating destruction, the Ukrainians will suddenly say, "We can't take any more of this and we're going to surrender"? Surely the events of the past months have shown that any such approach would be completely counterproductive. The more he behaves atrociously, the stronger the resistance will be and rightly so.

My right hon. and gallant Friend referred to the supplies that we give. Of course it is greatly to the credit of the previous Government and, indeed, the previous Prime Minister, who spoke earlier in this debate, that we have given such substantial supplies, but in giving those supplies, we have seriously depleted our own stocks. What I need to hear from the Minister is that a full-scale effort is being made and will be increased to ensure that the more we give, the higher our rate of replacement will be, because an effort cannot be sustained if the people who are resisting run out of supplies.

Finally, it would be remiss of me to conclude any debate about defence without making a reference to the need to reach 3% of GDP. We have made progress: we now have a pledge to reach 3% of GDP by 2030, but the

situation in 2030 is a long way away—it is longer than the second world war, with which I began. We need to reach it sooner than that.

3.57 pm

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): The Ukrainian, Leon Trotsky, said:

"You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you."

Leon Trotsky was previously a resident of Mykolaiv and Odessa. This phrase, uttered by Trotsky the communist revolutionary, has proven quite accurate for many people living in those parts of Ukraine in 2022.

The Liberal Democrats must add to the chorus of condemnation in relation to Putin's nuclear threats. President Joe Biden said, on the eve of the February invasion:

"We have no intention of fighting Russia."

As Ukrainian courage and willingness to resist Russia's occupation have grown, so has NATO's willingness to supply materiel to Ukraine and so have Ukrainian ambitions grown in terms of how much of their country can be de-occupied.

Putin claimed yesterday that, at the Istanbul talks in March this year, Ukraine's representatives gave positive responses to Russia's proposals. Putin claimed that a

"peaceful settlement obviously did not suit the West, which is why, after certain compromises were coordinated, Kyiv was ordered to wreck all these agreements."

We in the UK should state plainly that Kyiv's war aims are for Kyiv to formulate, independent of its friends and allies in the west.

Some have said that, without NATO, Ukraine would not prosper militarily in the way that Ukraine appears to be doing, and that we in the west need to determine our own end state, our own strategy, and then influence the Ukrainians. I would counter that we must make it plain to Putin and the wider world that it is the Ukrainian Government who are making all the decisions.

We need to be straightforward about the fallacy of Putin's narrative that Kyiv is "receiving orders" from western advisers, as he puts it.

Putin said yesterday:

"Some irresponsible Western politicians are doing more than just speak about their plans to organize the delivery of long-range offensive weapons to Ukraine... Washington, London and Brussels are openly encouraging Kiev to move the hostilities to our territory."

I suggest that it would be simple for the Minister to correct that misinformation and to state that London has offered our allies in Kyiv no encouragement to strike Russia within its own borders. Rather, we should expose Putin's rhetoric by stating categorically that the UK's multiple-launch rocket system is supplied on condition that it is not used to strike anything within Russia's internationally recognised borders.

It was mentioned earlier that some of us on the all-party parliamentary group on Ukraine were hosted last week in Kyiv by Yalta European Strategy. I joined that APPG visit and, like the hon. Members for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), I was interviewed on Ukrainian television. I offered viewers of Priamyi TV reassurance that the change in the UK of both the Head of State and the Prime Minister within just a few days would not disrupt the support the UK gives to Ukraine.

Political parties across this House have united in opposition to Putin's brutal and illegal war of conquest. The Liberal Democrats will back the steps necessary to ensure that the light of freedom and democracy continues to burn in Kyiv. It was striking last week to look into the eyes of counterpart MPs from the Ukrainian Parliament, the Rada. Like others on the Ukraine APPG, I was struck by how fiercely independent those parliamentarians we met are—they would be unwilling to take orders from anyone, be it Russia, Europe or anywhere else.

Some Members of this House may not be interested in war. Given that war risks being, as Trotsky said, interested in us, I urge those colleagues who do have some bearing on the situation to stand firm in the face of aggression and threats. Then we should hope that Ukraine shows magnanimity in its dealings with Russia, so that it may bring this sorry episode to a close.

4.2 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): A number of colleagues on both sides of the House have talked about the seven months of this conflict. In truth, it is part of a much longer strategic conflict between Putin and Ukraine. From 2007, when Putin set out his worldview at the Munich security conference, we have known roughly where he was likely to go. From his interference in Ukraine in 2004 through the 2008 invasion of Georgia and the illegal annexation of Crimea, it is all part of a continuum of behaviour that I am afraid we have for too long overlooked because it did not suit us to take a realistic view.

This time, however, as the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), rightly said, Putin's aims have completely, clearly and explicitly failed. Those aims, let us remember, were to remove President Zelensky, install a puppet Government, defeat the Ukrainian armed forces and effectively destroy Ukraine as a functioning state.

As a consequence, Putin faces mounting criticism at home and abroad. Yesterday alone we saw 1,300 arrests in Moscow, and we should give our support to those willing to make that protest for their moral courage in doing so. We have even seen *Moskovskij Komsomolets*, the normally placid news outlet in Russia, criticising what it called the "underestimation of the enemy", stating that Russia had suffered a defeat and was minimising losses by withdrawing—not the sort of comments we expect to see from that particular organ of the state.

The criticism from outside has not been confined to the free world. Prime Minister Modi made clear last week to Putin that this "is not an era for war".

Even the Russians had to admit that the Chinese had disquiet about what was happening in Ukraine, and little wonder, because it has brought about a much more united west and a new focus on areas such as Taiwan, which the Chinese have certainly not welcomed.

The net result all of that for Putin is that he is cornered, but that is by no means a cause for celebration in the west. As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) wrote this week in a very good article in *The Spectator*—I commend it to all Members—Putin makes threats to frighten us, but to minimise the chance of the use of a tactical or strategic nuclear weapon, "we need to assume that the threat is real".

It may be sabre-rattling, but it may not be. We have miscalculated with Putin before; we cannot afford to miscalculate again. He is a tyrant with a tyrant's behaviour: paranoid, petulant and progressively more extreme. He will throw more and more Russian lives into the fire without hesitation, as so many of his predecessors did.

Mr Djanogly: On the question of calling up the reserves, does my right hon. Friend think that Putin may now be over-extending his support with the Russian people?

Dr Fox: He may be, but we would be foolish to assume so. Public opinion, even in places such as Russia, under a regime such as Putin's, can turn. Yes, internal forces can produce a change in the personnel and the nature of a Government, but that can take a long time to happen—if ever—and we should not calculate based on that coming through, as many lives may be lost in the interim.

As many Members have said, we must continue to support Ukraine, its Government and its people with moral and political support, as the Prime Minister set out in New York; to provide weapons to Ukraine, at whatever cost, as long as they are required; and to maintain our united front with other allied nations in the free world, especially in our efforts to stop Russia's war machine being funded through the sale of fossil fuels.

While we deal with the Ukraine war, we must continue to focus on other threats that are being posed around that region. We do not have the luxury in security and foreign policy to choose to focus on one conflict alone, and I will briefly point to two other conflicts. The first is in the Balkans, where Russia and China have been heavily arming Serbia, and where the very real threat of renewed conflict—with all the horrors of the ethnic wars that we saw there before—is something that we must be alive to. The second example is the involvement of Iran, which has supplied weapons, drones and political support to Russia at a time when few other countries have been willing to do so, and is trying to develop its own nuclear weapon. As we have discussed in the debate, we have seen what nuclear blackmail can look like. Does anyone seriously believe that the world would be a safer place were Iran to become a nuclear weapon state, or that, were Iran able to, it would disrupt fossil fuel supplies any less than Russia?

The common thread running through much of this is that we have collectively allowed wishful thinking to replace critical analysis on far too many occasions. The safety of our world requires us to do much better in future.

4.8 pm

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): I join previous speakers in applauding the heroism and sacrifice of Ukrainian forces, who, in just a few short weeks, have liberated vast swathes of territory previously occupied by Russia. We cannot yet comprehend the scale of the suffering that is taking place in Russian-occupied Ukraine, but the widespread reports of war crimes and crimes against humanity that are emerging from the liberated territories serve as a potent reminder of why Putin must not be allowed to succeed in this criminal endeavour.

I also pay tribute to the immense bravery of the thousands of Russian citizens who took to the streets yesterday in protest of the partial mobilisation of the

[Mick Whitley]

army reserves. They did so in the full knowledge that they were defying the decrees of a regime that tolerates no dissent, and I am sure that the thoughts of the whole House are with those who have been taken into custody.

As a new and far more dangerous phase of the war begins, the UK must remain steadfast in its support for the struggle of the Ukrainian people, but as Putin once again forces the world to reckon with the spectre of nuclear war, we must also remain ever vigilant to the dangers of an escalation of the conflict. As President Biden told the UN General Assembly yesterday:

“A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

While I welcome the Government’s continued commitment to providing military aid to Ukraine, I must tell Ministers that their responsibilities to the Ukrainian people extend far beyond the battlefield. In the early months and weeks of the war, the Government refused to follow the lead of our European friends and neighbours and waive visa requirements for refugees fleeing the onslaught. Now, Ukrainians who were promised safety and security in Britain face an uncertain future. Across the country as many as 50,000 Ukrainians could be homeless in the new year as a result of Ministers’ woeful failure to provide additional support or even the most basic clarity ahead of the ending of the initial six-month sponsorships.

I have had the great privilege of meeting Ukrainian refugees who now live in my constituency, and meeting the families who have opened their homes and hearts to them. With the cost of living crisis hitting hard, I am afraid that many of those sponsorships will simply not be sustainable without additional support. Indeed, in some local authorities, fewer than a quarter of hosts are in a position to extend their guests’ stay beyond the first six months. Councils across the country are warning that the situation is reaching breaking point.

This was an entirely foreseeable crisis, and it is, frankly, unforgivable that Ministers have yet to come forward with a credible plan for what happens when a refugee’s initial six-month stay comes to an end. But it is not too late to act, so I urge the Government to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that in situations where the relationship between hosts and guests remains viable, those sponsorships can continue. That must mean greatly increasing financial support for hosts, as Lord Harrington, the former refugees Minister, recommended last month. The Government must also acknowledge that community sponsorship was only ever intended as a short-term solution to an immediate crisis. To give Ukrainian refugees the longer-term support they need, we need to ensure that financial and logistical support is in place for the entirety of the three years for which they have received permission to stay.

We also need to do more to support Ukrainian refugees in finding homes of their own. Far too many Ukrainian refugees have been left to fend for themselves in the cruel and uncaring world of the private rented sector. Too many landlords have been allowed to refuse Ukrainians tenancies simply because of where they have come from. Like millions of UK residents before them, refugees who have found work are finding that they simply cannot afford rip-off rents in the areas that they hope to call home. It is time for the Government to equip local authorities with the financial resources and powers that they need to act as guarantors for refugees who are searching for accommodation.

Government Members speak regularly of the pride that they take in the support that the UK has offered Ukraine, as they have done today, but I warn them that their moral obligations will never be truly fulfilled until they can guarantee that not a single refugee is left without a home this winter.

4.12 pm

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I recognise that others want to speak, and I will try to be as brief as possible. In a way, this debate is simple, because it is ultimately about the sovereignty, independence and self-determination of the Ukrainian people. All else is but a support to that simple position, and everything we do must be about securing that.

Back in the 19th century, Gladstone made a very simple statement, which should underwrite all that we do on the matter. When he spoke about the attack of the then Turkish empire on Moldavia and Wallachia, he said that there was no greater bulwark for freedom than the breasts of free men and women. That is the truth of where we are today, and that is what we see happening in Ukraine—free men and women fighting in their homeland for the defence of their families and of that freedom that we take for granted.

That freedom is not free; it comes at a huge price, and not only in the violence and the desperate depredations of the war brought about by the despot Putin. We need to readjust our thinking about defence spending to ensure we have the right equipment to support those who face something similar in future. This comes at a big price for us as we go into the winter months. As has been said, President Putin faces disaster, and yet his actions show that he still believes he has one card up his sleeve: the ability to split the alliance as we get towards winter.

It is interesting that, even though India is moving away from Putin, China is indifferent, in a way, to where he is, and there was condemnation at the UN General Assembly the other day, he still thinks that if he puts the pressure on, the west will begin to break. There is some indication of politicians in the west feeding that. The other day, senior politicians in Italy were talking about why we should reduce the sanctions, because they were hurting us more than they were hurting him. As has been mentioned, there has also been talk in some other eastern European countries. He thinks it is working and he wants to double down.

I will make one small criticism. In her remarks, the US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, still talked about getting to a point where there can be negotiation and a negotiated settlement. I think that is quite wrong, because any talk about negotiation feeds Putin’s view that he will split the alliance. I would like to hear from the Government that we categorically believe that the only person who should ever be capable of talking about negotiation is Volodymyr Zelensky—not anyone in any country in the alliance, because all we do is help Putin. That is key to all that we do at the moment.

To get through and make sure that we are stronger, all of us in the west, united, should surely talk to our public about the difficulties that they will face as a result of the war in Ukraine and of our need to support it despite those difficulties—the cost of living that we are

trying to intervene on at the moment; the problems with energy costs and spikes; and the difficulties that they may see with higher food prices. We need to be honest with them.

I say to the Minister that we need a second bit of honesty too. I intervened earlier about recognising that Russia sees tactical nuclear weapons as war-fighting weapons, which my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) also mentioned. That has always been part of Russia's principal view. Instead of dancing around that sometimes and saying, "Well, we're not going to be scared by rhetoric," we should recognise that it is not rhetoric; they believe that to be the case. The question is whether they will decide to do it and whether the military will do it.

Our answer to that must be to say, united, that if Putin ever does that, we will continue to bear down on him regardless and to give Ukraine the equipment and tools it deserves. If we are clear about that and about the possibilities, the public will be with us. It is when we surprise them by trying to say that there is no threat, when there is a major threat, that it is critical. We should be honest about that.

Finally, China is watching. China invaded the South China sea and not a single thing was done about it. It has militarised it and very little was done about it. It is brutal to its own people at home and we have done very little about it. I simply say that the rules and lessons that we learn from Ukraine should have been learned in the 1930s. If we appease dictators who are hellbent on invasion and destruction, we lose the freedoms that we fought for. That is what this is all about.

4.17 pm

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. I have been struck by the thoughtfulness and decency of several contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House. I am proud of the SNP's role in these discussions. I am proud that, despite our domestic priorities and political differences, we have been able to work with the Government. I commend the Minister for the Armed Forces and Veterans on his opening speech, and the Defence Ministers on their openness and the way that they have worked with both sides of the House. That is genuine on our part.

Hon. Members can be damn sure that the SNP is part of the international coalition in defence of Ukraine: we believe in freedom, democracy and human rights and we believe that we should be good neighbours who should not live in fear of bigger powers. Of course, therefore, we are part of that and where we agree with the UK Government, we have agreed, as my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) said. On military support and sanctions, we have been vocal in our support of the UK Government's position. We have often urged greater efforts than we have seen, but we have supported them.

The only big difference between our position and that of the UK Government is on refugees. We would like to have seen the UK emulate the EU's approach of waiving visas for three years. We think that would have been proportionate and fair. Instead, we saw a Home Office system that the Scottish Government have made work in Scotland. I pay tribute to the many big-hearted people across Stirling, Scotland and the UK who have opened not just their hearts, but their homes to the

people of Ukraine who really needed support at that time. I was in Killin a few weeks back, and I was really struck by the care and affection that locals have had for the people who are guests in the community, and I do commend them on their effort.

It is right today that we take due stock of events in Ukraine. As we have heard, the conflict is at a pivotal moment. Ukraine is winning and the Kremlin is losing. We take no pleasure in that fact, but there is a justice to it, in that aggression is not successful and there have not been the results the Kremlin was hoping for. President Putin's statement overnight came from a position of weakness, as we have heard. His nuclear blackmail and his activation of the reservists, breaking a promise that he made, come from a position of weakness, not strength. We must be vigilant to the true risks that are presented by the Kremlin's aggression not just against Ukraine, but against the liberal international order.

We must also be steadfast in support of the Ukrainians themselves. We need to redouble our efforts. They are winning, but they have not won yet, and I fear there is an awful lot of heartache ahead for the Ukrainians before we see a resolution. So I was glad to hear from the Minister that military training and the supply of matériel and intelligence support will continue, and it does so with wholehearted SNP support. We may have points of difference and we will seek greater information on some points, but we do support that very strongly. I was also glad to hear that the eventual negotiated outcome—because there will be an eventual negotiated outcome; there always is to every conflict—is going to be on Ukrainian terms. A prerequisite for any talks, which as we have heard must be set from Kyiv, not from anywhere else, must be the withdrawal of all Russian occupying forces from all sovereign Ukrainian territory, including of course Crimea.

I say that the conflict is far from over, but I would suggest to the Government a few points that we need to continue and take forward, because we cannot take our foot off the pedal. We have heard mentioned already the Ukraine fatigue among the general population and among the media, and we must make sure that we are not succumbing to it as well. Ukraine continues to need our support.

We need to keep sanctions under review. I will be taking part for the SNP in the next debate, when we will revisit sanctions. We do need to keep them under review, to make sure that loopholes are closed because loopholes are being exploited, and we do need to make sure that any opportunity to raise pressure on the kleptocrats is taken. That is an evolving situation.

We also need to be honest about and to guard against the influence of dirty money at home now. The UK is vulnerable to this, and we have seen a belated start on this from the UK Government, with our support, but we need to see much more. Our financial and property systems are nowhere near as transparent as they need to be, and they are vulnerable to dirty money. The overseas territories are playing a role that needs greater scrutiny than they have had, and we need to continue those efforts. We have seen a belated start to that, but we need to see more.

