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**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY**  
**DEBATES**  
**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 30 June 2025**

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# HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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

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# THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
[WHICH OPENED 9 JULY 2024]

THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 770

NINETEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2024-2025

### House of Commons

*Monday 30 June 2025*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

#### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

### Oral Answers to Questions

#### DEFENCE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Armed Forces Family Housing

1. **Matt Turmaine** (Watford) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve housing for armed forces families.

[904891]

13. **Euan Stainbank** (Falkirk) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve housing for armed forces families.

[904903]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):** With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, on behalf of those serving in our armed forces, I would like to thank you for the parliamentary flag-raising ceremony to mark the start of Armed Forces Week last Monday. I thank hon. Members across the House for the support that they gave to more than 200 local Armed Forces Day events over the weekend.

On housing, we are a Government who are delivering for defence. In January, we bought back 36,000 military homes into public ownership. In April, we launched a consumer charter to deliver basic housing rights and standards. In May, we announced an additional £1.5 billion for forces family homes—part of £7 billion that we will invest in military accommodation in the next five years.

**Matt Turmaine:** I meet servicemen, servicewomen and veterans in my constituency at events such as Remembrance Day and the recent VE commemorations. We all know the challenges that servicemen and women have had with housing and its quality in recent years. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is this Labour Government who are finally making them proud?

**John Healey:** Indeed. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his strong working links with veterans in Watford. He is right: as he will recognise, my hon. Friend the Minister for Veterans and People recently launched Operation Valour, the first ever UK-wide approach to veteran support, with £50 million of funding to establish a new network of Valour-recognised support centres right across the country.

**Euan Stainbank:** This Saturday, hundreds will join to mark Falkirk Armed Forces Day in Callendar Park, belatedly. Many of those who are currently serving and veterans in Scotland rely on the activities of charitable organisations such as the Ancre Somme Association, which is hosting the event, and Veterans Housing Scotland, which provides affordable housing for those who have served. Do the Government have any plans to supplement the essential and welcome £1.5 billion additional investment for service housing with additional support for registered charitable organisations that are working tirelessly to safely house veterans?

**John Healey:** We do indeed, and we are putting in extra funds and greater support to deal with the problem of homeless veterans. I am happy to thank and pay tribute to the Ancre Somme Association for its part in a successful Armed Forces Day parade and celebration in Falkirk. I pay tribute to all the volunteers right across the country who made our local Armed Forces Day events possible. We pay tribute to the regulars, the reservists, the veterans, the cadets and the armed forces families, but it is the volunteers who help us make these events happen.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): With basing becoming longer-term and more predictable, and with most young people wanting to buy rather than

rent their home, what assessment has the Secretary of State made of the success of Forces Help to Buy? What plans does he have to extend it?

**John Healey:** Unfortunately, Forces Help to Buy really has not kept pace either with demand or with the success of civilian programmes. It is part of the forces housing review that I have launched, which I expect to report in the autumn. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the aspirations of those who serve and who join the services are exactly the same as for every other working person in this country. We should try to make that part of the contract that this nation makes with those who will serve in future.

**Alison Bennett** (Mid Sussex) (LD): Housing is not the only issue affecting armed forces families. When a member of the forces moves, their family often move with them. My work experience student Amy, who is in the Gallery today, is from an armed forces family and attended three primary schools. One school provided dedicated support, whereas others had less understanding of the issues that children whose parents are in the forces may face. Will the Secretary of State work with the Secretary of State for Education to ensure that armed forces children receive consistent support at every school that they attend?

**John Healey:** We will indeed. Amy's experience is typical for many children of forces families: regularly moving as their parents answer the call and are deployed in different areas. We can do better by them. I am in conversation with my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary about how we can do better by our forces families and forces children, but also about how we can do better for the cadets and the opportunities that they offer to all young people.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Helen Maguire** (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): I welcome the recent announcement of funding to improve military housing, but our fantastic service personnel deserve more than short-term fixes. This year's armed forces continuous attitudes survey showed that one in five personnel plan to leave, and over a quarter of them cited the standard of accommodation as a reason. That should be a wake-up call. Will the Government commit to going further and show a real commitment to retention by finally U-turning on their decision to block Liberal Democrat proposals to bring all military housing under the decent homes standard?