On looking after refugees here, I have mentioned that people have opened not just their hearts, but their homes, and they need more support. We have seen a paper chase of a system that I do not believe is fit for

[Alyn Smith]

purpose, but people have now largely negotiated through it. However, where we have seen too much paper chase, we are now seeing too little money. We strongly support—and we would really urge the Government to take this forward—doubling the monthly payment to £700 a month, because energy costs and the increased costs of having guests are hurting people, and that needs to be taken care of.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): To pick up the comments from my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), there is a cost to this for people in the UK. He was right that we have to be honest about that, and I think the hon. Member is also making that point. However, we also need to reinforce the point that there is a bigger cost to our constituents if we do nothing. Does he agree with me on that point, and that we really need to ensure that people see we are doing this for a much greater reason? All the points he is making about refugees are absolutely right, but we are trying to prevent something much wider and much more destructive.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. That was quite a long intervention and there is a time limit, so such interventions do prevent other people from having their allocation. If interventions are taken, it would be good if Members could still stick to their five minutes.

Alyn Smith: I thought it was an excellent intervention personally. I agree with it strongly, so I am very grateful for it. We do need to make the case on an ongoing basis for the support we are giving those in Ukraine, because it is not just their freedom, but ours. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point.

We do need to see more accountability. I pay tribute to the UK for the support that it has given to the International Criminal Court and the Canadian co-ordination of these efforts, but we need to make war criminals and potential war criminals aware that there will be no amnesty and no hiding place. The UK can do more about that—the UK has a developed legal system and a number of practitioners who are very active in this field—so we need to put more resources into it. The SNP is part of this coalition. I am proud that we have been able to work together on this point, because this transcends boundaries and transcends politics, and that support will continue.

4.24 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): The world has just witnessed Ukraine pull off a stunning counter-offensive around Kharkiv. It liberated thousands of miles of territory in what was an incredible feat of military planning. Months of distraction around Kherson were put in place, with radio silence around what people were doing around Kharkiv. It was something that brought the world with them, and showed that, yes, Ukraine will be victorious if we stand by it. That victory was not just thousands of miles of territory, but it hit Russian logistics. It liberated major administrative and rail hubs that the Russians had been using, and it will castrate Russian ability to get what it needs and to rely on those rail logistics throughout. As a result we

have seen a panicked response from the Kremlin, with sham referendums and a partial mobilisation of 300,000 men.

Much has been made of that mobilisation, but a country cannot magically muster kit, strategy or skilled soldiers. We must be careful and challenge the arguments when we hear big announcements from Putin that are not tantamount to changing the situation on the ground. The performative referendums should be called “hostage referendums”, because that is what they are. It is vital that the world rejects them, and I am confident that we will. Years ago when we did not reject them, we saw Putin emboldened to do what he is doing today.

Ukrainian gains are showing the scale of the atrocities being committed by Russian troops, and it is vital to consider how we can support those affected. I will therefore focus on recommendations for what the Government should be doing. First, our international justice infrastructure is not sufficient. The International Criminal Court cannot prosecute in this situation, and as one of the foremost powers when it comes to security and justice, we must convene a plan for how we will hold people who have committed atrocities at all levels to account. Secondly, I made the point earlier about creating a specific court or tribunal for sexual violence and rape that is established at the start of conflicts, rather than at the end when it is too late to collect evidence.

We must also learn how we share intelligence. In September last year—this time last year—Britain and America went round and told our allies that Putin was going to invade. We had the intelligence, we were sure of it, but our allies did not believe us. The French said it just would not happen and that Macron had too good a relationship with Putin; the Germans said that that was not what their intelligence showed. When I asked European ambassadors why they did not believe us, they said it was because of Iraq. It is greatly concerning that they are making intelligence decisions based on what happened many decades ago when I was only a child. It also shows that we have manifestly failed to make the most important intelligence analysis and argument that we needed to make over the past decade.

Putin is no master strategist—he is a gambler. He gambled in 2014 that we would turn a blind eye to the invasion of Crimea. He gambled in Syria, where we turned our backs, and he gambled in February that we would be too divided. He was wrong about that, but Putin bases his decisions on the critical assumption that we have not adapted to 21st-century hybrid warfare. We have spent the past two decades focusing on terrorists who behave like states, but between now and 2050 we must adapt to states that behave like terrorists. To do that we need whole state resilience. That is not easy, it is not sexy, and it will take decades to put in place, but that is how we protect ourselves and our allies in the long term. That covers everything from investment and supply chains, to defending our multilaterals and the rule of law, upholding human rights, the independence of our educational institutions, and our culture and digital security. We must recalibrate.

Technology and the democratisation of information have fundamentally changed geopolitics. We are at war at all times, and the best enemies are the ones we do not know are there. We do not know we are at war with them. The point was made earlier that conversations

could be taking place with people radicalised and recruited without a single word being spoken aloud. We are not ready, whether that involves energy and food sources, business, culture, finance or the military. Hostile states are infiltrating us at all levels, and we must tackle that. We as Britain can convene our allies—our ability to convene partners is one of our greatest strengths—and work together towards a more resilient society. If we do not double down, defend and stop neglecting our international institutions, we will further embolden Russia. This is our responsibility if we want fair play and respect for the rules-based order.

Alyn Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way; she is making a powerful speech. Does she agree that, on cyber-resilience especially, there is a lot of good work to build on, but that it needs more resource?

Alicia Kearns: Without question; the hon. Member is absolutely right. We are building those capabilities within the military, but they need to be cross-force and also need to bring in civilians, whether based in the Foreign Office or elsewhere. Back in 2016, I was in Ukraine training the Ukrainians how to conduct counter-disinformation operations and integrate that with cyber, and we have seen that work pay off—Members can look at what they did over the last few weeks.

The lessons are clear. The decisions, defences and resilience that we implement now are what will defend us over the next 20 years. We need to make ourselves and our international alliances more resilient, because only in that way will we protect ourselves, return to moral leadership on the world stage, stop atrocities and be able to take a stand and protect ourselves from hostile states that will spend the next 20 years using their whole-state effort to undermine us and to hurt us.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I would urge those who have already spoken to perhaps think twice about intervening again.

4.30 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): I visited Kyiv two weeks ago as a member of the first cross-party delegation of MPs since the war began, which has been mentioned by other Members—many of us are here today. We were a group of seven MPs from four parties. It was a long journey there and back, as there are no flights, but we were absolutely determined to go together to show solidarity and support for the Ukrainian Government, for the armed forces, for the sovereignty of Ukraine and for the people of Ukraine. I congratulate the Ukrainian armed forces on their victories of the past 10 days—it was an exciting weekend to be there as they were announced.

I am proud of the welcome given by people in Putney, Southfields and Roehampton, and by so many families across this country, to people from Ukraine, many of whom I have met. However, I echo the concerns of other Members about what will happen at the six-month cliff edge of support for those families to whom we are saying, “We would like to be able to support you, but we just can’t.” What will happen to those Ukrainians who want to stay and cannot go back yet, but who do not have a guarantor or the necessary credit history to secure private accommodation? It will really undermine

all the good words that we say in this House and the good support that we are providing for Ukrainians if we do not provide the longer-term welcome that is needed.

As we have reflected in the past week on Her Majesty’s reign, we have seen the striking contrast between the transition away from the British empire during her reign and Putin’s aggressive, dominating, barbaric empire-building, which has Ukraine in its sights right now but could extend much further, including to the Balkans, where there is an election in Bosnia in just 10 days’ time. It is vital to stand up to the aggression of Putin and his regime, and to join with our allies in supporting Ukraine and looking to build a peaceful future together, at the same time as supporting the de-occupation.

As a delegation of MPs, we met President Zelensky and his head of office, with the Minister for Defence and deputy Ministers, with MPs, human rights activists and soldiers, and with the staff of the Depaul aid agency, who are providing psychological counselling and aid.

The reports coming from Bucha, Mariupol and the de-occupied regions are shocking: torture, mass graves and rape used as a weapon of war—war crimes by the Russian army. As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on prevention of genocide and crimes against humanity, I know that we mean “never again” when we say it in this House every year and when we remember past atrocities, but now is the time to put flesh on those words and to act against atrocities that we know are happening now. That is why we are proud, as the British people, to be supporting the people of Ukraine. Perhaps it is the only issue that unites us across the House, but we have been unequivocal supporters of Ukraine from the outset.

The increase in energy prices may be a factor in what people are calling potential “Ukraine fatigue”, but I know that the British people understand that the link with that increase is another reason why we must support Ukraine and stop Putin blackmailing us over energy. We need to end the war decisively and as soon as possible, so that it does not cost even more.

The needs are clear: the need for air defences; for military equipment support; for heating system support as a back-up during the winter; for the return of prisoners and the forcibly adopted Ukrainian children—a scandal that I do not have time to say more about, but one that is really shocking; for support for rebuilding and reparations; and for justice and, especially, a special international tribunal to try Putin for the crime of aggression. The International Criminal Court is a parallel process, but it will not deliver justice fast enough. Britain can therefore lead in calling for that international special tribunal.

Finally, support for civil society humanitarian aid and long-term peacebuilding should be built into the process. It is not enough to have military, diplomatic and legal support; we must have that fourth essential element of civil society. That is how whole-Government support for Ukraine can be delivered. Kyiv is a beautiful city and Ukraine is a beautiful country. I want to return to a free and victorious Ukraine that will not fear future aggression. We can see that when we stand together.

4.35 pm

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): I, too, was very pleased to join the all-party trip to Kyiv a week ago. It will soon be represented in my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

[Mr Jonathan Djanogly]

If a deal involving peace for land had ever been possible, it is clear now that Ukrainians will not start to negotiate until all their land is free from Russia—and that includes Donbas and Crimea. That was the firm view of every politician, soldier and citizen I had the opportunity to meet in Ukraine. One can see why, as the vile outcome of Russian occupation is revealed in territory retaken by the heroic actions of the Ukrainian military. Sadly, the horrors of Bucha are not an isolated horrific incident. Indeed, it is becoming clear that looting, torture, murder, rape and intimidation is standard practice for the Russian occupiers. Horribly, Russia has deported tens of thousands of Ukrainian children, including 2,300 orphans to Russia. These crimes must never be forgotten or overlooked. I was very pleased to hear how UK prosecutors have been helping local agencies with evidence collection and advice.

This war is about more than just helping a freedom-loving people fight against a bullying aggressor. As others have said, Russian aggression has been used time and time again under Putin, right from the invasion of Georgia in 2008. There is nothing to show that unless stopped Russia would stop at Ukraine. To that extent Ukrainians are also fighting the war on behalf of all of us who refuse to accept a Europe where barbarity and violence call the shots. With that in mind, we should now consider Russia a state sponsor of terrorism and, as such, it would be equitable for frozen Russian state and state-linked assets, including frozen sanctioned individual assets, to be seized for payment to Ukraine for its reconstruction. That would require legislation similar to that passed by Canada in June.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware that we have just heard the news that a young woman was killed in Moscow by the Russian police for participating in anti-war demonstrations? Will he condemn that?

Mr Djanogly: I certainly will condemn that and the many other deaths in Russia that we are hearing about all the time.

The question recently came up as to whether individual oligarchs should be able to buy their way out of sanctions. I am doubtful that that could work without the international sanctions system being holed under the water line. However, if any deal is considered, it has to be co-ordinated and approved by Ukraine, not just the sanctioning country, and the restitution money involved should go to Ukraine. In that way, any decisions on the release of assets would be properly co-ordinated.

Over recent months, there have been many pictures of Russian tourists swanning around Europe as though nothing was happening in Ukraine. That should stop and we should now ban Russian visas to the UK other than for exceptional circumstances. Certainly, at the very least, we should not allow into the UK any member of Putin's United Russia party. Sanctions are a slow-burn approach, but they are increasingly effective. However, there are so-called holes in the bucket—Turkey comes to mind and there are others. Will the Minister advise what efforts are being made to isolate such countries?

Battlefield victories are accentuating the size of the challenges yet to be faced. First, militarily speaking, Russia still maintains a powerful and vicious threat.

Putin is an unpredictable enemy who is wounded and concerned to protect his Crimea legacy to Russia. He may yet become even less principled over civilian rights. Indeed, only yesterday he upped the ante by calling up Russia's reserves.

Secondly, retaking occupied territory is one thing but holding it is another. Police, courts, schools and civil society all have to be re-established. War crimes and collaborators have to be prosecuted. Infrastructure has to be rebuilt. The cost and administrative challenges involved are enormous and urgent.

Thirdly, the military requirements are changing. In the early days of the war, basic equipment for soldiers and defensive weapons, such as anti-tank missiles, were the priority. Then, longer-range artillery to break down Russian defences was—and still is—required to enable offensive operations. Following reoccupation, the priorities then changed again and the need for anti-missile defence systems is now coming to the fore, as was highlighted very much during our visit.

If Ukraine is to encourage its more than 10 million internally displaced citizens and millions of foreign-based refugees to return to their homes in Ukraine, security from air attack becomes key to restoring confidence. That point was very much reinforced by Russian retaliation against lost ground, taking the cowardly form of missile attacks against civilian targets. Electricity and water infrastructure has already been bombed and the cold winter is approaching.

The challenges are immense, but one thing is for sure and came across very strongly during my time in Kyiv—namely, Ukrainian recognition of British support and the gratitude that was shown by everyone we met. Ukrainians feel that the UK is in this battle with them for the long term, that we were the first to speak up for them in the international community, and that we then backed that up with money, arms and valuable advice. The Government and virtually all Members of all parties in this House are to be commended for their support. History is on our side.

I was left with the strong impression that out of this war, out of this horror and barbarity, will develop an immensely strong and lasting relationship between our two countries. In the meantime, we must redouble our efforts to ensure a speedy victory for Ukraine as soon as possible and enable its restoration towards the modern democratic country that I know it has the potential to be.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am sorry, but many of the speeches recently have been six minutes, so I will have to reduce the time limit immediately to four minutes, and it may have to go down beyond that.

4.41 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I wholeheartedly join the cross-party support for Ukraine. I will mention an issue that has been touched on but debated less this afternoon.

Women are casualties of war and conflict, but they are very often overlooked. Women, including those who fight alongside men, suffer in a uniquely gendered way. Ukrainian women have displayed incredible strength in

defending their country and their families both on and off the battlefield. As more Ukrainian territory is liberated, more terrible stories emerge of atrocities committed against women. By June, the UN human rights monitoring team had received reports of 124 alleged incidents of sexual violence. The Secretary-General's special representative has warned that the number of reports is rising fast.

Wartime sexual violence is one of the oldest crimes known to people. It has long-term implications for individuals and communities long after war has ended. The Government recognise the problem of wartime sexual violence, but that must be fully matched with support for women on the ground. Too often, wartime sexual violence is viewed as inevitable, as part of war. That is totally unacceptable. The sexualised threats faced by women and girls must be confronted head on and prosecuted like any other war crime. I am grateful for the recommendation from the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns).

The Government, along with the international community, need to aid Ukraine to ensure that there is a robust response to gender-based violence. That must include post-rape care, access to abortion and mental health support. Our human response demands that we make sexual, reproductive and maternal healthcare a priority. Perpetrators must be vigorously investigated and adequately punished, and the UK must help by providing support for Ukraine to do that.

The majority of people fleeing Ukraine are women and children. The response from communities in bordering countries and in the UK has been incredibly powerful, but we should not be blind to the ongoing risks for women and girls. Female refugees have always faced disproportionate risk, especially if they are travelling alone. Many of my constituents have contacted me on behalf of Ukrainians who are stuck in dangerous places waiting for visas. While they wait, their funds run low and they are at greater risk of trafficking and abuse.

Refugees are safest when they have options. They need full legal protection and the right papers, and they need to be totally aware of their rights. The Government must equal the outpouring of compassion that has been shown by the British public and allow Ukrainian refugees to come to the UK without unacceptable bureaucratic delays. Otherwise, we are driving vulnerable women and girls into the arms of opportunistic abusers. It is a matter of basic safety. As the war continues and shows no signs of being resolved, the British Government must do better at protecting women and girls. I am sure that many colleagues across the House share my admiration for the courage of the women of Ukraine; we must match it with action.

Although we hope that the war will be over soon, it probably will not. Just as important as speeding up the process now is making sure that support for our Ukrainian refugees is sustained. What are the Government's plans for six months' time and beyond? How will we help families to find long-term accommodation, jobs and financial support? We should not underestimate the substantial trauma that women and children will have suffered, especially if they have experienced sexual violence. Support services will need funding beyond this year to rebuild lives in the long term. The Government will have to show a lot of stamina in providing not just military help, but humanitarian help to deal with the human tragedy beyond the here and now.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am going to have to be really strict. I am sorry, but I cannot get everybody in unless I reduce the time limit even further, so after the next speaker it will be three minutes.

4.46 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will try to adhere to your three-minute rule.

The message should go out from this debate to Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian people that we salute their bravery. They have suffered grievously. In just seven months, the world has seen one of the biggest refugee catastrophes since the second world war, with more than 7 million people displaced within Ukraine, 7 million people displaced to the rest of Europe, and more than 14,000 people dead or wounded. Hundreds of people have suffered war crimes of torture and sexual crimes, as the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) made clear, and hundreds of innocent children have been kidnapped, as my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) said.

Quite simply, we have to help the Ukrainian people to win this conflict, because if they do not succeed in driving the Russians out of Ukraine, no country in Europe will be safe. I therefore congratulate my Government on the support and help that they are giving to Ukraine, as the Minister for the Armed Forces outlined in his comprehensive statement today. I am delighted that the new Prime Minister has made it very clear that we will stick by Ukraine for as long as it takes. Contrary to what some speakers today have said, I do not think that there will necessarily be a quick end to the conflict. All sorts of twists and turns could happen. As other hon. Members have said, although we hope that Vladimir Putin's threat of using a tactical nuclear weapon is just that, we cannot be sure.

We are absolutely right to give help. I understand that the British people are suffering grievously with the cost of living because of the price of energy and food, but as their politicians we must point out to them that if we do not continue to support Ukraine throughout this conflict, they will suffer even more.

The issue I really want to talk about is grain, which we have not heard anything about in this debate. At long last, with the United Kingdom's diplomatic help, the United Nations has negotiated for some grain shipments to cross the Black sea and go out through the Dardanelles to some of the most vulnerable and poorest people in Africa. We must make sure that that programme continues: it is vital for some of the poorest people in the world, and we must do all we can to prevent the Russians from stopping it.

To all my constituents who have so generously hosted the Ukrainian people—I have met some of them—I say, "Please continue. I know it is difficult in some cases, but please continue your generosity." To the British people, I say, "Please bear with the privations caused by this war. It will be difficult this winter, but our Government will do what they can. I am sure that right will eventually come through and the Russians will be driven out of Ukraine."

4.49 pm

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Vladimir Putin has called up an additional 300,000 reservists. On the face of it, that seems a large number of reinforcements, but the fact is that most of those men have completed a fraction of the training that a NATO member would require. When this war first began, Russia was sending in conscripts who had had only a few days of basic training. It appears that Putin has not learnt his lesson; or perhaps he has, and simply does not care. To Putin, his own people are cannon fodder. They are being sent to the frontlines owing to his personal delusions of grandeur.

The reality is that the latest reinforcements are likely to suffer a worse fate than the original battlegroups. Owing to the failure of the Russian army and, more importantly, the success of the Ukrainians, there is much less equipment for these reinforcements. In Russia's recent disorganised retreat from the Kharkiv region, a substantial amount of Russian equipment was destroyed or captured. That is testimony to the bravery, skill and tactical prowess of the Ukrainians.

The way in which the people of Russia have reacted to Putin's mobilisation announcement is interesting. Almost as soon as he had finished speaking, "how to leave Russia" topped the Google trends in the country, and flights leaving Russia sold out or prices skyrocketed. More than 1,000 people who were protesting against reinforcements were arrested on the streets. Putin is pushing his own people to the edge, but he has a huge security apparatus protecting him and his cronies in Russia. His grip on power is strong. It is no good expecting him no longer to be in control or to suddenly do the right thing, because neither will happen. That is why our support for Ukraine must not waver.

The Ukrainians have shown Russia and the world that they are a fully capable fighting force. The Government must do all they can to continue our support, and that includes looking again at steps that can be taken here against Putin's supporters. There is still too much dirty Russian money around our country, particularly in London. There is much more that we can do. The pressure on Putin's supporters needs to be tightened.

There is only one acceptable way in which this war can end, and that is with a democratic Ukraine having control over all its own territory. Now is the time for us to double down. As I said months ago when the conflict started, this war is our war: Ukraine and Ukrainians are fighting it on behalf of all of us. We must give the Ukrainians what they need, and the Government must do our bit at home as well.

I echo the comments of, in particular, my hon. Friends the Members for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) and for Putney (Fleur Anderson) about refugees. We must do much more. We cannot let these people down. Please, please let us listen to them. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Putney for bringing her news to us, and I thank her so much for going to Ukraine.

4.52 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): It was a pleasure to lead the delegation last week. For anyone who is interested, I am organising another to take place later in the year, and it will be lovely to see colleagues on it.

That weekend when we were in Ukraine heralded a new phase in the war. First, while there is still a long way to go, there is now a sense in Ukraine of a pathway to Ukrainian victory and Russian military defeat, probably within the next three to 18 months. Secondly, the partial collapse of Russian forces will compel it to commit reserves that it would have wanted to build up until the spring for the chance of a spring offensive. From now on, Russia's war will almost certainly become a defensive war of digging in and holding on.

It is clear that Russia's weakness is on the battlefield, while Ukraine's is economic and political. It has an almost total economic dependency on the west, and it has a dependency on our arms supply. It is clear that Putin will try to break this alliance and gain a political victory where he cannot seize a military one. In military terms, the umbilical cord between us and Kyiv becomes the centre of gravity for the Russians to attack. This explains, in part, Putin's decision to threaten the use of nuclear weapons and to annex territory to Russia, and his decision on the mobilisation.

Is nuclear weapon use likely? Not by any means, but I think we should speak with a sense of care and proportion. In the minute I have left, I will try to explain a slight difference with the Government. To minimise the chances of nuclear use, tactical or strategic, we have to assume that that threat is real and that at some point, probably as Russian troops face collapse in the south, Putin will have—again, this is a military term—a decision point to either use tactical weapons or not. We have to assume that he may well use them, and the purpose of making that assumption is so that we can plan. To say that he is bluffing means that we do not have a plan, and we will again, as we have been doing since 2007, be playing catch-up in a disastrous situation, with a fascistic Russian state.

Hope is not a strategy. Keeping fingers crossed is not a policy. At every point, Putin has chosen to escalate and increase risk. There is no sign that he will do anything different now. In short, we need to maximise the chance of avoiding tactical use that will kill thousands by planning for it now. I have run out of time, but I will in due course write further on this and what the Ukrainians told us.

4.55 pm

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): For years, countries in eastern Europe such as Poland and the Baltic states have been warning about Russia under Putin. We absolutely must recognise the gravity, scale and multifaceted nature of the threat and the lengths that Putin may go to.

While we have some encouraging bits of news, with terrain retaken in eastern Ukraine, we must not underestimate the scale of the challenges that remain. There is still extensive terrain to reconquer, the war efforts are taking a toll both on military personnel and on civilians, and Putin continues in his efforts to sow alienation and give false legitimacy to his invasion through the so-called referenda. A huge effort is also required to rebuild ruined towns and devastated communities.

Putin's clear aim is to divide and conquer, so while the world is looking at the physical—the ground war and the threat of nuclear weapons—there is at the same time a huge propaganda war, sometimes more subtle and sometimes less so, trying to undermine the west's unity and resolve, with internet users bombarded with

clever false messages masquerading as the truth. I stress again to the Minister how important it is for the UK and allies to invest in combating internet warfare and mounting counter-offensives.

We need renewed efforts at diplomacy and at fostering unity. It is very important that we are putting money where our mouth is and supporting efforts in Ukraine. It is absolutely vital that we stand firm on sanctions, but we must foster the most positive and unified response from other countries. That includes, of course, investing Foreign Office expertise.

This is not just about Europe and NATO. In the wider world, how do we maintain world peace and deal with the bullies? First, we need to be strong and show strength. Appeasement does not work. In 2014, after the invasion of Crimea, the lack of action by the west was a monumental failure. We need to stand strong in the face of aggression. For all their imperfections, we need to rebuild our respect for international organisations such as the United Nations, and repair the damage caused by Trump when he belittled international organisations, tore up treaties and cut funding to important international programmes.

An important part of that international work is the need to tackle the gap between richer and poorer nations. Nations across the globe need reason to buy into international organisations and to feel that they are being heard. Coronavirus has taught us how interconnected we are, but that is also true in respect of security. We need to build up resilience and prosperity in developing nations, to stop them being used and manipulated by the world's tyrants.

While continuing our direct support for Ukraine, we must also focus on fostering unity among our allies and taking a lead in world organisations to stand firm against Putin.

4.58 pm

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): May I start by putting on the record my appreciation for the British troops based in my constituency of Devizes for the work that they have done in training our allies in Ukraine on Salisbury Plain, and, most of all, my appreciation for Ukraine for her leadership, her army and her people? They have resisted Putin, they have fought back, and they are winning.

The question now is: what next? Members might be familiar with the famous story in Vladimir Putin's memoir of him as a young boy chasing a rat with a stick. It got into a corner, turned on him and attacked. Putin is now that rat, driven into a corner by the heroic Ukrainians. The risk is that the rat now turns, does what he said he would and launches a nuclear strike on Ukraine or a NATO country, even including the UK. The lesson from the story of Putin and the rat is not that we do not corner him—there is no escape route for him that we can offer, except his defeat and humiliation. The lesson we must learn is that we must be ready for the rat to turn.

I do not doubt Ukrainians' determination to stand whatever happens, and I do not doubt the commitment of the British Government or, indeed, the wider alliance to stand with the Ukrainians. My concern is with our own preparedness in the event of a nuclear strike, either in Europe or here. I know that Ministers did not like it

when the Chairman of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), raised that point earlier, and I do not expect them to say anything other than that our defences and doctrine in the event of a nuclear strike are entirely up to date and ready. My concern is with our wider resilience, not just in the event of a nuclear strike but against the wider economic and military pressures that we might be under. I am concerned that our conventional defences should be as strong as possible. We have learned the critical importance of men and armour in this war, and I would like to see our Army grow. We also need to be concerned with our economic security and our social resilience.

I echo the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) when she talked about the need for a whole-of-state approach. There is talk of a new integrated review; I echo the calls for that, and hope that it will include not just whole-of-state resilience, but whole-of-society resilience as well.

5 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I rise to speak not only as the Member for West Dunbartonshire but because, coming from a place like Clydebank, I am keenly aware of what it is like growing up in a place that had the worst aerial bombardment in these islands during the second world war, playing in the ruins and the bomb craters. That is why it is clear to me that just as planning for a new social settlement for people in these islands began right in the middle of the last great war—as we would call it—although it was not exactly a perfect settlement, that is something we must now do to help Ukraine build itself a prosperous and sustainable peace, integrated into the European Union and the mainstream of a free Europe, as it wishes.

The challenge is stark. The Kyiv School of Economics has reported a 33% drop in gross domestic product, which is something that we will need to bear in mind, and a \$200 billion bill to repair the damage done by the Russian Federation. That requires commitments from not only this Government but other allies—commitments that are not only financial, and to timescales that are measured not in weeks but, I am afraid, in decades. Although, as we have heard, there is a lot of support across the House for such measures, we need to hear a lot more from Treasury Ministers about what they plan to do. It is also something of a philosophical challenge for the Government: Ukraine is now a candidate country for the European Union and, contrary to the way things have often worked in military planning, long-term economic and social change will be delivered through its gradual and deepening alignment with the rest of Europe. I hope there will be nothing to stop this Government ensuring that Ukraine is able to do that to the fullest possible extent.

If Ministers have not already done so, I urge them to begin the essential planning that is required for what will be needed in Ukraine when it wins the war—a very modern Marshall plan. I am glad to note that in the regular debates, it has become customary for many to repeat the couplet “Slava Ukraini, heroyam slava!”—glory to Ukraine, glory to the heroes! However, I am mindful of the old Gaelic proverb that translates as “To a man prepared for war, peace is assured.” Ukraine is prepared and peace can be assured, but its continued existence as a sovereign state requires more than heroic platitudes and, I am afraid, even proverbs uttered on the Floor of the House of Commons.

5.3 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I place on record my thanks to my two local authorities for the work they have done in supporting and resettling Ukrainians who have had to flee the war and find a new home in the United Kingdom. The work the Government have done to support them is fantastic, and I have heard good reports that the financial support, in particular, that has been made available has been enormously helpful. While there is clearly a little bit more work to do for those who are going to be settling in the UK in the long term, to ensure that access to education, healthcare and other services continues to be available in the time they are here, it is a success story despite some of the concerns that were raised at the time.

I will focus on two points that emerge from what is happening in Ukraine at the moment, and from some of the points made by a number of Members about how we prepare for the future. Before being elected to this House, I was a member of one of the constituent bodies of the Council of Europe. Its meetings were always challenging, given that at that time, we had Ukraine—which had been invaded by Russia to the extent of Crimea—and Russia in the same room, debating their supposed mutual respect for human rights and the rule of law. But it is clear that with proposals such as the new European political community there is an opportunity for the UK and other countries that do respect the rule of law to bolster the position of politicians, civil society organisations and leaders in Russia who do not condone the actions of Vladimir Putin. He is by no means the only politician in Russia. Many of us who have been engaged in any sense in those international operations will know that there is internal opposition to him in that country. We hope that if the work being done by Ukrainians succeeds, and if the pressure brought to bear by the international community succeeds, we will have an opportunity to foster a relationship with a much more positive Russian Government than the one we have at the moment. It will bolster the efforts we are putting in to support Ukraine if we can strengthen the hand of critics of Putin at home, and that will lay the groundwork for a more constructive relationship in the future, which will be particularly important for the reconstruction of Ukraine.

Finally, I wish to touch on the point about cyber. I had the opportunity to be a witness at the Home Affairs Committee before being elected here, and prior to my session a witness from GCHQ was asked at the height of the Brexit debates, “Do the Russians want the UK to leave the EU?” The answer was very informative: what the Russians were seeking was not a particular outcome, but division in the west. They wanted us in this House and us in the west to be arguing among ourselves about what was happening. That goes to the heart of the points made by so many Members, and I echo this one: the unity and consistency of purpose across the allies is so vital to the long-term outcomes for Ukraine.

5.6 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am pleased to be called in this debate. I was moved the other day when I watched the solemn and dignified meeting between our Princess of Wales and Olena Zelenska, the wife of the Ukrainian President. The image was clear: the UK and Ukraine were standing together at that level, with the ladies very much to the fore. I want us to continue to do

the right thing by the people of Ukraine and continue to stand with them in their darkest hour. I want to say a big thanks to all those in my constituency who work at Thales in east Belfast, which makes the next generation light anti-tank weapons. The management tell me that most of the workforce come from my constituency, so I want to say a big thanks to them for all they have done. They have made a turning point for many in Ukraine conflict.

There is no denying the many ways in which Ukrainians are suffering as they continue to have their homeland invaded by Putin, and I am grateful to other Members for highlighting such atrocities. I would like to draw attention to the ways in which freedom of religion or belief is being trampled on during the crisis, especially given that, as I have said many times, religious freedom is a bellwether human right; where it is protected, other human rights tend to be secured too.

This year, the executive director of the Institute for Religious Freedom said that Russian attacks on religious freedoms in Ukraine had never been as “cruel” as they are now. He said that if Russian invaders previously expelled believers from Ukrainian churches and prayer houses, they are now destroying them with bombs and missiles strikes. It should be remembered that international attacks against religious sites can constitute war crimes according to international humanitarian law. The damage to freedom of religion or belief does not stop there. The president of the Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary said that in six months of the war about 400 Baptist churches had been forced to close. Pastors of the churches have been kidnapped and gone missing, as have some of the parishioners. Many corners of Ukraine feel the ripples of war, and while war rages basic human needs cannot be met. No doubt, at the conclusion of the war the psychological and spiritual distress caused by it will remain. The Donbas and Luhansk regions are the ones where this is happening most.

Northern Ireland is known for our giving spirit, and many of our churches, across all denominations, have been sending financial support to churches in Ukraine to purchase food and clothing. With those churches closing, the support avenues in the Donbas and Luhansk regions are affected for those who no longer have a safe place to be, a place of comfort and a place to get food. These avenues of support were essential for people in Ukraine, and we have a duty of care to these people to ensure that they can survive this war. Everyone has mentioned the atrocities and the important support the UK has given to Ukraine, but it is also important that we underline the despicable things that have happened to human rights and those who have lost their right to freedom of religion or belief—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order.

Let me just say that the Front Benchers have kindly agreed to shorten their contributions in order to assist me in getting everybody in. I call the shadow Minister, Stephen Doughty.

5.9 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I thank colleagues on both sides of the House for their valued contributions to today’s debate. I, too,

think it is fantastic that we have seen the release of a number of Britons and others; that is wonderful news, but we must also recognise that others are still being held or have not made it safely home. I also welcome the new Minister to his place and look forward to working constructively with him over the weeks and months to come.

The attendance and the comments made today from both sides of the House show that the resolve of this House has never been stronger and that our continued commitment to the freedom of Ukraine and our opposition to Putin's illegal and barbaric invasion are palpable. I, too, joined the recent cross-party delegation to Kyiv, and I draw attention to my declaration of interests as a guest of Yalta European Strategy, which will be tabled in due course. I was able to convey our cross-party support personally to President Zelensky, who is remarkable, given what he is doing and the effort he is leading. It is worth saying that, when I met him, his first comments were to offer his sincere condolences to all of us on the loss of Her late Majesty the Queen and to make clear his absolute thanks and gratitude to the British people, this House, the Government and all parties for our continued and resolute support. Those tributes were echoed by Ukrainians who left flowers at the British ambassador's residence and the British embassy in Kyiv.

I was left with three main reflections from that visit. The first is about the brutality of the Russian invasion. We saw with our own eyes the scenes in Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel. We saw residential buildings that had been rocketed. We saw areas where terrible atrocities had been committed. The tactics that the Russians are using are very clear, and that has been exposed in even greater, horrifying detail in recent days in Izium. It is absolutely clear that we have to work with the Ukrainians to bring those who committed those acts at all levels to justice. We also saw the holocaust memorial at Babyn Yar, which recognises the horrific slaughter of 34,000 Jews by the Nazis in 1941. That same memorial, and indeed the nearby TV tower, was damaged and civilians were killed in a Russian attack just months ago. It is absolutely extraordinary, and we saw the shrapnel from that attack.

The second reflection is about the resolution of Ukrainians at every level—the individual soldiers, citizens and Members of Parliament we met, and of course the Government—to fight for the freedom of their country. MPs were taking resources to soldiers from their areas to support them. At the same time, their Parliament is sandbagged. Can we imagine this Parliament with sandbags in the windows to defend democracy? That is what Ukrainians are doing. They are clearly also a western, European, ambitious, young and dynamic country with no affection for, or affiliation with, Putin's regime or his agenda. It is very clear where they want to stand, and we need to stand with them.

The third reflection I was left with is about the absolute criticality of western, European and indeed United Kingdom unity and support for the Ukrainians in their efforts at all levels—militarily, economically and otherwise. Our military and economic support are crucial to the success we have seen in recent days and to the defence of Ukraine, and our economic support more broadly will be critical going forward. We have to show resolve in supporting Ukraine through what will be a difficult few months this winter. On one of the nights

we were there, we saw that the Russians are already attacking critical national infrastructure in response to Ukrainian successes. They took out the electricity and water supplies to millions of people in the east of the country. That is what they are willing to do in response—to attack civilian infrastructure.

Let us be clear: for Ukraine this is a war of necessity, survival and national unity, but for Putin it is one of choice and aggression; it is an imperial war and an attempt at colonisation and annexation. That must be clear in the message we share around the world with our partners, and we must make it clear in our diplomatic efforts in the global south, south Asia and elsewhere. We need to work with Ukrainians to make clear what Russia is doing, what its agenda is and how it is prosecuting this war in the most barbarous and inhumane way possible.

Although Putin's war machine has stalled in recent days, the consequences of the war will, sadly, reverberate for years. The destruction it has already brought to towns and villages across Ukraine, as well as the damage it has done to critical infrastructure, have the capacity to set the country back decades. We saw bridges and civilian infrastructure damaged and destroyed. That is why it is crucial that we provide Ukraine not only with financial and economic support to get its people through the winter, but, in the long term, with trade and investment links to sustain it through the period of rebuilding, which must come when it is victorious.