**John Healey:** No one could describe the decision to buy back 36,000 military family homes from private hands as a short-term fix, nobody could describe the consumer charter setting out basic housing rights and standards as a short-term fix, and no one could describe the housing strategy review we have got going as a short-term fix. The decent homes standard is one standard; I think we can be doing better by our armed forces families.

### Supporting Veterans

2. **David Taylor** (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): What steps he is taking to support veterans in Hertfordshire. [904892]

16. **Emma Foody** (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to support veterans. [904906]

18. **Alex Brewer** (North East Hampshire) (LD): What steps he is taking to ensure that veterans receive adequate support after leaving the armed forces. [904909]

**The Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns):** First, I would like to recognise Mr Roy Briggs, a world war two veteran who recently passed. Those of us on both sides of the House salute our greatest generation.

As the Secretary of State said, we recently announced Op Valour, the veterans' support system, which is underpinned by £50 million over three years, and I launched the north-west England pilot last week. This is an institutionally resilient system—it is not a sticking plaster—that will reform the system at the local, the regional and the national level. When we combine that with the covenant broadening from three Government Departments to 14 just on Saturday, that is a significant increase to both veterans' and armed forces community support.

**David Taylor:** I thank the Minister for his answer and for his kind words about Roy Briggs. His family and I are also grateful for letter that he wrote to them. I had the privilege of attending his funeral last week. He was a real servant to our country, having flown in many brave missions over Europe. He was part of one of the RAF's first ever humanitarian missions when dropping essential food over the Netherlands and he also flew many missions in RAF bombers.

I know that the Government are doing various things to try to support veterans. Could the Minister outline the further steps that the Government can take to support organisations that support veterans such as the Royal British Legion as well as smaller organisations such as the Hemel armed forces and veterans breakfast club?

**Al Carns:** The armed forces covenant trust fund is one of the mechanisms we use to support the charitable sector, but we must also step back and look holistically at the fact that there are 1,730 armed forces charities in the UK. Op Valour will help to synthesise that, get more bang for buck and ensure that veterans get the right support where and when they need it.

**Emma Foody:** A local charity in my area supporting women veterans was recently working with a woman who was rehomed in general purpose supported accommodation for veterans in Scotland. The accommodation was entirely unsuitable for her as a survivor of sexual violence and led to her being subjected to a further sexual assault by a man who was also housed there. Will the Minister assure me of his work to ensure appropriate support for women veterans?

**Al Carns:** Just last week, I visited several different organisations, one of which was Launchpad in Liverpool, which showed some examples of supported housing for veterans. It is not lost on me that female veterans have different requirements, and we need to do more to support them. We will ensure that that is catered for by having a women's section as part of our veterans' strategy.

**Alex Brewer:** I welcome the Government's investment in supporting veterans, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Glastonbury and Somerton (Sarah Dyke) mentioned recently in the House, female veterans are about 10% less likely to be employed after service than male veterans. What specific steps are the Government taking to address that imbalance?

**Al Carns:** I thank the hon. Member for that really important question. There are two pieces that I would highlight. The first is the armed forces career transition partnership, which helps individuals during the two years prior to their leaving the service, and for two years after, to find jobs. The second is Operation Ascend, which looks to partner career opportunities and businesses—of which we have engaged with over 400—with any veteran or individual leaving the armed forces, which has engaged with 3,000 individuals. Part of our veterans strategy will include that from a women's perspective. We are doing everything we can, and over 86% of veterans who seek help go straight into employment within the first six months.

**Sarah Bool** (South Northamptonshire) (Con): There are 3,566 veterans in my constituency, of which 28% are disabled. Many are concerned about the future support available to them. Can the Minister assure disabled veterans, not just in South Northamptonshire but across the country, what the Department will do, and that it will not forget them?

**Al Carns:** That is an exceptionally valid point. Just last week, I held a consultation with the Disability Minister to ensure that veterans charities, which really speak loudly for veterans, and I could highlight any concerns to him. That was included within the consultation.