I was a little disappointed to hear that the UK trade envoy, although having been in post for some years, had not in fact visited Ukraine. There were also concerns about the lack of activities coming from the British-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce. We need to be looking to the long term. We need to be providing Ukrainians with hope for their future when this war is over. I hope the Minister will be able to comment on that.

As was made clear by my hon. Friends at the opening of this debate, Labour continues to fully support the Government's position to provide the necessary military assistance for the defence of Ukraine. Indeed, I remain humbled and moved by the UK's training programme for new Ukrainian recruits as well as the matériel support that we are providing. I want to thank all those who continue to play this critical supporting role. Putin expected this war to be over in days, but, thanks in part to our support, the people of Ukraine are resisting and fighting back seven months down the line, and I am confident that, in the end, freedom and liberty will triumph.

None the less, dark days lie ahead. We have heard many worrying comments in the debate today. Indeed, the speech that Putin made yesterday was meant to frighten and intimidate the international community into withdrawing support to fracture our alliance. We must not let him succeed. The Estonian Prime Minister, Kaja Kallas, put it fantastically when she said that threatening with nukes belongs to the arsenal of a pariah state. That is absolutely right. Now is not the time to withdraw support or to cower to Putin's distortions and threats. In particular, we need to work with Governments across Europe in the months to come. We have heard worrying things about the situation in Italy and the comments being made in Hungary and elsewhere.

[Stephen Doughty]

We need to stay unified and resolute in our support for Ukraine. That is when our words and our deeds will count the most. The Government will continue to have the Opposition's support in the agenda that has been set out and that has been followed over the past seven months. I know that they can also count on the support of the people from Cardiff South and Penarth who came out on the streets on Ukrainian independence day and at other events recently.

In the proceedings today, real tribute has been paid to the immense sacrifices that Ukrainians continue to make for their own country, for Europe as a whole, and also for the values that we all share, and I know that, in the end, those are the values that will prevail.

5.17 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Leo Docherty): I am very grateful to all Members for their contributions to this extremely useful debate today. I am also grateful to those on the Opposition Front Bench for their constructive and positive tone.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) correctly pointed out that this is Putin's war—not Russia's war—and that he is to blame, not the Russian people. We are in agreement on that. He pointed out the grave peril facing Putin's army this winter, which will really test them. I am pleased to confirm that we do indeed have a long-term strategy. The tone of that has been set out again by the Prime Minister in New York, and our collective institutional efforts will be working in alliance with that.

The integrated review will evolve—it is a working document and it is inherently correct that it will evolve as time passes. Robust plans to ensure the supply of munitions, both in terms of what we give our Ukrainian allies and what we need for ourselves, are energetically being put in place. I am pleased to see that the new Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), has joined me on the Front Bench this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) gave us some moving reflections on his recent visit to Ukraine. He usefully pointed out the remarkable resolve of the Ukrainian force. That word “resolve” expresses all we need to know about the Ukrainian capability. We are in absolute agreement on that. He mentioned some issues concerning trade. I will write to him on those, because they are important in terms of the broader picture.

We were honoured to have our former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), speak to us. I know that he is not in his place because of a pre-arranged appointment. He was right to point out that this was a shameful war of conquest and that Russia's youth is being sacrificed on the altar of Putin's ego. He said that Putin's rhetoric shows that he is weak, not strong. Putin's singular achievement in Ukraine has been to unify the west. He mentioned the leadership of President Zelensky; I think we have all been moved by that and by the recent images of Madam Zelenska coming over for the state funeral last week. We are grateful for the bond formed by our former Prime Minister and President Zelensky, which is now being taken up by our new Prime Minister.

Great democracies, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip said, must have the stomach to stand up to tyranny this winter. I know we all agree with that, and our new Prime Minister was very clear about that in her speech in New York last night. Resolve is what we will all show.

The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) gave some very useful reflections on his recent visit. He warned that we should be aware of the “Putin whisperers” and pointed out that while the war could stop tomorrow if Russia just stopped attacking, if Ukrainians stopped defending, Ukraine would cease to exist. I thought both points provided a very useful lens through which to see the situation. We are in agreement on that, and the Government are grateful for the continued support of his party.

The right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) gave some interesting reflections on grain, the weaponisation of food and energy by President Putin and the broader strategic issues at stake. The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) gave some personal reflections on his time with the British Council in Russia and used that as an important lens through which we can see the sheer bravery of those protesting against Putin's war machine. Since yesterday it seems that at this rate they are likely to imprison more people than they can draft as new members of their armed forces.

My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee, pointed out that when it comes to tyrants such as Putin, “cynicism has no limits and hypocrisy no boundaries”.

That was extremely useful historical context. However, I can assure my right hon. Friend that we are energetically making plans to ensure that the provision of munitions for Ukraine, as well as for ourselves, is sufficient. I know that collectively we all hope to see 3% spent on our own domestic defence sooner rather than later, and the Government have commendable plans in place.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord) again put this matter in historical context by reminding us that even if we are not interested in war, war is certainly interested in us. He called out Putin's lies, and I join him in that calling-out. He also gave some interesting reflections on his meetings in Ukraine with Ukrainian MPs, who have been a model of courage and resolve; I salute him in his reference to those gallant friends.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) gave a useful description of the arc of Putin's aggression over the years. Of course, this war is not seven months old; it started many years ago with Putin's statement at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, the invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. That was a useful context in which to set this challenge. My right hon. Friend also gave some interesting thoughts on the broader strategic situation regarding Russia's malign activity in the Balkans and the malign influence and supply of drone munitions by Iran.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), who I think is on his way back, gave some Gladstonian context to the debate, pointing out that freedom has no greater bulwark than the breasts of free men and women.

Freedom is not free, and we all face the price individually in houses up and down the country this winter because of the sharp rise in energy prices. He pointed out that President Putin thinks he can split us, but I offer him reassurance that we are resolute. He also made some interesting strategic remarks about the relationship between this conflict and China: China is watching and, in this new era of global competition, we are essentially deterring China in Europe. That is important to remember.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) reiterated the support of his party, for which I was most grateful, and made some interesting comments on sanctions. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) made some good points about war crimes and preventing sexual violence in conflict. I am pleased to confirm that we have established with our partners the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group and we will be hosting a conference in November on preventing sexual violence in conflict, in which I know she will be interested.

The hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) reflected on her personal experiences in Ukraine, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly). I regret that my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) had very little time to give us his expertise, but we treat these issues very soberly. He referred to the umbilical cord between us and our Ukrainian allies, and I am grateful for his contribution.

Many other hon. Members made contributions that I do not have time to cover, including the hon. Members for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley), for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer), for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith), for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and my hon. Friends the Members for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), for Devizes (Danny Kruger) and for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds).

In conclusion, our Government remain absolutely committed to continuing our support for Ukraine. As winter approaches, Ukraine's resolve will be tested, and our resolve will be tested. This war, and the humanitarian damage that it is inflicting on Ukraine, remains very grim. The global economic consequences—most pressingly on energy and food prices—affect all of us. As the Prime Minister made clear last night in New York, we must remember that, as we support Ukraine, we are defending our own way of life: we are standing for freedom, democracy and the sovereignty of nations. We will not be deterred.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before I put the Question, I want to emphasise that it is important that those who have spoken in a debate come back in good time for the wind-ups.

Question put and agreed to.

That this House has considered the situation in Ukraine.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the motions (1) in the name of Jesse Norman relating to Sanctions, (2) in the name of Mr Secretary Rees-Mogg relating to Electricity, (3) in the name of Secretary Chloe Smith relating to Environmental Protection and (4) in the name of Penny Mordaunt relating to Adjournment (Conference Recess).—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

Question put and agreed to.

Sanctions

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

With the permission of the House, motions 3 to 6 will be debated together. I will call the Minister to move motion 3 and to speak to motions 3 to 6. At the end of the debate, I will put the Question on motion 3 and ask the Minister to move motions 4 to 6.

5.26 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Jesse Norman): I beg to move,

That the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 11) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 792), a copy of which was laid before this House on 14 July, be approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we shall consider the following motions:

That the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 12) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 801), dated 14 July 2022, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18 July, be approved.

That the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 13) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 814), dated 14 July 2022, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18 July, be approved.

That the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 14) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 850), dated 18 July 2022, a copy of which was laid before this House on 20 July, be approved.

Jesse Norman: The instruments before us were laid between 14 and 20 July under powers provided by the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018. They make amendments to the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

As the last debate demonstrated, this House stands absolutely resolute in its opposition to the illegal and aggressive invasion of Ukraine by Russia. In co-ordination with our allies, the United Kingdom continues to play a leading role in introducing the largest and most severe economic sanctions package that Russia has ever faced. The measures that we are debating are designed to isolate Russia's economy still further and target key industries that support President Putin's illegal war in Ukraine. The measures are somewhat technical, so I hope that the House will forgive me if I go through them in a little detail.

The No. 11 regulations ban the export of goods and technologies related to the defence, security and maritime sectors. They also prohibit the export of jet fuel, maritime goods and technologies, certain energy-related goods, and sterling and European Union banknotes. In addition, they ban the import of goods such as fertiliser, metals, chemicals and wood, depriving Russia of a key export market. Together, those markets were worth some £585 million last year.

The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments concluded that three provisions in the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 10) Regulations 2022 would not be inside the powers conferred by the Sanctions Act. His Majesty's Government have resolved that by revoking the 10th amendment and replacing it with the 11th. I thank the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments for its continued engagement as we introduce further secondary legislation rapidly in response to this abhorrent war.

The No. 12 regulations place fresh restrictions on investments and services in Russia. They are designed to hit revenue streams of critical importance to the

Russian economy. The new measures prohibit persons from being involved directly or indirectly in acquiring land and entities with a place of business in Russia, in establishing joint ventures with persons and entities connected with Russia, and in opening representative offices or establishing branches or subsidiaries in Russia. The measures also restrict the provision of investment services related to these activities. There are some exceptions to the provisions to prevent overlap with existing regulations as well as licensing and enforcement powers.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): My right hon. Friend is talking about services. Will His Majesty's Government take further action to prevent Russian state entities such as Gazprom and VTB Bank, and the legal firms that support them in this country, from continuing to use the UK courts? I have written to the Secretary of State for Justice about the matter, because there is a long list of cases that the Russian state and Russian proxy entities are taking in the UK courts, and that money ends up back in the coffers of the Russian Government.

Jesse Norman: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his question, and the House recognises his great expertise in this area. He will understand that I am not going to comment on the future sanctions policy of this Government, but he can take it as read that we are looking extremely closely not just at ways of further extending this escalating programme of sanctions that has elaborated itself over the last few months, but at closing some of the loopholes. If he wishes, I will make certain that my officials have sight of the letter he has written and will write to him on the matter specifically.

I turn to the No. 13 regulations, which widen the definition of scope of activities for which a person can be designated. His Majesty's Government have expanded the definition of destabilising, undermining or threatening Ukraine and supporting or obtaining a benefit from the Russian regime. This brings into scope many individuals and entities in the Russian Government, its agencies and its armed forces. The regulations make minor amendments to the definitions of being involved in, obtaining a benefit from or supporting the Government of Russia. These have the effect of broadening the interpretation of being associated with a designated person to include immediate family members who may, and often do, hold assets on their behalf. The regulations also provide an exception from trade sanctions for humanitarian assistance actively delivered in non-Government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Finally, they expand the definition of ownership in relation to ships and aircraft, and they correct errors and omissions in previous regulations.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his place. He mentions family members who are associated with sanctioned individuals. He will probably be aware of, but unable to comment on, the case of Alisher Usmanov, who is sanctioned by the UK, the EU and the US but has passed on some of his wealth—£2.1 billion, I think—to his sister, who is outside the scope of our current sanctions regimes. Will my right hon. Friend's tightening up of sanctions, which I welcome, mean that we can go after people such as Alisher Usmanov's sister and the assets she holds on his behalf?

Jesse Norman: As my hon. Friend has brilliantly anticipated, I am not in a position to comment on any individual case, but I can say that these powers of designation as to travel bans and asset freezes now have a significantly wider scope to include family members. I take the point he has made in relation to that specific individual—I am sure my officials will have noted it—and I thank him for his intervention.

The fourth and final set of regulations are the No. 14 regulations, which introduce further trade sanctions. The regulations prohibit the export, supply, delivery and making available of a comprehensive list of critical goods, energy-related goods and related ancillary services—services that Russia had relied on G7 nations to supply. These goods had a combined market value to Russia of £365 million last year. The instrument also bans the import, acquisition, supply and delivery of Russian coal; that measure entered into force on 10 August.

That is on top of prohibitions on the import, acquisition, supply and delivery of Russian oil, which will come into force before the end of this year; and on the import of gold that directly or indirectly originates in Russia, which entered into force on 21 July. Ancillary products and services on coal, oil and gold exported from Russia are also prohibited. A further ban covers the provision of business and management consulting services, public relations and accounting services to persons connected with Russia.

These hard-hitting new measures continue the Government's project of ratcheting up the pressure on Russia. We will continue to do this in close concert with our allies until Putin ends his illegal invasion of Ukraine. I commend these regulations to the House.

5.34 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the new Minister to his place. I look forward to working with him on sanctions, as I have with his many predecessors. I welcome the opportunity to discuss sanctions on Russia again and I am pleased to see such a wide range of issues being covered in today's measures, which are mainly amendments.

My first question is why so many amendments are needed. The Minister has answered some of that, as do the explanatory notes, but—I do not want this to be seen as a criticism of the officials, who work incredibly hard to put such regulations together—an extraordinary number of errors and omissions appear to have been made, as he just confirmed. That underlines the point that I have made in many previous sanctions debates about the resourcing and assistance that is being given to critical units in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and elsewhere, and whether that is enough. I know that it has been expanded and there are more officials, but we need to have the support in the system to ensure that we get such things right first time. Putin and his cronies will be—we know that they are—seeking every single loophole, omission and error to try to circumvent them. We must not allow them to do that. I will come to further comments about that in due course; I hope that the Minister will explain that in his closing remarks.

Obviously, in the last few weeks, we have seen remarkable progress by Ukrainian forces in the east and south of the country in an incredible counter-offensive. Indeed, Ukrainians have shown extraordinary courage, strength

and ingenuity in the face of Russian aggression. Those efforts, thanks to our support and that of others, are thankfully bearing fruit. As we enter a new phase of the conflict, it is more important than ever to show our firm resolve to stand behind Ukraine in every way, not only in the military domain but politically, economically and diplomatically as well as, crucially, in the consequences that Putin and his cronies must face for their illegal and barbarous actions.

As I mentioned in the previous debate, I have just returned from a trip to Kyiv and the surrounding area. I refer again to my impending entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a guest of Yalta European Strategy. I was deeply moved by the spirit, courage and bravery shown by not only President Zelensky but all the Ministers, officials, Members of Parliament, members of civil society and Ukrainian citizens. I returned with a deep sense of urgency, a personal commitment and a solemn duty to do everything that we can to end President Putin's egregious display of aggression, violence and cruelty, which we have sadly seen so brutally in the scenes from Izyum—the mass graves, the torture and the stories coming out of there. We heard in the previous debate about sexual violence. On our visit, we heard some truly horrific things and we saw with our own eyes the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

The former Minister, now Foreign Secretary, informed me in May that 150 individuals were working full time in the sanctions taskforce in the FCDO and that the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation had at least doubled in size, but I have tried to get further clarity about the resourcing going in. I asked about that in the last two debates and I was promised a letter by the Minister. I have not had that and I hope that the new Minister can chase that up and get some answers. We support these sanctions and the measures, but it is only right that the Opposition can scrutinise and understand whether the Government are properly resourcing them. What extra financial resources have been given to those bodies? What conversations has the Minister had with the National Crime Agency to ensure the proper enforcement against those who breach the sanctions regime?

In the previous debate, I asked about the potential circumvention of sanctions. Numerous allegations have been put to me about a range of industries, such as the steel industry—we have discussed measures on those sorts of products and there are measures in these regulations—where Russia is attempting to use third countries potentially to export steel and other key products, some of which are ending up in the UK and countries across the west that are imposing sanctions. That is an absurd situation and I hope the Minister can provide more information about that and about what we are doing to close the loopholes that Russia is attempting to use. We can have the toughest regime on paper, but if Russia is in practice finding ways around it, that is not acceptable.

I was struck on the visit to Kyiv by the importance of ratcheting up the sanctions. Indeed, many of the measures proposed in these regulations are about expanding the sanctions, and that is a good thing. However, it is crucial that we work with some of the best minds around the world to look at other areas where we can bring pressure to bear. Indeed, McFaul, the former US ambassador to Russia, and others, including from the Ukrainian Government, have a working group looking

[Stephen Doughty]

at additional ways in which they can expand these sanctions and make them tougher. I was concerned to be told that there is apparently no UK representative on that group. Can the Minister clarify why that is the case? We need to have somebody on that group, because we need to be leading, with the United States and others, including our friends and allies in the European Union, to ensure that we have the toughest, broadest and deepest regime, and that we think about innovative ways in which we can really hit those people around Putin who are providing the backing financially and otherwise for his actions in Ukraine.

In the detail of the sanctions packages being announced today there are many welcome things—prohibiting the import of oil, coal and gold and the export to Russia of maritime equipment, oil refining technology, jet fuel and other materials. Those are absolutely critical and the Labour party obviously welcomes the Government's movement on them. However, one area that did raise some concern for me was the prohibition of the export of goods which have

“potential use for internal oppression”.

Obviously, it is a good thing that that is included in this package, but I have to ask why there was any possibility that UK public or private bodies were ever providing Russia with materials that might be used for internal oppression in the first place. I hope that the Minister can explain to us what kind of exports have been going on. This matters, because this war did not start just seven months ago; it started in 2014 or far before that. We have known of Putin's internal repression against democratic opposition and others for years, so I seriously hope that we have not been providing support to him that could have been used to quash internal opposition in Russia.