### Defence Procurement: SMEs

3. **Luke Murphy** (Basingstoke) (Lab): What steps his Department plans to take through the defence industrial strategy to support SMEs. [904893]

8. **Sadik Al-Hassan** (North Somerset) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that SMEs are able to participate in defence procurement contracts. [904898]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry (Maria Eagle):** The Government's modern industrial strategy, launched last week, announced a 50% increase in MOD spending with small and medium-sized enterprises to £7.5 billion a year by 2028, reversing the downward trend under the previous Government. Our new SME hub will help small firms to access better opportunities, and our reform of defence procurement, along with ringfenced innovation funds, will give SMEs access to the defence dividend. This Government's increase in defence spending will provide jobs and growth across the UK.

**Luke Murphy:** Basingstoke is home to some fantastic defence SMEs, including Nightball Technologies and Bertin Exensor, but one issue that has been raised with me is that Government procurement agencies cannot specify UK sovereign tech or sole-source contracts, even where UK capabilities exist. That results in lengthy competitive tenders, where there is a high risk that end

users do not get the capabilities that they need and equipment is bought from foreign suppliers. Will the Minister meet with me and firms from Basingstoke to discuss how we can prioritise UK defence SMEs over foreign suppliers, especially where UK sovereign tech exists?

**Maria Eagle:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. There is some flexibility under our procurement rules to specify national security grounds upon which to make a decision. Half our spend is already through sole-source contracts. I am of course happy to meet him and his SMEs. We are delivering for defence by promoting new procurement models that are easier for small firms to access, and our SME hub will engage directly with SMEs to help them to access defence supply chains.

**Sadik Al-Hassan:** In my constituency of North Somerset, many small and medium-sized enterprises are springing up to support our country's rearmament efforts. In Nailsea, one such company, 1415 Industries, was recently blocked from opening a business bank account due to blanket prohibitions and excessive delays by retail banks, hindering its ability to organise seed funding and bid for procurement contracts. Will the Minister meet with me to discuss the case of 1415 Industries and the wider problem relating to financial institutions and their interactions with defence SMEs that the case highlights?

**Maria Eagle:** I recognise my hon. Friend's point, and I will of course meet with him and his SMEs. Over the last six months, the Defence Secretary and I have convened stakeholders from industry and finance to discuss this issue and make it clear that defence is an ethical sector that they should support. The strategic defence review committed us to developing a dedicated financial services sector strategy, which we will aim to publish in spring 2026. That should give us a further opportunity to make sure that the finance industries know what a good investment defence can be.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): Our UK defence industry can have few better ambassadors around the world than our Red Arrows. As the Hawk aircraft comes to an end, will the Minister look closely at the British-designed modular aircraft being developed by Aeralis, because it would support SMEs right across our country, including by bringing around 600 jobs to StandardAero in Gosport and about 1,000 to the south Hampshire area? Surely that would be a much better way to support our national SMEs than opting for the Italian-Russian Yak-130 aircraft, which the MOD is rumoured to prefer.

**Maria Eagle:** I know Aeralis well; I visited it when I was in opposition, as I know the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) has done, and I have spoken to its representatives since. Of course, an open competition will be held for the new aircraft to deliver advanced jet training and for an aircraft for the RAF aerobatics team, to ensure value for money and positive UK benefit, and I hope that Aeralis will apply for that competition. It will have a very good chance if its product is up to scratch.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her answers. She is a regular visitor to Northern Ireland and supports the SMEs there, so when it comes



to the defence industrial strategy to support SMEs, could she update the House, and myself in particular, on what she and the Government are doing to help SMEs in Northern Ireland to increase jobs and also increase contracts?

**Maria Eagle:** The hon. Gentleman is right to say that I have visited Northern Ireland and its defence sector on a number of occasions, and I hope to return and do so again. The increase in spend that was announced last Monday on the modern industrial strategy for our SMEs to take advantage of—an increase of 50% up to £7.5 billion a year—should give opportunities for some of the innovative companies in Northern Ireland to take advantage of the available money. When our SME hub gets up and running, it will be available to assist small firms in understanding how best to get access to some of the opportunities that that will bring.

### Defence Sector Exports

4. **Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to support defence sector exports. [904894]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry (Maria Eagle):** In order to deliver for defence and make defence manufacturing an engine for growth, we must improve our export performance. Potential customers want a consistent Government-to-Government offer, so as part of defence reform, a new national armaments director and defence exports office will support defence export campaigns, and responsibility for the promotion of defence exports will be transferred to the Ministry of Defence.

**Gareth Snell:** It is welcome news that MOD is committed to the establishment of a defence exports office. Will the Minister set out what this will mean at home for jobs in constituencies such as mine in Stoke-on-Trent Central, where our proud manufacturing companies stand ready to support UK defence and security?

**Maria Eagle:** It will mean a coherent specialist approach to Government-to-Government agreements on sales of our capabilities being based in the MOD, which has expertise in those capabilities. This is going to mean extra jobs and growth, and that jobs can continue in the UK beyond the delivery of our own domestic orders because there will be export orders to fulfil. That should reap a defence dividend across the nations and regions of the UK as our manufacturing jobs continue to deliver for defence.

**Lincoln Jopp** (Spelthorne) (Con): Ametek, a defence manufacturer in my constituency, has reported to me that the process of getting a defence export licence has almost ground to a halt in the past 12 months. Could the Ministry of Defence send someone sufficiently threatening round to the Department for Business and Trade—perhaps the Veterans Minister—to persuade it to get a grip of its processes and speed everything up?

**Maria Eagle:** I am sure that we can make representations to that Department to ensure that there is no unnecessary delay in applications for export being granted, where that is appropriate.

### Ukraine: Military Support

5. **Jas Athwal** (Ilford South) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with allies on military support for Ukraine. [904895]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):** At last week's NATO summit, I met Defence Ministers, including Ukrainian Defence Minister Umerov, about surging support into Ukraine, with the UK also announcing last week that hundreds more advanced short range air-to-air missiles—ASRAAM—would be delivered to Ukraine, starting in the next few weeks. Last Monday, I joined the Prime Minister in hosting President Zelensky in No. 10, where we discussed the ongoing detailed planning for the coalition of the willing, and I am proud to say that, three and a half years into Putin's illegal invasion, this House and this country remain united for Ukraine.

**Jas Athwal:** Yesterday, alarming reports indicated that Russia had launched its largest air attack on Ukraine since the war began, killing at least six people and injuring many more. Clearly, regardless of his claims, Putin is not ready for peace. Given Russia's continued aggression, what steps are the Government taking alongside NATO allies to increase pressure on Russia to agree to an unconditional ceasefire?

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend is right. Last night's attack is a reminder of just how fierce the Russian onslaught on Ukraine is, but it is also a reminder that Putin has failed in his strategic ambitions. Three and a half years into this campaign, he has passed the gruesome milestone of 1 million Russian casualties on the battlefield, and he is failing to take the territory that he thought would fall to him. I am proud that the UK has stepped up with leadership on Ukraine—with the coalition of the willing alongside the French and by chairing the Ukraine defence contact group alongside the Germans—and that we will spend more than £4.5 billion this year on UK military aid to Ukraine, which is the highest ever level.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Secretary of State.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): I associate myself with the Secretary of State's comments on those terrible attacks. It should be a source of pride that some of the best drone and counter-drone tech that we have supplied to Ukraine has been made by British SMEs. The problem is that Labour's procurement freeze means that almost none of it has been bought in parallel for our own armed forces. In this week of Labour U-turns, will the Secretary of State consider another one: namely, scrapping the Government's crazy £30 billion Chagos deal and instead spending the money on rapidly supplying drones for the British Army, so that it can train for war as it is being fought today in Ukraine?

**John Healey:** That was a bit of a "bucket" question. On drones, we are increasing tenfold the number of British drones that we will supply to Ukraine this year. We are also stepping up the lessons we are learning from working with Ukraine on the development of its technology—battlefield-hardened and combat-ready—so that we can supply our own forces with increasing numbers of drones as part of the strategic defence review's vision for the way that we transform our forces in the years ahead.

### Operation Banner: Legal Protection for Veterans

**6. David Davis** (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the adequacy of legal protections for veterans who served in Operation Banner. [904896]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):** The veterans who served under Op Banner served to protect civilian lives and secure the peace in Northern Ireland. I share the right hon. Gentleman's deep concern that many may now be caught up in investigations or litigation, and I am determined that we protect them further. I am working closely with the Northern Ireland Secretary, as are our officials, to ensure that we discharge our duty to the veterans as part of the necessary plans to repeal and replace the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.