The explanatory note refers to micro-organisms and toxins. Again, I want to understand what assessment has been made of the volumes of any such materials that have made their way from the UK to Russia, and why that change had not been brought to the House sooner. These are very serious matters and—particularly given Russia's record of using weapons of mass destruction, including in this country—I seriously hope that no UK company has been exporting any materials that have got to Russia in this way. The designations in SI No. 792 are welcome, but I come back to the issue of swiftness and responsiveness, and why—seven months into this phase of the war—we are only debating such a designation today.

I ask the Minister, and I have asked this in all the previous debates on sanctions, whether he has any further specific proposals not only to freeze assets, but to confiscate and sequester those assets—not least because of the huge costs involved in continuing to support Ukraine, which we absolutely must do, but also because of the clear costs there will be in reconstruction and making sure that Ukraine can develop and survive after this war is over. Indeed, this request was made to us by many of those in the Ukrainian Government, other officials and Members of Parliament from many parties while we were in Kyiv just weeks ago. They want to see that done. It has been done in a number of countries, and other countries are looking at how they can sequester and use assets. I know that it is not straightforward and that it might require further legislative change, but can the Minister provide some clarification?

We have had the issue raised of travel by individuals designated under these sanctions regimes, whether the issuing of tourist visas to Russians should be allowed—I certainly do not think it should be—and of designating Putin's United Russia party as a state sponsor of terrorism or as a terrorist organisation, just as we have Hezbollah, Hamas and other parties in other locations that are sponsoring terrible and heinous acts of aggression and crimes against humanity. What are the Government's thoughts on those proposals?

The scope of these sanctions measures is of course wide, and I think it shows the resolve we have to tackle those who are backing Putin, but we must deal with the wider ecosystem around those who are backing him. I know that the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill has been published today, but we have to tackle the whole ecosystem of the London laundromat and all those individuals who have been backing and sustaining his regime. I certainly hope that in debates to come we will see tough action taken in that regard.

Overall, Labour wholeheartedly supports the measures outlined today, and I hope the Minister will answer some of my detailed questions. Our sanctions regime is integral to Britain's role in supporting Ukraine and holding Putin's regime accountable for the acts of violence that it continues to perpetrate against civilians across Ukraine. This winter, the people of Ukraine will weather the even more difficult storm of the brutal, egregious and unconscionable war of aggression that they face, and we must back their bravery by being brave and bold with sanctions, and by not providing succour for any of those who are supporting such aggression.

5.45 pm

Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) in welcoming the Minister to his place, and I also find myself in the strange position of thanking the shadow Minister for raising the issue of loopholes. This is an issue specific to my constituency, and relates to a business that has potentially been affected by such loopholes. I speak on behalf of JD UK/Alunet Systems, but I clarify that I will be supporting the sanctions and will not press the House to a Division—I am sure there will be a sigh of relief all round.

Alunet Systems is a group of companies based in Dewsbury that sells a wide variety of metal-based products, including aluminium, steel, and iron-based garage doors. Before the invasion its revenue was £30 million per annum, but that has now reduced to £20 million. It employed 100 people, but that has now reduced to 70. That could be down to a potential loophole in the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 11) Regulations 2022, which should be on an equal level to the amendments to schedule 2B under the Republic of Belarus (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2022—I am not trying to confuse Members.

The company's previous Belarusian supplier, Alutech, which supplied aluminium and sectional garage doors, has found a potential loophole to avoid the impact of sanctions on the import of products containing steel and iron from Belarus and Russia. The Belarusian company entered the UK market directly after JD UK ceased trading with it. Belarusians have claimed about 30% of JD UK's iron and steel customers, and about

15% of its aluminium customers through price dumping. That is a loss of about £10 million in revenue from a British business based in my constituency.

Amendments to schedule 2B under the Republic of Belarus (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 banned the import of iron and steel consigned from or originating in Belarus, and they applied to all commodity codes starting 72 or 73. Chapter 7 of the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 11) Regulations 2022 covers iron and steel imports and acquisitions under schedule 3B. However, that does not seem to extend to the same range as stated for Belarus, and includes only some elements of the 72 and 73 codes, but not all. One of JD UK's products—sectional garage doors—contains steel and has a commodity code starting 7308. It is banned under the Belarus amendment, yet is still available to import if the components are Russian. I am sure the Minister would agree that the difference in sanctioned goods has a significant potential to threaten JD UK's business sales, and encourages Alutech to export via Russian subsidiaries instead of Belarus. That is an unintended consequence of the sanctions.

Currently, no sanctions are in place regarding exports of aluminium from Belarus. Again, the Belarusian company contacted several of my constituent's major customers, offering to supply them aluminium profile directly from its Belarus factory. The lack of sanctions and/or high enough tariffs on aluminium exports could allow the Belarusians to threaten my constituent's business sales in the UK. The current 35% tariff regime for aluminium products has made it unviable for my constituent to continue conducting business with Belarus. However, Alutech in Belarus is diverting material through Russia and continuing to sell at very attractive prices, making more profit than selling through my constituent. Alunet suggests that, unless the loophole closes, its revenue from aluminium is likely to fall by another £10 million, which would make the business unviable. It also suggests—I would like the Minister to consider this—that the tariff against Russia and Belarus be increased to 100% to make it more consistent.

I have some questions for the Minister, which I hope he can respond to. First, how will the Government make the position unviable for Russian and Belarussian companies that exploit these anomalies, loopholes or whatever we want to call them? To support British businesses, please will he clarify why there are such differences between the Belarusian and Russian sanctions, and also outline what will be done to protect our UK markets? In summary, will he reassure Alunet that he will take these matters into consideration so that we can protect a Dewsbury business that employs so many people in my constituency?

5.51 pm

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): I always remember that nobody criticises a speech for being too short, but I think I can excel myself today on this one.

We support these measures and have called for many of them ourselves. If they came to a vote, which I trust they will not, we would support three and abstain on the fourth. I was very glad that the Minister outlined the detail. To make a couple of general comments, we warmly welcome the expansion of the definition of “associated with”, which has been abused. We are dealing with some of the slipperiest and best-advised people,

and this is an evolving situation, so we are glad to see that evolve, too. We are also glad to see the further restriction on land interests, which is of key relevance to Scotland. The tightening of energy sanctions is also significant for us, given our energy footprint. We warmly welcome the tightening of those sanctions.

I would, though, also raise my concern, as a more general point, about the use of third countries and brokers in, effectively, laundering Russian energy assets, which we have seen. We have seen reports of India in particular refining various products and their being sold on, so that needs further attention. I would also welcome a reassurance, which I have asked for before, that all these measures will be properly tracked through the overseas territories, because all of us are, as I say, tackling deeply slippery people who are good at exploiting loopholes. We need to ensure that what we do does not accidentally create loopholes, and the overseas territories should be part of that.

We support these measures, but I am conscious of the hurt to the UK economy as well. Under the impact assessments, we are looking at the best part of half a billion pounds-worth of hurt to the UK economy. A number of UK companies that have acted in good faith are suffering from these measures through no fault of their own, so there should be greater consideration to making UK Government support available for those companies on a case-by-case basis. Several companies are suffering through this and need more support than they have received.

More generally, we will come back to this—these are not the last SIs that we have seen on this subject—but I would also like a discussion about what we will do with the assets so seized and the money so sequestered. We have previously heard calls for a Marshall plan to aid the reconstruction of Ukraine. That is not legally easy—I acknowledge that fully—and it is outwith the scope of these sanctions, but having a purpose to which we will put these funds would give urgency and legitimacy to these sanctions, and also a bit of urgency to reaching the destination point, which is the reconstruction of a whole and sovereign Ukraine. We support these measures.

5.53 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I will make a few brief points to the Minister and raise some specifics, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood) did. It is quite clear that Russia is now actively trying to get round sanctions on an industrial scale. We are seeing that in its use of tech and microchips, in the potential sale of raw steel products to third parties, which then get re-exported back into Europe, and, as I am sure the Minister will know, in the passing of assets to wives, kids, families and in-laws of various types.

Along with the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), I was also in Kyiv as part of that delegation and was likewise a guest of Yalta European Strategy—obviously I will declare that in due course. When we met folks in Kyiv there was a sense of urgency that, as well as all the great stuff we are doing, we need to be helping them to shut down Russia's ability to maintain a multibillion-dollar monthly war effort. Therefore, the sanctions regime is absolutely vital in achieving that. When it comes to the specifics of the oligarchs, what they wanted was that money going back to Ukraine in war reparations.

[Bob Seely]

On specific elements, I mentioned this point in my intervention, but I would just like to build on it for a couple of minutes. In UK courts, Russian state parties are still bringing cases. Is that right? If successful, the winnings from those cases go back via Russian proxies to the Russian state, where they are used to continue to fund the illegal invasion of Ukraine. As I said, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Justice, and another 10 Members of Parliament from both sides of the House have co-signed the letter. The 12th amendment to the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 has already established that it is a criminal offence to knowingly provide the Russian state and other entities with funds or economic resources. I am asking for the Government to consider whether that provision can be applied to the legal winnings from ongoing litigation in UK courts.

Along with the 10 other signatories, I am asking the Government to prevent Russian state entities, such as Gazprom and VTB Bank, from using the legal system to effectively conduct a form of lawfare against Ukraine. As people may know, tackling the amoral offering of services to highly dubious characters has been quite close to my heart. It is less revolting than some of the intimidation of journalists and campaigners, but now, because of the situation with the war, it should come under the scope of Government action.

We are asking specifically for the following: the introduction of further sanctions against British law firms and banks which do not comply with existing sanctions regimes, and an amendment to hold managing partners accountable for their work should they be violating sanctions; the direct prohibition for UK-based law firms to represent entities controlled by the Government of the Russian Federation, including the Bank of Russia and entities in which the Russian state has a significant or controlling interest; and, thirdly, for His Majesty's Treasury and the Ministry of Justice to address and tell us what they are going to do about ongoing litigation cases, of which there are at least half a dozen in English and Welsh courts, to ensure the Russian Federation is not evading the sanctions regime and is not profiting from winning those court cases. I have a list of about eight big law firms, including Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, VTB Bank Europe, PCB Byrne, Steptoe & Johnson and a number of Russian state entities. They are in the letter that, in the last few minutes, I have pinged to the Minister. I would be most grateful if the Government could give a considered response to those three points, but also to the current litigations as they go through the UK courts.

5.58 pm

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): The Liberal Democrats support the statutory instruments, so my comments will be brief.

First, I heard the proposal that members of the United Russia party be subject to sanctions. That was, I think, proposed back in spring by the President of the European Parliament and should be considered for future statutory instruments.

Secondly, the Minister will know, through his involvement with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, that the research collaboration advice team in the

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has been very useful to the higher education sector in enabling universities to support enforcement on sanctions and export control. I hope that in any slimming of the civil service in future months—we hear about the purported cuts of 91,000—the research collaboration advice team in BEIS is not hacked back, because it is doing crucial work on the enforcement of these sanctions.

5.59 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I will not detain the House for long. I very much welcome the measures and the reasons for them. As the briefing states, the current measures we have imposed through sanctions are insufficient and we need to go further. The sanctions are effective, however, as evidence given to the Treasury Committee has shown. They are putting further pressure on Putin, who is clearly now under huge pressure anyway. However, they are a dimmer switch rather than a traditional light switch, so it is important that we improve the dimmer switch's efficacy.

I raised the case of Alisher Usmanov earlier because it is a case in point and not because I wanted a direct answer on it. These are clever people, with very large resources, and they can employ the best people to help them to try to evade sanctions. They look to do that in two principal ways. They either use associates, relatives and the rest—it is good to hear that the provisions will tighten up on family members, and I will follow with interest whether that works with Mr Usmanov—or they use very complex corporate vehicles. Again, the Government intend to legislate in that area to improve the transparency around companies. Mr Usmanov has a £600 million yacht—that is some yacht—which is currently moored in Hamburg. Even though the German authorities know that it is his, they cannot identify his direct linkage to the ownership of the yacht, so they cannot impound it, which is disappointing. The Italians have taken his villa in the Italian riviera away from him, but we cannot identify his direct connection with that yacht, so we need to tighten things up in various areas to make this easier.

I will suggest a couple of measures to the Minister and his officials, who are hopefully listening. There was a suggestion from Bill Browder—his name will be familiar to many of us in this debate—who has been a fantastic champion for tackling dirty money around the world. Clearly, following the money is so difficult because these people are very clever and use very clever advisers to hide the money. If we introduced legislation so that all UK professional advisers who had dealt with a sanctioned individual had to open their books to the authorities, that would make it much easier to track that money through very complex shell companies and the like—so we could follow the money and properly sanction people. It would also potentially deter some of our professional advisers in this country from dealing with these highly suspect characters in the first place. Hopefully, the Minister will consider that.

In terms of following the money, I am also very concerned by the push from the Treasury to make the UK an international, world-leading crypto hub. One thing we know about crypto is that it is designed not to be regulated. Although people will say that there is a log, so there is an audit trail for all the money, the regulators cannot see it and that is how it is designed. In my view, our regulators will therefore never be able to

track the stuff through crypto, yet we seem to be saying that we want the UK to be a leading crypto finance centre. We should reconsider that.

Another measure is the Magnitsky Act, which the EU and the UK have, although we do not call it that. That currently only covers human rights, but the EU is adding corruption to it, so asset freezes and travel restrictions could then be used for somebody who is guilty of—or even suspected of—corruption.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), and my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) mentioned sequestering, confiscating and redistributing assets. That is a really interesting point. Most of us in the House absolutely believe in property rights, so taking assets off people and giving them to somebody else is pretty tricky stuff. We cannot undermine our values in attempting, rightly, to use some of that money to pay reparations to Ukraine. There is one thing that we could do much more easily. We hold about £30 billion of Russian foreign currency reserves, which is currently seized. That is protected by sovereign immunity, but we could change those rules pretty quickly. It would not be difficult for us to establish criteria around which we can set aside such measures. Clearly, Russia is guilty under international law with its illegal invasion of Ukraine. It cannot be difficult for us to say, “On that basis, the £30 billion of assets can go to help Ukraine, instead of British taxpayers having to fund the help that we are providing to Ukraine.”

Finally, the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, which is to have a Second Reading on 13 October, is missing some measures that would have a profound effect. All the money that came out of Russia and flowed into oligarchs’ back pockets went through some major banks around the world, not least Danske Bank. Some £200 billion of laundered money went through the bank’s division in Estonia. The people who run the bank must have known, because a bank’s normal return on capital employed is approximately 20%, whereas the return on capital employed in that branch in Estonia was 426%. That must have stood out pretty clearly to the people who run those banks.

If we introduced measures in the Bill to say “If you fail to prevent money laundering, fraud or false accounting, you could be held to account not only as a corporation but as an individual,” it would have a profound effect on the people facilitating this stuff. It would allow us to clamp down on it and stop it happening. I know that that is not a matter for the Minister on duty today, but I will certainly be mentioning it on 13 October. Thank you for giving me time to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker.

6.6 pm

Jesse Norman: I thank all hon. Members who have spoken in this very interesting debate. It is a testament to the intense interest and passion that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has raised in this House that, even on topics as apparently technical as this one, we could have such a vigorous and energetic debate.

Let me pick up as many as I can of the points that have been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) spoke truly about how highly effective sanctions have been so far, as evidenced by the Treasury Committee. I would say that it is more like turning off a light, but the danger is that

the dimmer switch may be activated the other way. That is one thing that we are constantly dealing with. I will say a little about it more generally, partly in response to the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), because this is an evolving situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton mentioned Bill Browder, a very interesting and brilliant man whom I have met. The idea about opening books is a very interesting one. We have a lot of interesting ideas in this House; one of the strengths of the open parliamentary debate that makes our system so much stronger than the Russian alternative is that we are willing rapidly to evolve our response to public opinion and to such suggestions, for which I thank my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend also made a point about crypto that I think was right. It is important to say that crypto-assets are treated in exactly the same way as any financial asset. We therefore expect these measures to be as widely respected by entities, even if enforcement proves to require further work.

Stephen Doughty: I have just received notice that on 11 October we will be debating another set of amending regulations on sanctions—not only against Russia, but against a whole bunch of regimes—to deal with the very fact that crypto-assets are not treated in the same way as other financial assets for the purposes of sanctions. In fact, there appear to be a whole series of loopholes that the Government are only getting around to dealing with on 11 October. We really need to move a lot faster. We need to be up to speed with what is actually happening and with how people are using these markets.

Jesse Norman: If I may say so, I do not think that it is possible to move faster than having a debate within two days—in fact, a day and a half—of Parliament’s resumption after the interval following the unfortunate passing of Her late Majesty the Queen. The rules apply. As a further rebuttal to the shadow Minister’s point, my reply to the suggestion that something can somehow be made perfect, as though it were set in stone forever, is “Of course not.” This is a rapidly evolving situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) talked about lawfare. He is exactly right that some very well-heeled and well-resourced individuals are using all their resources, as corporates and as individuals, to try to thwart us. That is why the response must continue to evolve, and it will.

On the point raised by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord), the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation in the Treasury has more than doubled in this financial year. The response that is being made is being taken very seriously, and there is a continuous effort to build sanctions capability across Government.

I take the point that the hon. Gentleman made about advice for the higher education sector. I can also tell him that a very effective team in the Department for International Trade is helping businesses in this country to deal with this issue, which, again, we take extremely seriously.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight, when referring to lawfare, mentioned Freshfields. I was sorry to hear the name mentioned, given the respect in which

[*Jesse Norman*]

that firm is held across the country. I wish it were not true, if it is—I hope it is not—but it was interesting that my hon. Friend mentioned it.

Bob Seely: Will the Minister give way?

Jesse Norman: I would rather not, because I have not much time, but let me just say this. My hon. Friend talked about the extension of designation, and this makes the point about the evolving nature of the threat. It is important to get the sanctions in quickly, but as the response evolves, so we must evolve it, and that is what we have done. Being associated with a designated person now includes obtaining financial benefit or other material benefit, or being an immediate family member, which means a wife, a husband, a civil partner, a parent or step-parent, a child or stepchild, a sibling or step-sibling, a niece or nephew, an aunt or uncle, or a grandparent or a grandchild. That is an example of the response evolving as my hon. Friend would have wished.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) rightly drew attention to the slippery nature of what we are dealing with. I have been highlighting that in my speech. He talked about the danger of laundering energy. There are technically difficult questions to address about how that is to be characterised, especially when, as it were, forms of energy are changed.