**David Davis:** During Operation Banner, every single time a paramilitary was killed by a British soldier, it was subject to judicial investigation. The Director of Public Prosecutions went through the evidence at the time, interviewed people, looked at the planning documents and was able to talk to people contemporaneously while they could still remember it. It was not a rubber stamp; it was rigorous, as was proven by the fact that, where necessary, it led to prosecution. What is happening now is double jeopardy. Worse still, it is double jeopardy under new rules but with no new evidence. Indeed, there is a risk of lost evidence and lost memory, given the passage of time. I have heard what the Secretary of State has said, but will he commit to ensuring that soldiers who were subject to reviews at the time will not be subject to further risk of prosecution under the Government's replacement for the legacy Act?

**John Healey:** Any incoming Government would have to repeal the legacy Act. It is unlawful legislation—it has been rejected by domestic courts, and rejected by communities across Northern Ireland, and it is simply wrong for anyone to suggest otherwise. We owe it to those affected by the troubles, whom the right hon. Gentleman speaks about, including our armed forces communities and veterans, to be honest about the unworkability of that legacy Act and to get this legislation right. That is exactly what the Northern Ireland Secretary and I are working together to ensure we can do, taking full account of all the interested parties, in particular those veterans and armed forces communities that the right hon. Gentleman speaks about.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): According to the 2021 census, there are more than 2 million veterans living in Great Britain. Clearly, some of them have been busy lately: their parliamentary petition entitled "Protect Northern Ireland Veterans from Prosecutions", with support from the *Daily Mail*, the *Express* and others, now has more than 160,000 signatures and will be debated in Parliament on 14 July. Which Minister will respond to that debate, so that we can ask them why the Government's current remedial order is drafted to help the likes of Gerry Adams sue the British taxpayer while throwing our veterans to the wolves?

**John Healey:** We welcome the petition, and we certainly welcome the parliamentary debate—it is quite proper that Parliament debates these issues. The right hon. Gentleman's legacy Act offered false and undeliverable promises to the veterans of Northern Ireland. The last Government were warned that it would be unlawful and incompatible with the Windsor framework. Even the chief commissioner of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery said that the Act has obvious problems, and that elements of it were dead in the water from the beginning. We are now fixing that flawed and failed legislation, and we will do so in a way that honours our duty towards those veterans.

**Mr Francois:** The Government could have appealed to the Supreme Court on this but deliberately did not. I do not doubt the Secretary of State's personal sincerity. However, at Prime Minister's questions on 15 January, the Prime Minister promised veterans:

"We are working on a draft remedial order and replacement legislation, and we will look at every conceivable way to prevent these types of cases from claiming damages—it is important that I say that on the record."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2025; Vol. 760, c. 324.]

Why then, despite the PM's solemn promise, is the order still unchanged? Surely he is not expecting to order his own MPs, many of whom represent red wall seats from which those veterans were originally recruited, through the Aye Lobby just to do Gerry Adams a favour? He is not going to do that, is he?

**John Healey:** The Prime Minister was right then and he is right now. I am working with the Northern Ireland Secretary to repeal and replace the legacy Act. We will honour the Prime Minister's undertaking to this House and do right by the duty that this nation holds to those veterans who served for more than 38 years during the troubles in Northern Ireland.

### Red Arrows

**7. John Cooper** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): What steps he is taking to maintain the capability of the Red Arrows. [904897]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry (Maria Eagle):** The strategic defence review recommended that the Hawk T1 and T2 be replaced with a cost-effective advanced jet trainer. The future platform of the Royal Air Force aerobatic team is being considered at the same time, and a Royal Air Force programme team is being established to deliver that capability.

**John Cooper:** The TSR-2 aircraft was a world beater. Unfortunately, the only thing that it could not beat in a dog fight was a Labour Government, who knew the cost of everything and the value of nothing. Will the Minister assure me that we have learned the lessons of TSR-2, and that we will look at the replacement for the Hawk in the light of pressing a British-designed and manufactured aircraft that can sell Britain abroad?

**Maria Eagle:** The Conservative party set 2030 as the Hawk T1's out-of-service date in its 2015 strategic defence and security review, and it then did precisely nothing to achieve a replacement in the nine years that followed, so I am disinclined to take lessons from the hon. Gentleman's

party on how to replace the Hawk. I assure him that the competition will welcome any bids from UK-based suppliers.

### Shipbuilding Supply Line

9. **Graeme Downie** (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure an “always on” approach to the shipbuilding supply line. [904899]

**The Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry (Maria Eagle):** As outlined in the strategic defence review and in the UK’s modern industrial strategy, the Government are committed to supporting an “always on” shipbuilding industry by leveraging our buying power through public procurement and seeking to export our capabilities to friendly nations.

**Graeme Downie:** As the Minister says, the SDR spoke of the need for an “always on” supply of shipbuilding, with the Royal Navy continuing to move towards a more powerful but cheaper and simpler fleet. The Minister has visited my constituency and seen the construction of the Type 31 frigates by Babcock at Rosyth, with the first ship, HMS Venturer, recently floated off. Other ships of the initial five ordered by the Royal Navy are progressing well. When can we expect to see announcements to guarantee the continued always-on supply of shipbuilding, and will she give an update on the need for more Type 31 frigates for the Royal Navy to reflect the flexibility of that platform, as well as the lower cost and faster production achieved by the incredible workforce at Rosyth in my constituency?

**Maria Eagle:** I recognise the benefit that the construction of Type 31 frigates has brought to Rosyth, and I have personally engaged with international partners to try to secure future orders. In addition to any orders that we ourselves may have, exporting that type of capability to our allies and friends is a sensible way of ensuring that we can keep production going at Rosyth.

### Defence Spending: Cross-party Talks

10. **Cameron Thomas** (Tewkesbury) (LD): If he will make an assessment of the potential merits of holding cross-party talks on increasing defence spending to 3% of GDP by 2030. [904900]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):** At last week’s NATO summit all 32 nations signed up to a new defence investment pledge of 5% of GDP by 2035, including, for the first time, spending on national security, national resilience and homeland security. That builds on this Government’s £5 billion boost to defence this year, the funded and costed plan to hit 2.5% of GDP in two years’ time, and our ambition to hit 3% in the next Parliament.

**Cameron Thomas:** There is a great deal of experience across these Benches, and most of us recognise the imminence of the need to hit 3%. My expertise is in force protection, and I know, among other things, that Brize Norton cannot draw support from the Military Provost Guard Service under the land top level budget, such as at nearby Dalton barracks and South Cerney. That is more acute still at RAF Lossiemouth. Will the

Minister meet me to discuss the command structure of the MPGS and bring our experience to the table to find that 3% of GDP imminently?

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman—he would be a much better person to meet than me on this matter.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Defence Committee.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): UK defence companies need certainty from the Government in order to invest and plan with confidence. I welcome the Prime Minister’s recent efforts at the G7 and NATO summits, and his commitment to spend 5% of GDP on defence by 2035, including 1.5% on defence and security-related investment. Can the Secretary of State clarify how exactly that 1.5% will be measured? Will it involve new projects and investments, or will it merely be a reclassification of existing projects? Crucially, how can industry, public bodies and other stakeholders contribute so that they can help to achieve that goal?

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend asks characteristically searching questions, so let me send him the NATO criteria that were published alongside the pledge last week, and let him and his Committee, when they interrogate me on Wednesday afternoon, pursue any further questions that they might have.

**Sir James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): There are Members on the Government Front Bench who know a thing or two about leadership—I can say that with confidence, because the Prime Minister is not in that place. The Government have a commanding majority and do not need the support of Members from any other Benches to hit 3% of GDP, and further, if only the leadership of the Labour party could get its own Members of Parliament through the Division Lobby. Given that the Prime Minister shows no ability to do that with the changes to welfare, how will he ensure that 3% is spent on defence in a timely manner?

**John Healey:** The Conservatives “hollowed out and underfunded” defence for 14 years—those are not my words, but those of the right hon. Gentleman’s former Cabinet colleague, Ben Wallace. This year there has been a £5 billion boost in defence spending, but in his Government’s first year, in 2010, there was a £2 billion cut in defence. Just as we boosted defence spending this year, we will increase it to 2.5% by 2027, which is three years earlier than the right hon. Gentleman argued for. We have shown exactly how we will fund that. We have taken the decision—which he did not take—to switch funding from overseas development aid into defence, and just as we have shown where the money is coming from in this Parliament, in the next Parliament we will do the same.