The hon. Gentleman talked about proper tracking through the overseas territories. He will be aware that these rules apply in the overseas territories by Order in Council, in the same way that we would apply them here. I think he erred slightly in talking about the legitimacy of sanctions in part depending on the assets seized; the legitimacy of sanctions lies in the fact that we are fighting an aggressive nation that is seeking to overturn our way of life and the foundations of liberal democracy, and I do not think any further legitimacy is required for that to be a worthwhile thing for us to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mark Eastwood) raised the important issue of Alunet, in his constituency. I thank him for doing so, and I thank him for writing to me in advance with the details. I understand the sense of those at Alunet of the loss that they appear to have incurred, and also the concern that they are feeling. I will be writing to my hon. Friend specifically about that issue.

Let me now come to the questions raised by the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth. He asked why so many changes and amendments were needed. It is, of course, because the first instinct in a war situation is to get sanctions on the books as quickly as possible. We know that they have been effective because the Treasury Committee has reminded us of that, and we have plenty of other evidence that it is the case. As I have said, however, as the situation evolves so we need to evolve the response, and as the concerns about the humanitarian impact and unfairness evolve, the sanctions picture inevitably becomes not merely more widespread and more expensive, but more complex—and it is right that that should be so.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a letter that he had written. Obviously the process has been disturbed by the abeyance of Government and the funeral of Her Majesty, but I will ensure that that letter is sent. He also

talked about resourcing. I have referred to the increase in the size of OFSI, and that is matched by the seriousness with which this issue is taken across Government. The hon. Gentleman raised a series of other, more technical issues, and I shall be happy to write to him about those in more detail.

I invite the House to support these motions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 11) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 792), a copy of which was laid before this House on 14 July, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 12) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 801), dated 14 July 2022, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18 July, be approved.—(*Jesse Norman.*)

That the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 13) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 814), dated 14 July 2022, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18 July, be approved.—(*Jesse Norman.*)

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (SANCTIONS)

Resolved,

That the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) (No. 14) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 850), dated 18 July 2022, a copy of which was laid before this House on 20 July, be approved.—(*Jesse Norman.*)

Business without Debate

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (FRIDAY 23 SEPTEMBER)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the Order of the House of 13 June, (Adjournment (Summer, Conference and November Recess)), the House shall meet on Friday 23 September at 9.30am and

(a) notwithstanding Standing Order No. 11(4) and (5), urgent questions and statements may be taken before the commencement of public business and the provisions of Standing Order No. 14(1) shall apply; and

(b) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 11(6), the Order of 13 June shall otherwise continue to have effect, subject to any amendments thereto which the House may agree.—(*Mr Bone.*)

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL (11 OCTOBER)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 10(2)(b), the sitting in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 11 October shall begin at 11.30am, shall be suspended from 1.30pm to 4.30pm, and may then continue for up to a further three hours.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

ELECTION OF SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRS (NOTICE OF ELECTION AND DEADLINE FOR NOMINATIONS)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 122C(1) and (2),

(1) the Speaker may announce a date for an election of the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee before 13 October 2022 in respect of which the requirement of notice is not met and

(2) nominations for the Chairs of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Science and Technology Committee shall be submitted by 3.30pm on the day before the ballot.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

NATIONAL SECURITY BILL: PROGRAMME (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That the Order of 6 June (National Security Bill: Programme) be varied as follows:

In paragraph (2) of the Order (conclusion of proceedings in Public Bill Committee), for “Tuesday 13 September” substitute “Tuesday 18 October”.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

LEVELLING-UP AND REGENERATION BILL: PROGRAMME (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That the Order of 8 June (Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: Programme) be varied as follows:

In paragraph (2) of the Order (conclusion of proceedings in Public Bill Committee), for “Tuesday 20 September” substitute “Thursday 20 October”.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

TRADE (AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND) BILL: PROGRAMME (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That the Order of 6 September (Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill: Programme) be varied as follows:

In paragraph (2) of the Order (conclusion of proceedings in Public Bill Committee), for “Thursday 22 September” substitute “Thursday 20 October”.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS BILL: PROGRAMME (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That the Order of 7 September (Financial Services and Markets Bill: Programme) be varied as follows:

In paragraph (2) of the Order (conclusion of proceedings in Public Bill Committee), for “Tuesday 25 October” substitute “Thursday 3 November”.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BILLS) (MOTION)

Ordered,

That —

(1) the Order of the House of 13 June (Business of the House (Private Members’ Bills)) is amended as follows:

- (a) leave out “9 September, 16 September,” and insert “21 October”; and
- (b) after “25 November,” insert “2 December.”

(2) the Orders for Second Reading of Bills having precedence in accordance with Standing Order No. 14(9) on 9 and 16 September are read and discharged;

(3) Bills set down for 9 September are ordered to be read a second time on 21 October in the order in which they were so set down;

(4) Bills set down for 16 September are ordered to be read a second time on 2 December in the order in which they were so set down, but, notwithstanding the practice of the House, Bills set down for second reading on Friday 16 September may be set down for a day earlier than Friday 2 December provided that such notice is given on or before Wednesday 12 October and that any such notice may not take priority over any other notice already given.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

TEN MINUTE RULE MOTIONS

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in bills and nomination of select committees at commencement of public business)—

(a) the notices given for motions for leave to bring in Bills on Tuesday 13 and Wednesday 14 September shall be treated for all purposes as if notice had been given for Tuesday 11 October,

(b) the notice given for a motion for leave to bring in a Bill on Tuesday 20 September shall be treated for all purposes as if notice had been given for Wednesday 12 October,

(c) the notice given for a motion for leave to bring in a Bill on Wednesday 21 September shall be treated for all purposes as if notice had been given for Monday 17 October, and

(d) the provisions of Standing Order No. 23 shall apply in all other respects (other than notice) to the motions set down for consideration at the commencement of public business under this order for Tuesday 11, Wednesday 12 and Monday 17 October.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE LEVY (REPEAL) BILL)

Ordered,

That notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee in respect of the Health and Social Care Levy (Repeal) Bill may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before it has been read a second time.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

ADJOURNMENT (CONFERENCE RECESS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),

That the Order of the House of 13 June (Adjournment (Summer, Conference and November Recess)) be amended as follows:

leave out “Monday 17 October” and insert “Tuesday 11 October”.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Warm Home Discount (Scotland) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 29 June, be approved.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Chemicals (Health and Safety) Trade and Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 23 June, be approved.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

Question agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I can now announce the new arrangements that Mr Speaker has determined for the elections of the Chairs of the Science and Technology and Foreign Affairs Committees. Nominations for both elections will close at 3.30 pm on Tuesday 11 October. If there is more than one candidate for either election, the ballot will take place on Wednesday 12 October between 11 am and 2.30 pm in the Aye

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

Division Lobby. A note with more detail about these arrangements and the nomination process will be made available in the Vote Office.

PETITION

Energy crisis support for small and medium sized businesses, the public sector and charities

6.19 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): Small and medium-sized businesses are the lifeblood of our local economies, but energy price increases threaten to cripple them. In addition, when times are tough, it is the public sector and the third sector that our communities turn to. Whether it is the warm banks that Glasgow City Council is having to open up so that everyone has a warm place to go if they cannot heat their homes, or youth centres such as the Brunswick Youth and Community Centre—which welcomes around 60 young people every night, where they learn, have fun, and stay safe and warm—each provides a vital lifeline for people. To provide that lifeline, they need certainty. Our businesses need certainty.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government

“to match the Energy Price Guarantee period for domestic consumers of two years for small and medium sized businesses, public sector organisations and charities, allowing certainty and stability in their dealings and further urges the Government to extend the eligibility criteria to allow access to the scheme for businesses, public sector organisations and charities who may have agreed their energy contracts prior to 1 April 2022.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that businesses, public sector organisations and charities are facing unprecedented energy costs which will have dire and serious consequences for staff, customers and beneficiaries; notes that the Energy Bill Relief Scheme is an effective price cap and has been pledged for a six-month period, and that a price cap for domestic energy consumers under the Energy Price Guarantee has been pledged for a period of two years; and further notes that eligibility for the Energy Bill Relief Scheme is restricted to businesses, public sector organisations and charities who have fixed contracts agreed on or after 1 April 2022, as well as to deemed, variable and flexible tariffs and contracts.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to match the Energy Price Guarantee period for domestic consumers of two years for small and medium sized businesses, public sector organisations and charities, allowing certainty and stability in their dealings and further urges the Government to extend the eligibility criteria to allow access to the scheme for businesses, public sector organisations and charities who may have agreed their energy contracts prior to the 1 April 2022.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002768]

Worcester Warriors Rugby Club

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Craig Whittaker.)

6.20 pm

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): It is a great honour to secure this debate, on an issue that is very dear to my heart. In recent weeks, Warriors fans have grown accustomed to the odd delay, and I apologise to all those who may have tuned in at 5 pm or 5.30 pm, but I hope I am able to evoke their concerns during the course of the debate. I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) for taking up his role, and look forward to his response. I am also grateful to the Clerks in the Table Office for accommodating me at the first possible opportunity after the period of mourning. Sadly, this debate is all too urgent and timely.

Worcester Warriors is a rugby club that has been at the heart of our county and community for decades, and follows in the footsteps of the Worcester rugby football club, who have played rugby union in Worcester for over 150 years. In the era of professional rugby, which roughly coincides with my adult lifetime, the club has been based at Sixways, and throughout my adult life I have been a supporter. The first game of professional rugby I ever watched was in Worcester; the club was then in North Midlands division 2, and although never a player myself, I have worn the club colours of gold and blue ever since. When I gave Worcester rugby shirts to my two nephews, then aged four and eight, they described them as their Uncle Robin suits, as they had so often seen me wearing mine. As is the case for so many other local folk, the club has provided a forum for intergenerational bonding, an arena for local pride, and a gathering space for special events.

The rise and rise of Worcester, who subsequently became the Warriors, was no accident, but the result of the vision and drive of one man: Worcester's most successful 20th century entrepreneur and philanthropist, the late, great Cecil Duckworth. It is not possible to overstate Cecil's contribution to our city. The boiler he first made in his garage became the prototype of the modern combi boiler and the basis for Worcester Heat Systems, now known as Worcester Bosch, the biggest private sector employer in my constituency. His endowment of the Duckworth Worcestershire Trust continues to make an enormous contribution to our local environment, and his generous support for the Acorns Children's Hospice made its Worcester hospice a reality.

Cecil's greatest and most prominent local legacy, however, was the rise of the Warriors. I was privileged to know Cecil and his family long before I became Worcester's MP, and to be able to watch rugby at Sixways with him. I recall watching a pre-season friendly between Worcester and Oxford University while I was a student there, and learning that even great figures such as Cecil and his opposite number at the university rugby team, who happened to be a former head of the civil service and distinguished member of the other place, were capable of colourful language when the referee's decision went against their team. I celebrated with him an astonishing six successive league wins and promotions as, with his support, the Warriors—as they became in 2002—moved all the way up from North Midlands

division 2 to National league 1, the league just beneath the rugby premiership. I well remember the ecstatic feeling when our team, unbeaten after 26 wins in 26 matches, first won promotion to the top flight in the 2003-04 season.

Like so many fans, I experienced the pain of relegation in 2009, followed by joy at our return to the top flight in my first year as Worcester's MP. All of this was masterminded by Cecil and his passion to see the club not just achieve, but cement, its position at the top of English rugby. When I first attended Sixways, there was one stand with a capacity of around 2,000; today we have a 12,000 capacity stadium, which is not only one of the best-equipped professional rugby stadiums in the country but a venue for key local cultural events, from concerts to the trooping of the Mercian Regiment's colour. Quite rightly, a bust of Cecil adorns the Warriors' stadium, and he was named life president of the club before his sad death from cancer in 2020.

While some might say that the Warriors is just a sports club, we in Worcester know it is much more than that. So many fans have spoken out about what the club means to them, and the staff and heads of department, as well as the players, have shown a spirit of togetherness in the toughest of times of which Cecil himself would be proud. I do not have time to echo all the sentiments of fans in this short debate, but so many have expressed what the clubs mean to them movingly and with real passion. I commend to the House looking at #together, #WeAreWarriors and #SaveOurWarriors on social media.

The club is also home to one of the most effective and successful community foundations in the rugby world—this is a key part of Cecil's vision—which reaches more than 15,000 deprived and vulnerable people across the west midlands, championing accessible rugby, delivering innovative and inspiring lessons in schools, including special schools and alternative provision, using the power of rugby to build confidence and unlock opportunity. I have lost count of the number of times I have been downstairs in this place to congratulate the foundation on winning awards at the premier rugby community awards. Sadly, all this is now at risk.

The current owners of the club have brought it to the brink of financial collapse, and for all that they have claimed this is the impact of the pandemic, they have failed to maintain the trust of their employees, keep their promises to local stakeholders or set out clear plans to reassure their many creditors. Their background in property development and the various complex transactions through which they have manoeuvred parts of the club and its land have raised serious doubts about their genuine commitment to keeping professional rugby at Sixways.

The news that on 17 August the owners had been served with a winding up notice by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs led dozens of my constituents to contact me with their concerns about the future of the club. On 26 August, I convened a meeting of local MPs and council leaders from all the three south Worcestershire councils and the county to discuss the concerns about any possibility of development land being separated from the club, and the risks to the viability of the stadium and the team. We agreed a joint statement. Crucially, included in this were the leaders of Wychavon District Council, the planning authority and Worcestershire County Council, with its responsibilities for economic development. It read:

"We will do all we can to retain professional, elite rugby at Sixways and protect the extraordinary legacy of the late Cecil Duckworth and his family.

We jointly call on the current Worcester Warriors owners to act in the best interests of the club, the players, the staff, the fans and the community served by the club, including the Warriors Community Foundation. We think it is essential that the club and all of its property assets remain linked.

While we recognise that there are significant opportunities for development at the Sixways site, we believe that these need to be utilised for the purpose of sustaining the rugby club and the wider ambitions of the local sporting community.

We are all very clear that we are prepared to work supportively with potential investors to find a positive outcome for the future of Worcester Warriors."

Since that statement was published, I am grateful to have had messages of support from Worcester's Labour mayor, city councillors, the supporters' trust and the president of the amateur side, WRFC—Worcester Rugby Football Club. I am also grateful for the close attention that has been paid to this situation by the Rugby Football Union, Premiership Rugby Limited and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport over recent weeks and particularly for the patience of the current Secretary of State with the bombardment of messages I have been sending her ever since her appointment. Her predecessor set out to me that the sole focus of the Department has been in trying to protect the club and the future of professional rugby at Sixways—amen to that. Following our statement, local MPs were invited to meet the current owners and hear their plans; we accepted assurances that they were negotiating to sell the whole of the club together and that whatever the formal structures in place around the land, there was no intent to separate or sell of parts of it to the detriment of the club. We were told that the club was in negotiations with a number of parties and that payroll would certainly be made the following week.

The following week, the owners failed to make payroll. Staff were not paid at all on the day their wages were due and players did not receive their pay on time. That triggered players at the club to serve 14 days' notice that their contracts had been breached, posing an existential threat to the continuation of the team and professional rugby at Sixways. On the same day, the mobile phones of the management at the club stopped working as the bills had not been paid and cars were taken from players because the leases had not been maintained. Academy players were reportedly made homeless as they lost access to their accommodation.

In the days of confusion and deep concern that followed, the players were eventually paid—late and sometimes irregularly. But together, selflessly, they decided to withdraw their notice and return to being in contract. The staff; 200 of whom are permanent full-time staff, with a further 200 part-time, were offered 65% of their wages, with the rest to follow once a deal had been secured. That has not so far been forthcoming, and I am told there are still a number of staff who have received no pay at all. It was at this stage that the five Worcestershire MPs who were free to do so put out our joint statement calling for the club to be taken into administration—I know all six of us were there in spirit. The owners fired back an angry release that stressed all the risks of administration and stated that they had had no offers of help from MPs or councils prior to our statement. The latter, I have to say, is simply a provable lie.

[Mr Robin Walker]

The owners' case against administration was fourfold: that it would reduce the value of the club's P share—its share of proceeds from premiership television and marketing rights—due to a call option being available to the PRL to buy it back in the event of administration; that it would leave local creditors out of pocket; that it would lead to automatic relegation from the premiership; and that it would leave season ticket holders without the value of their tickets.

Each one of those assertions is challengeable. From my own conversations with both PRL and the RFU, I know that neither the triggering of a call option on the P share, nor relegation should be considered a certainty. I urge them to do all they can in the event of an orderly administration to enable Warriors to stay in the premiership, with a points deduction if necessary, and to ensure that any new management and investors taking the club on have access to its P share. There is no reason why an administrator or new investor should not be able to honour season tickets, and local suppliers who from bitter experience have no trust in the current owners to pay their bills may stand a greater chance of recouping some of what they are owed if we have an orderly process rather than continued uncertainty and disorder.

Since that time, I am afraid that the situation off the pitch has not improved. Players have gone above and beyond to turn out and play for the club, despite the problems with their pay. Staff have moved heaven and earth to ensure that games can go ahead, meeting the challenges set by the RFU and PRL, even after wi-fi and internal emails went down, and with no support from their directors and owners. That Worcester Warriors players have scored tries against London Irish, Exeter Chiefs and Gloucester is a remarkable achievement in these most difficult circumstances. The solidarity that has been shown by each of those clubs reflects the desire of all rugby clubs to see the Warriors survive. That the University of Worcester Warriors—the ladies' team—actually won its Allianz cup fixture against Harlequins is truly spectacular. The heroic efforts of underpaid or unpaid staff have been praised by fans of clubs across the country, but those efforts are barely acknowledged by the current owners. Instead, we have had reports of staff facing disciplinary action for daring to point out the string of broken promises that have been made to them, and of key people being mysteriously unavailable when legal or insurance documentation needed to be signed. Through all of this, the team, under the tutelage of Steve Diamond, have maintained a spirit of unity that is admirable in the extreme.

The owners told local MPs last week that they were on the brink of a deal to sell 85% of the club's equity and that there would be new money to repay staff the proportion of wages owing and to secure all the commitments to the premiership before the end of the week. They promised staff and fans an announcement within 48 hours of the match on Sunday. Neither of those promises has been kept. Staff, fans and players are left with the lingering doubt that the owners might prefer the club to default on its rugby commitments so that expulsion from the premiership makes it easier to focus on developing the property assets away from the rugby. Such an outcome would risk making not only the Warriors but the Community Foundation, the academy, the amateur Worcester rugby football club and the

Worcester Raiders football club homeless. It would be a disaster for sport in our county and a huge blow, which neither I nor my fellow Worcestershire MPs are prepared to accept.

Even after staff went above and beyond again to secure this weekend's matches, another deadline has understandably been set by the rugby authorities for Monday. I know that staff, players and the exhausted heads of department at the club will do all they can to meet it, but I cannot be certain that they will be able to do so without the support of directors or new finance.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a fantastic case for the importance of rugby in his city and in my city of Gloucester. May I just share with him the solidarity that everybody at Kingsholm and Gloucester Rugby feels for his club? We want to see the Warriors back on great form, and we want to see these financial problems resolved. He has our full support in Gloucester.

Mr Walker: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. As the son of a former Gloucester player, I was very proud and impressed when Gloucester offered free tickets to the game the other day to Worcester Warriors staff and the players who were not playing. That was a great gesture of solidarity, and it was enormously appreciated.

If the protestations of the current owners are true—that they have the best interests of the club at heart—surely, even at this stage, they should be calling in the administrators. However, while any doubt persists about their motivation, I urge DCMS, as the largest creditor and the Department responsible for safeguarding the interests of sport, to step in and to do so before Monday. I know of at least two significant interested parties—one is the party with whom the owners claimed to be about to strike a deal last week—who have said that they are interested in stepping in with new finance to support the club, but only through a process of administration. I say to my right hon. Friend the Minister that that now seems the only way forward.

Before my right hon. Friend responds, I want to address two further points that have been brought to my attention by the press. First, there is the suggestion from one creditor of the club that Sport England has somehow unwittingly assisted in the separation of assets from the club or made it easier for property to be alienated from it. I hope my right hon. Friend can assure me that that is not the case. In doing so, I would urge him not simply to reiterate that there was already a formal separation of the stadium from other land before the Sport England loan was negotiated. We all know that, but it is not the point. The concern is that the new lease negotiated at Sport England's behest changed the terms on which the rugby trading company held use of the stadium, and reduced its access to non-rugby income and the proceeds of any events other than those related to the game itself. The accounts show that, prior to this, the book value of the lease held by the trading company was £16 million.

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that that book value still sits with the club and the assets over which DCMS has a call? If not, I hope he can reassure me that any process of administration will take into account all uses of public funding, and that where any of it has been used to pay property debt or secure other assets for the

owners or their holding companies—MQ Property Ltd, Sixways Property Ltd and Bond Group Property Ltd—these can be brought into scope of any administration process. I do not believe for a moment that Sport England or anyone at the Department wished to reduce the income available to a sports club, but it is vital that we ensure that no inadvertent harm is done through the complex processes that the club has gone through under departmental supervision.

Finally, and most damningly in the eyes of most Worcester folk, is the report in today's *Daily Mail* that the owners borrowed money from the family of the late Cecil Duckworth and have failed to repay it. I cannot stress enough how upsetting and appalling that is. One senior player has described the suggestion as "heart-breaking." What is also striking, having now discussed the matter with Beatrice—Cecil's widow—is that the money was borrowed in January 2020, before any impact of the pandemic and long before the owners admitted to the current financial woes of the club, with the express intention of making payroll. Within a few years of taking control of the club and after one of their original investors pulled out, they went to the great founder and benefactor of the Warrior's success and borrowed half a million pounds. Since his death, they have refused to communicate with his widow or her lawyers to give an update as to the status of this debt or to confirm when and how it might be repaid.

The owners have asserted that half of the money is not owed, as a promise was made on the basis of a handshake for Cecil to cover the costs of employing the then manager of the club, Alan Solomons. Although there is no documentary evidence to back that claim, the family have accepted that they will not contest it. Even after this, there has been no further engagement with the Duckworth family on the remaining money. I cannot express in parliamentary terms my personal revulsion at the way in which those charged with protecting Cecil Duckworth's legacy have behaved and seemingly continue to behave. I am told that the loan does not appear anywhere in the published accounts of the club or the holding companies, which prompts questions as to how they are meeting their legal responsibilities as directors and what other undeclared debts they may have taken on. It is no wonder one potential buyer has this week called for administration to include

"a forensic investigation of financial activities".

My request to the Minister is simple. Two weeks ago, I and my fellow Worcestershire colleagues spoke out with one voice to call on DCMS to step in and take the Warriors into administration, in order to secure its future. That call is now more urgent than ever. Nothing in the experience of the past two weeks has given us any greater confidence that the current directors can or will deliver. The patience of staff, players and fans is being stretched beyond endurance.

Investors are waiting in the wings with serious offers backed by serious local business people and serious rugby folk to take the club out of administration and set it on a secure footing. Securing their support is vital. I urge the RFU and PRL to continue to show the forbearance and understanding that they have shown to date and to listen to the calls from across the rugby world that a way be found to allow the Warriors to continue to play in the top flight.

I urge DCMS to delay no further and to trigger formally a process of administration to secure the club and all the property assets associated with it before Monday's deadline. I urge them to ensure that there are directors in charge of the Warriors who are fit and proper. In short, Minister, please #SaveOurWarriors.

6.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): I am pleased to respond to this debate and am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) for securing it. The interest shown this afternoon is testament to the importance that this club represents to the local community and to the sport of rugby as a whole. I pay tribute to him for the work that he has done. I also offer my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), who did this job extremely well. I know that I have very big shoes to fill. I know, too, that he is now able to take a keen interest in this issue.

As we have heard today, the club has had many different forms, but can date back to Worcester Rugby Football Club, which was first established in 1871. It was a long and eventful journey to the club's debut in the men's top flight in 2004, under the stewardship of John Brain and Cecil Duckworth, whom my hon. Friend has talked so movingly about today. Both of them have had a lasting impact on the club and local community.

The club has gone from strength to strength and seen its talent recognised at an international level with multiple players, including current captain Ted Hill being capped for England. The dramatic extra-time premiership cup win against London Irish in May provided an unforgettable moment for all involved with the club. The success is not limited to the men's team, however, with the Worcester Ladies team having won their inaugural premiership title in 2013 before becoming part of the Warriors group in 2016. The success has continued since then, with Laura Keates and Lydia Thompson both being named in England Women's world cup squad this week. Off the pitch, the Warriors Community Foundation makes a significant impact around the local area, providing vital services including a positive and safe learning environment for some of the hardest to reach young people.

For all these reasons, I was pleased that the Government were able to support the club to survive the challenges of the covid-19 pandemic through the sport survival package. Like many other sectors, the sport sector suffered as a result of the essential restrictions we all lived under during the pandemic. The Government were proactive in taking action to protect the sector through the £600 million package.

The package was set up to ensure that as many sport clubs reliant on spectators survived the period of restrictions during the pandemic as possible, while also seeking to minimise the potential long-term damage to sport, with a particular focus on the importance of grassroots activity and women's sport. That intervention was essential in maintaining professional sport in this country through such a difficult period.

However, as the nation recovers and crowds return to stadiums, it is right that the Government take a step back from providing direct financial support. The sport survival package was administered by Sport England

[*Stuart Andrew*]

on behalf of DCMS and all decisions for awards were taken by an independent board set up by the Department, based on a robust assessment of an individual organisation's financial circumstances; where appropriate, security was taken to protect the taxpayer.

I know this is a time of stress and anxiety for all associated with the club, from the playing and non-playing staff to the fans who have stuck with the club over so many years. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester described so well many of the things they have gone through recently. The match this weekend was a demonstration of the passion and commitment that so many people have for the club within the local community and I applaud everyone involved in ensuring that the fixture went ahead.

The Department is working tirelessly with the club's directors, Premiership Rugby and the Rugby Football Union to seek the best possible outcome for all concerned. We have expended more energy on Worcester than on any other club and we will continue to do so. That has included daily dialogue with stakeholders and the club's directors to explore all options available and to take appropriate professional advice.

While I am only in the first few hours of my time in this role, I assure my hon. Friend that I and the Secretary of State take a keen interest in this issue and that we will continue to do so and to explore every possible option. Indeed, one of my very first meetings in this role was on this matter. At this stage, we are not ruling out any options and are sending in professional advisers imminently to take a closer look at the club and potential options. If it emerges from that work that the most viable option for saving the club is to put it into administration, that is a decision we will not be afraid to take.

Of course the responsibility for governance and oversight of the game sits with the RFU and PRL, and any potential investors will need to pass the RFU's fit and proper owner tests as part of any takeover. DCMS does not have a direct role in finding new owners or investment for the club, but we have continued to encourage all interested parties to put their offers to the current owners or administrators, should that step be taken.

I understand the frustration of supporters due to the lack of progress over the past weeks and the calls for Government action. This is clearly a fast-moving situation, and we continue to reassess all options available to us as a creditor to protect taxpayers' money and deliver the best possible outcome for the players, staff and club on a daily basis as the situation evolves. As I have said already, we are taking action and not ruling anything out.

Any claim that Sport England or the Government are responsible for asset stripping or at any point were not working in the best interests of the club or taxpayers is incorrect. DCMS and Sport England have not been involved in the management decisions of any club to which they have lent. Those decisions were and remain, rightly, the responsibility of the directors of those clubs, and I can assure the House that the Department and Sport England thoroughly assessed all applicants' financial information and provided clubs with strict conditions on how the funds could be utilised following an assessment of need. As my hon. Friend highlighted, any administrators appointed would also look to explore the actions of directors and the previous use of funds in any administration. Unfortunately, I cannot comment further on the specifics of individual cases, including on the issue that he has raised, because of the confidentiality obligations in the legal agreements with the club.

As this debate has clearly demonstrated, Worcester Warriors has a rich history and is a crucial part of the local community. I thank my hon. Friend for calling the debate, and thank him and other hon. Members in the area for the work that they are doing to discuss the future of that important community asset. The Department will continue to engage closely with the owners, Premiership Rugby and the Rugby Football Union to try to ensure a positive outcome for the rugby offering in Worcester. I give him a guarantee that I will take an extremely close interest as the issue develops.

Question put and agreed to.

6.45 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 22 September 2022

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Energy Update

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 8 September, yesterday, the Government published further details of the support we are offering to people and businesses in the face of soaring energy prices. This package of unprecedented assistance for the whole UK provides the certainty families and business owners need to help them manage their energy bills.

Details of the energy price guarantee for domestic consumers and the energy bill relief scheme for business and non-domestic properties are available on gov.uk. The Chancellor of the Exchequer will set out more details of the costs of the Government's support as part of his fiscal statement on 23 September.

We have designed the schemes to be simple for energy consumers. Families and eligible businesses do not have to take action or apply for support, energy suppliers will automatically apply the appropriate reduction via their energy bill. Households will receive an equivalent level of financial support wherever they are in the UK. The same is true for businesses across the UK too.

The energy price guarantee will ensure that a typical household in Great Britain pays an average £2,500 a year for their energy from 1 October 2022, for the next two years. Households in Northern Ireland will see equivalent benefits on the energy bills. On average usage, a household in Great Britain will save £1,000 a year. This is in addition to the already announced £400 energy bills support scheme for households across the UK. The most vulnerable UK households will also continue to receive £1,200 of support. For consumers in Great Britain who pay for their energy through a monthly, quarterly or other regular bill, the energy price guarantee will be applied when their bill is calculated. The guarantee limits the amount the bill payer can be charged per unit of gas or electricity, so the exact bill amount will continue to be influenced by how much energy is used.

The energy bill relief scheme will provide protections for all businesses, voluntary sector and public sector organisations in Great Britain which face excessively high energy bills over the winter period, whether they are on existing fixed price contracts agreed on or after 1 April 2022, signing new fixed price contracts, variable or deemed tariffs or flexible purchase contracts. To administer support, the Government have set a supported wholesale price—expected to be £211 per MWh for electricity and £75 per MWh for gas, less than half the wholesale prices anticipated this winter—which is a discounted price per unit of gas and electricity. Suppliers will pass the reduction in the wholesale price through to their customers.

The energy bill relief scheme will run initially for six months covering energy use from 1 October 2022 until 31 March 2023. There will be a review of the operation of the scheme, to be published in three months' time. This review will consider how best to offer further support to customers who are the most vulnerable to energy price increases. These are likely to be those who are least able to adjust, for example by reducing energy usage or increasing energy efficiency.

A similar scheme will be established in Northern Ireland, providing a comparable level of support. We intend to provide more information on the comparable support for non-domestic customers in Northern Ireland by the end of September.

The scheme for domestic consumers will be different, because of the different way the electricity and gas market operates in Northern Ireland. But it will provide households with an equivalent level of support as for those in Great Britain. Households do not need to take any action to receive this support, although it may take a little longer than for Great Britain for relief to take effect. However, the savings will be applied to energy used from October onwards so that households get the same overall benefit as those in Great Britain. The energy price guarantee limits the amount you can be charged per unit of gas or electricity, so households' exact bill will continue to be influenced by how much energy is used.

Households in Northern Ireland will also receive the £400 discount on their bills through the Northern Ireland energy bills support scheme, which will offer the same level of support as for households in Great Britain. We aim to provide this £400 discount for Northern Ireland as soon as possible.

A comparable scheme to the energy bill relief scheme will be in place for businesses and other non-domestic customers in Northern Ireland. This will follow a similar structure to the GB scheme. We intend to provide more information on the comparable support for non-domestic customers in Northern Ireland by the end of September.

As the Prime Minister said on 8 September, the Government are bringing forward emergency legislation to underpin the delivery of our support package. We will introduce a Bill immediately after parliamentary recess. It will include measures for the GB energy price guarantee for domestic consumers and the energy bill relief scheme for businesses and non-domestic properties so all of GB receives equivalent support; and enable the delivery of comparable schemes in Northern Ireland. It will provide powers to enable low carbon generators to move on to fixed prices to end the situation where electricity prices are set by the marginal price of gas, ensuring consumers pay a fair price for their energy.

Contingent liabilities

I have laid before Parliament a departmental minute describing contingent liabilities arising from the energy price guarantee. It is normal practice when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability of £300,000 and above, for which there is no specific statutory authority, for the Department concerned to present Parliament with a minute giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances.

I regret that because of the urgency of establishing this scheme before 1 October, I have not been able to follow the usual timelines for issuing notice at least 14 parliamentary sitting days before the liability begins to be incurred.

The Treasury has approved the scheme in principle. I will continue to update Parliament on this scheme.

New oil and gas licensing

We are scaling up renewables, nuclear, and lower carbon energy sources, to boost Britain's energy security in the long term, and reduce our exposure to high fossil fuel prices set by global markets outside our control. While we do this, there will continue to be ongoing demand for oil and gas over the coming years during this transition, with oil and gas needed to maintain the security of the UK's energy supply. Making the most of our own domestic resources under the North sea will make us less dependent on foreign imports.

In the light of Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine and weaponisation of energy, strengthening our energy security is an absolute priority, and—as the Prime Minister said—we are going to ensure the UK is a net energy exporter by 2040. To get there we will need to explore all avenues available to us through solar, wind, oil and gas production, so it's right that we've lifted the pause to realise any potential sources of domestic gas.

In 2021, it was decided that a climate compatibility checkpoint should be put in place, so that compatibility with the UK's climate objectives is assessed as part of the decision on whether or not to endorse continued oil and gas licensing rounds.

In December 2021, a consultation on the design of this checkpoint was launched, running until the end of February 2022. A large number of detailed and thoughtful responses were received. The HM Government response, which is being published today, engages with many of the arguments put forward, and sets out the Government position on these. HM Government has also designed a checkpoint which takes the responses to the consultation into account; a document setting out this design and the tests to be included in the checkpoint is also being published today.

Having reviewed the results of these tests in the context of a 33rd licensing round, it has been decided that a 33rd licensing round is compatible with the UK's climate objectives.

The Government understand that the North Sea Transition Authority will shortly be launching a new licensing round for oil and gas exploration. This round could result in the award of more than 100 licences to developers, strengthening the UK's vital offshore oil and gas sector, putting more UK gas on the grid for longer, and bolstering the future energy security of the UK.

Shale gas extraction

The current pause (moratorium) on shale gas extraction was put in place on the basis that HM Government would only support shale gas exploration if it could be done in a safe and sustainable way, and that it would be led by the science on whether this was possible. The stated policy aim was to minimise disturbance to those living and working nearby, and to prevent the risk of damage.

Much has changed, however, since 2019.

In April this year, HM Government commissioned the British Geological Survey to advise on the latest scientific evidence around shale gas extraction, to assess progress in the scientific understanding which underpins Government policy, and to allow Ministers to consider next steps. Having considered their advice carefully, HM Government are publishing this report today.

The report makes clear that forecasting the occurrence of felt seismic events remains a scientific challenge for the geoscience community. It also makes clear that to improve our understanding we need more exploratory sites to gather the necessary data.

Geomechanical modelling has been an important tool in the United States for this purpose, but requires accurate mapping of sub-surface faults, for which more data is required in the UK. There have only been three test wells which have been explored for shale gas in the UK to date.

On the wider geopolitical stage, Putin's invasion of Ukraine and the resulting restrictions on gas supply to Europe have impacted on global energy prices and the energy security of our neighbours and allies. This emphasises the need for "home grown" sources of energy to reduce our reliance on imports.

The Government remain committed to net zero by 2050, but we have to get there, and to get there we are going to need oil and gas. And domestic sources of gas clearly have a lower climate impact than shipping liquified natural gas by tankers halfway across the world.

Under these circumstances, HM Government consider it appropriate to pursue all means for increasing UK gas production, including shale gas extraction. The Government are therefore lifting the pause on shale gas extraction and will consider future applications for hydraulic fracturing consent with the domestic and global need for gas, and local support for developments, in mind.

While HM Government will always try to limit disturbance to those living and working near to sites, tolerating a higher degree of risk and disturbance appears to us to be in the national interest given the circumstances described above. With this in mind, it is important that the policy relating to shale gas extraction reflects this. HM Government will be reviewing this aspect of shale gas policy as part of a wider reflection on how to better support the industry throughout the whole life cycle of the investment, from initial exploration to large-scale production and I will provide an update on this in due course.

We will look to the North Sea Transition Authority and other licensing authorities to be proactive in extending existing consents and permissions where practicable, to support the development of energy resources in the national interest.

It is clear that we need more exploratory sites in order to gather better data and improve the evidence base and we are aware that some developers are keen to assist with this process. We look forward to seeing these proposals in detail.

Offshore energy strategic environmental assessment

HM Government have completed an offshore energy strategic environmental assessment (OESEA) of a draft plan/programme to enable further offshore licensing/leasing for offshore marine renewables, including wind, wave and tidal energy, oil and gas, gas storage including carbon dioxide storage, and offshore production and transport of hydrogen.

The renewable energy elements of the draft plan/programme cover the relevant parts of the UK exclusive economic zone and the territorial waters of England and Wales; for hydrocarbon gas storage it applies to UK waters, territorial sea and the relevant parts of the UK exclusive economic zone, and for carbon dioxide

storage it applies to UK waters, the UK exclusive economic zone and relevant territorial sea, excluding the territorial sea in Scotland; for hydrocarbon exploration and production it applies to the UK territorial sea and the UK continental shelf; and for offshore production and transport of hydrogen it applies to UK waters.

A public consultation on the OESEA4 environmental report was undertaken between 17 March 2022 and 27 May 2022. All comments received on the draft plan/programme and the environmental report have been considered by HM Government and a HM Government response for OESEA4 has been prepared and will be placed on the gov.uk website. This summarises stakeholder comments and HM Government's clarifications and responses to them. The environmental report and the comments received have informed the HM Government's decision on whether to proceed with the draft plan/programme.

HM Government have decided to adopt the draft plan/programme, with the area offered restricted spatially through the exclusion of certain areas together with a number of mitigation measures to prevent, reduce and offset significant adverse impacts on the environment and other users of the sea. On the basis of the evidence set out in the environmental report, which discussed the alternatives to the chosen approach, and the comments received during consultation, HM Government conclude that there are no overriding environmental considerations that would prevent the achievement of our draft plan/programme of offshore marine renewables leasing wind, wave and tidal technologies, offshore oil and gas licensing, offshore gas storage and carbon dioxide storage leasing/licensing, and offshore production and transport of hydrogen, provided appropriate mitigation measures are implemented along with future research. In all cases, the relevant competent authority should undertake any appropriate assessments prior to awarding licences or leases, where screening in accordance with the relevant conservation of habitats regulations shows this to be necessary.

The plan/programme based on OESEA4 will have a lifespan of approximately four years. HM Government, therefore, commit to refreshing the OESEA in two to three years' time to account for the higher ambitions relating to offshore wind and hydrogen in the BESS that are expected to be delivered in the period 2026-2030 and any additional changes to the energy policy context, technology, and understanding of the environmental baseline and effects assessment. The associated documents have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS295]

Retained EU Law

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): On 31 January, to mark the two-year anniversary of the UK's departure from the European Union, the Government set out their plans to bring forward the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill.

Retained EU law is a category of domestic law created at the end of the transition period. It consists of EU-derived legislation that was preserved in our domestic legal framework by the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to ensure continuity as we left the EU.

However, retained EU law was never intended to sit on the statute book indefinitely. The time is now right to bring the special status of retained EU law in the UK statute book to an end on 31 December 2023, in order to fully realise the opportunities of Brexit and to support the unique culture of innovation in the UK.

To achieve this, the Bill I have introduced today includes the following provisions;

Sunset of retained EU law

The Bill will sunset the majority of retained EU law so that it expires on 31 December 2023. All retained EU law contained in domestic secondary legislation and retained direct EU legislation will expire on this date, unless otherwise preserved. Any retained EU law that remains in force after the sunset date will be assimilated in the domestic statute book, by the removal of the special EU law features previously attached to it. This means that the principle of the supremacy of EU law, general principles of EU law, and directly effective EU rights will also end on 31 December 2023. There will no longer be a place for EU law concepts in our statute book.

Before that date, Government Departments and the devolved Administrations will determine which retained EU law can be reformed to benefit the UK, which can expire, and which needs to be preserved and incorporated into domestic law in modified form. They will also decide if retained EU law needs to be codified as it is preserved, in order to preserve specific policy effects which are beneficial to keep.

The Bill includes an extension mechanism for the sunset of specified pieces of retained EU law until 2026. Should it be required, this will allow Departments additional time where necessary to implement more complex reforms to specific pieces of retained EU law, including any necessary legislation.

Ending of supremacy of retained EU law in UK law by 2023

Currently, retained direct EU legislation still takes priority over domestic UK legislation passed prior to the end of the transition period when they are incompatible. This is not in keeping with our status as an independent, sovereign trading nation, and the Government's 2019 commitment to remove this.

Therefore, the Bill will reverse this order of priority, to reinstate domestic law as the highest form of law on the UK statute book. Where it is necessary to preserve the current hierarchy between domestic and EU legislation in specific circumstances, the Bill provides a power to amend the new order of priority to retain specific legislative effects.

Assimilated law

Following the removal of the special features of EU law from retained EU law on 31 December 2023, any retained EU law that is preserved will become "assimilated law" to reflect that EU interpretive features no longer apply to it.

Facilitating departures from retained EU case law

To ensure that EU law concepts do not become "baked in" through over-cautious court judgments, the Bill will also provide domestic courts with greater discretion to depart from the body of retained case law. It will also provide new court procedures for UK and devolved law officers to refer or intervene in cases involving retained EU case law.

Modification of retained EU legislation

To correct an anomaly created by European Union Withdrawal Act which gave some retained direct EU legislation legislative parity with Acts of Parliament for some purposes, despite it not having been properly scrutinised, the Bill will downgrade the status of retained direct EU law for the purposes of amendment. The Bill will modify powers in other statutes, to facilitate their use to amend retained direct EU law in the same way they can be used on domestic secondary legislation. This will enable the amendment of retained direct EU law, with the appropriate level of parliamentary scrutiny.

Powers relating to retained EU law

The Bill will also create powers to make secondary legislation so that retained EU law or assimilated law can be amended, repealed and replaced more easily. This Bill will allow Government via Parliament to clarify, consolidate and restate legislation to preserve its current effect. Using these powers, the Government via Parliament will ensure that only regulation that is fit for purpose, and suited for the UK will remain on the statute book.

Business impact target

Having left the EU, the UK has further opportunities to reform its regulatory regime. The UK Government published their consultation response to the “Reforming the Better Regulation Framework” and is in the process of implementing the wider reforms outlined.

As part of these reforms, the Bill repeals the business impact target, which is outdated and not fit for purpose. Any subsequent replacement of the business impact target, when combined with the other wider reforms, will ensure that the UK’s regulatory framework is fit for the UK economy, business and households, into the future.

[HCWS298]

UK’s Updated 2030 Nationally Determined Contribution

The Minister for Climate (Graham Stuart): The Glasgow climate pact, agreed by almost 200 countries at COP26 in November 2021, recognised the need for accelerated action to limit global warming to 1.5° C above pre-industrial temperatures. It called for all countries to “revisit and strengthen the 2030 targets in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as necessary to align with the Paris Agreement temperature goal by the end of 2022, taking into account different national circumstances”.

During its COP presidency, the UK has been working with partner countries, non-state actors and civil society to encourage countries, particularly major emitters, to respond to this call. And the UK has shown leadership by revisiting its own NDC to ensure it remains a fair and ambitious contribution to global action on climate change. The latest science from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—IPCC—published earlier this year highlighted the closing window for action to keep 1.5° C in reach and made clear the urgency of delivering on the Glasgow climate pact.

In revisiting the UK NDC, the Government considered a range of factors including the latest available science, expectations in the Paris agreement and the Glasgow climate pact, the UK’s existing 2050 net zero commitment, and energy security, as well as advice and evidence from the Climate Change Committee and other independent commentators.

The UK has strengthened its NDC by making the following updates to the accompanying information to facilitate clarity, transparency and understanding—ICTU—in line with international best practice and the Paris agreement rulebook:

clarified how the target—which remains a commitment to reduce all greenhouse gas emissions by at least 68% by 2030 on 1990 levels—aligns with the Paris Agreement temperature goal;

explained more fully how the UK will deliver the NDC by 2030;

updated on the progress made in expanding the territorial scope of the NDC to include the UK’s Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories; and

included more, detail on levelling up, gender, green skills, public engagement, Just Transition and how the UK is supporting other countries with delivery of their NDCs.

The UK’s NDC requires the fastest rate of reduction in greenhouse gases between 1990 and 2030 of any major economy and is on a trajectory to net zero by 2050. The Government are committed to net zero by 2050 and looks forward to the review led by Chris Skidmore to ensure that it is delivered in a way that is pro-business and pro-growth.

Since submitting the NDC in December 2020, the UK has published a range of sectoral strategies and plans and has signed up to numerous pledges and actions to deliver on the 2030 target. The Prime Minister has also announced an ambitious package of measures to tackle soaring energy prices and ensure the UK’s energy security, following Putin’s illegal invasion of Ukraine.

The UK will submit its updated NDC to the UNFCCC in time for the deadline for inputs to the NDC synthesis report, 23 September 2022, and will lay a copy in the House at the same time.

[HCWS296]

TREASURY

Health and Social Care Levy (Repeal) Bill

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Richard Fuller): Today the Government have introduced the Health and Social Care Levy (Repeal) Bill.

This Bill delivers the Prime Minister’s promise to reverse the temporary 1.25 percentage point increase in national insurance rates from 6 November and will cancel the levy coming in as a separate tax from April 2023.

In cancelling the tax rise for employees, the self-employed and employers, the Government are acting to support individuals with the cost of living by allowing them to keep more of what they earn, as well as to support businesses to pursue growth, innovate and invest.

This will be an average tax cut of around £135 for workers this year and around £330 next year. Taking into account the increase to national insurance contributions thresholds at the spring statement and the levy reversal, almost 30 million people will be better off by an average of over £500 in 2023-24.

Around 60% of businesses with NICs liabilities will see a reduction in their NICs bill, with 20,000 of these businesses being taken out of paying NICs entirely due to the combination of this measure and the employment allowance. The average savings for businesses will be £9,600 for the 2023-24 tax year.

The Government are implementing the change as soon as possible, to maximise the cash benefit for people and businesses this year. Most employees will receive a cut to their national insurance directly via payroll in their November pay.

The self-employed will pay NICs at 9.73% on earnings between £11,909 and £50,270 per annum. The blended figure is equivalent to seven months at the higher rate 10.25% and the remainder at 9%

While the tax rise will be cancelled, funding for health and social care services will be maintained as planned. The additional funding used to replace the expected revenue from the levy will come from general taxation. The Government remain committed to ensuring fiscal discipline over the medium term.

[HCWS301]

EDUCATION

Further Education Funding and Accountability System Consultation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Andrea Jenkyns): Following an initial consultation in July 2021, the Government published a second consultation into implementing a new further education funding and accountability system in July 2022.

This consultation sets out further detail on our reforms to deliver a fairer FE system across the country that effectively supports learners to develop the skills they need to secure high-value jobs and support growth of the economy, and seeks views on how these can best be implemented. We believe our reforms 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.

The consultation was due to close for responses on 21 September 2022. After listening to the feedback of the sector over the summer, with some stakeholders asking to extend the length of the consultation period, I am announcing that we have extended the consultation's closing date by three weeks. This means the consultation will now remain open for responses until 12 October 2022.

We will consider the feedback we receive through our consultation and publish a response in due course.

[HCWS299]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): The Government are today introducing the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, as committed to in the Queen's Speech at the start of this parliamentary Session. Building on the recently enacted Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022, the measures in this new, significant Bill enable us to bear down further on kleptocrats, criminals and terrorists who abuse our open economy, strengthening the UK's reputation as a place where legitimate business can thrive while driving dirty money out of the UK.

The UK is at the forefront of global efforts to tackle illicit finance and economic crime. There have already

been a number of important strides forward in the effort to confront and address economic crime in recent years, including:

being the first G20 country to establish a public register of domestic company beneficial ownership in 2016 (the "people with significant control" register);

the introduction of new powers in the Criminal Finances Act 2017 to include unexplained wealth orders and account freezing orders;

allocating £400 million through the spending review and new economic crime levy to support law enforcement over the next three years, as well as a £63 million spending review settlement over the next three years for implementation of Companies House's transformation programme;

the publication of the economic crime plan in 2019 and the progress made against it by both the public and private sector;

establishing the national economic crime centre to co-ordinate the law enforcement response to economic crime and the combatting kleptocracy cell in the National Crime Agency to focus on targeting corrupt elites and their assets in the UK; and

most recently, passing the expedited Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act.

The economic crime landscape is constantly evolving, and we cannot be complacent about the threat. That is why we are bringing forward this further legislation to help tackle these problems and transform our fight against illicit finance.

The key elements of the Bill include:

broadening the registrar's powers so that the registrar becomes a more active gatekeeper over company creation and custodian of more reliable data, including new powers to check, remove or decline information submitted to, or already on, the companies register;

introducing identity verification requirements for all new and existing registered company directors, people with significant control, and those delivering documents to the registrar;

providing Companies House with more effective investigation and enforcement powers and introducing better cross-checking of data with other public and private sector bodies;

tackling the abuse of limited partnerships (including Scottish limited partnerships) by strengthening transparency requirements and enabling them to be deregistered;

creating powers to more quickly and easily seize and recover cryptoassets;

creating new exemptions from the principal money laundering offences to reduce unnecessary reporting by businesses carrying out transactions on behalf of their customers;

enabling businesses in certain sectors to share information more effectively to prevent and detect economic crime; and

providing new intelligence gathering powers for law enforcement.

These new measures will tackle economic crime, including fraud and money laundering, by delivering greater protections for consumers and businesses, boosting the UK's defences, and allowing legitimate businesses to thrive. They will also protect our national security, by making it harder for kleptocrats, criminals and terrorists to engage in money laundering, corruption, terrorism financing, illegal arms movements and ransomware payments. And they will support enterprise by enabling Companies House to deliver a better service for over four million UK companies, maintaining our swift and low-cost routes for company creation and improving the provision of data to inform business transactions and lending decisions across the economy.

This Bill forms a key part of the wider Government approach to ensure that law enforcement and the private sector have the tools needed to help tackle economic

crime, sitting alongside the key provisions in the Online Safety Bill which will tackle online fraud, as well as the upcoming second economic crime plan and fraud action plan.

This Bill has been developed in close partnership with law enforcement agencies, as well as with the financial sector, professional and business groups, and civil society organisations. This reflects the breadth of the measures in the Bill, the nature of the threats posed and the importance of working across sectors to tackle economic crime.

The Government remain committed to tackling economic crime and illicit finance, and to strengthening the business environment across all of the UK. We will continue to work with the devolved Administrations on these measures and the formal legislative consent motion process.

[HCWS300]

TRANSPORT

A47-A11 Thickthorn junction development consent order

The Secretary of State for Transport (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): This statement confirms that it has been necessary to extend the deadline for a decision on the

A47-A11 Thickthorn junction development consent order made under the Planning Act due to the national mourning period.

The DCO would authorise works for the improvement to Thickthorn junction and related works linking the A47 to the A11. The proposed development is situated within the administrative boundaries of Norfolk County Council and South Norfolk District Council. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on 20 June 2022 and the current deadline for a decision is 20 September 2022. The deadline is now extended to 14 October 2022.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make her decision within three months of receipt of the examining authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline and make a statement to the House of Parliament announcing the new deadline.

The decision to set new deadlines is without prejudice to the decisions on whether to give development consent for the above applications.

[HCWS297]

Petitions

Thursday 22 September 2022

OBSERVATIONS

TRANSPORT

Doncaster bid for Great British Railways headquarters

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the new Great British Railways headquarters should be located in the railway town of Doncaster; notes that Doncaster is where the Mallard and Flying Scotsman were built, highlighting its rich railway heritage; further that Doncaster is located on the main line; and further that Doncaster has a great history and great people who will benefit from the creation of a new Great British Railways headquarters in their town.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to note the nomination of Doncaster to house the new headquarters of Great British Railways.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Nick Fletcher, *Official Report*, 18 May 2022; Vol. 714, c. 806.]

[P002732]

Great British Railways headquarters

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that Carnforth would be an ideal location for the new headquarters of Great British Railways; further that the creation of the headquarters would bring additional jobs to the community, as well as encourage new investment; and further over 1,500 members of the community have signalled their interest to the Secretary of State for Transport via a letter writing campaign.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to note the nomination of Carnforth to house the new headquarters of Great British Railways.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by David Morris, *Official Report*, 18 May 2022; Vol. 714, c. 807.]

[P002733]

Observations from the Minister of State, Department for Transport (Kevin Foster): received 13 September 2022.

A competition to select a national headquarters for Great British Railways (GBR), to be based outside of London, ensuring skilled jobs, investment and economic benefits are focused nationwide, was launched on 5 February 2022 and closed for applications on 16 March 2022.

The GBR Transition Team received 42 expressions of interest from towns and cities across Great Britain and assessed applicants against the competition's six selection criteria which are aligned with railway priorities, value for money and broader governmental policies. These were:

1. Alignment to Levelling Up objectives
2. Connected and easy to get to
3. Opportunities for GBR
4. Railway heritage and links to the network
5. Value for money
6. Public support

Six locations were shortlisted, and the public were invited to an online consultative vote, which opened on 5 July 2022 and closed on 15 August 2022. These six locations were Birmingham, Crewe, Derby, Doncaster, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and York. Later this year, the Secretary of State will announce a decision on the final location of the GBR Headquarters based on the information gathered throughout the process and the criteria outlined above.

More details on the competition are provided at the GBR Transition Team website available at www.gbrtt.co.uk/hq.

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PETITIONS

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Thursday 29 September 2022**

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