**Alex Baker** (Aldershot) (Lab): I, too, welcome the commitment to get to 5% of GDP on defence spending by 2035. It is imperative that the increase in defence spending means that funding is getting to those on the cutting edge of defence innovation. Cody technology park in Farnborough is already home to world-class defence innovation, with a wide range of small and



medium-sized enterprises working there, alongside QinetiQ, and it is where DragonFire has just been developed. What role does the Minister see for existing places such as Cody, in delivering our defence industrial strategy? Will she meet me to discuss whether Cody could be the home for the new defence SME hub?

**John Healey:** I see a huge role. I hope that my hon. Friend took the commitment that the Chancellor and I made, alongside the spring statement, to set a new target for direct defence investment in SMEs, as a sign of that commitment. While I am in the business of committing my ministerial colleagues to meetings, I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry would be only too happy to meet her and to draw on her expertise as part of the development of our defence industrial strategy.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**David Reed** (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): On defence spending, is not the truth that Labour's promise to reach 3% of GDP, let alone 3.5% or 5%, is just smoke and mirrors, because there is no actual plan to pay for it? How can the Government claim that they will properly invest in our defence and keep the country safe when they cannot even deliver the limited savings they have promised on welfare? So I ask the Secretary of State: where is the money coming from?

**John Healey:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Dispatch Box and to the Conservative Front Bench team, alongside his two very distinguished colleagues, the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) and the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge). I gently say to him that, since the election, his colleague the shadow Defence Secretary argued 13 times for 2.5% by 2030. He only changed his tune after February, when the Prime Minister showed how it was going to be funded and said that we would do it three years earlier, in 2027. We have shown how we will raise the extra funding for this record increase in investment in defence since the end of the cold war. We have shown exactly how it is costed and exactly how it will be funded in this Parliament, and in the next Parliament we will do the same.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Helen Maguire** (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): The Government's commitment to reach 5% on GDP on defence spending is the right decision. As we face the once-in-a-generation threat from Russia, it is vital that we regenerate our armed forces after years of decline under the Conservatives. However, we need more urgency. The International Institute for Strategic Studies warns that if there is a ceasefire in Ukraine, Russia could

"pose a significant military challenge to NATO allies...as early as 2027."

In order to strengthen our defence, we need to give people better incentives to join the armed forces. Will the Minister consider accelerating recruitment by backing the Liberal Democrat proposal for a £10,000 signing bonus to attract new recruits?

**John Healey:** We are accelerating recruitment. We are dealing with the deep-seated and long-running failure in recruitment, because the previous Government, over

14 years, set and then failed to meet their own recruitment targets. We are dealing with the recruitment and retention crisis in the armed forces. I am proud to say that last year we gave the armed forces the biggest pay rise for over 20 years; that this year there will be another inflation-busting pay rise; and that we are starting to provide better pay, better kit, better housing and better support for forces families—the sorts of things that will keep those valuable and valued members of the armed forces serving our country and protecting us all.

### UK-Mauritius Chagos Agreement

11. **Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): What estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the UK-Mauritius agreement concerning the Chagos archipelago, including Diego Garcia. [904901]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard):** As the Defence Secretary has said, the cost of the agreement represents less than 0.2% of the annual MOD budget. This has secured unrestricted access to and use of the base on Diego Garcia, control over movement of all persons and good on the base, and control of all communications and electronic systems. It is a good deal.

**Greg Smith:** I do not know that I agree with the Minister that this is a good deal, although I am curious about the £30 billion. Does it count towards the new NATO target of 3.5%, or the additional 1.5% on top of that? As we have to inform the Mauritian Government before we do anything particularly useful from that base, should that cost actually be counted in the defence numbers at all?

**Luke Pollard:** Let me squash the hon. Gentleman's last comment, which is wrong: we do not have to inform Mauritius before taking any military action. Under the treaty, we have to provide notification after the event. I have explained this 13 times in written answers to Members on the Conservative Front Bench, but I am afraid that they still do not get it. That underlines why they could not do a deal after 11 rounds of negotiation, whereas this Government did it after two rounds, securing the future of that vital base for UK and US operations.

**Luke Akehurst** (North Durham) (Lab): Is it not the case that our closest allies—the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and even India—have all welcomed this deal, precisely because they recognise the irreplaceable role of Diego Garcia in global security? What does the Minister think is going on with the Opposition, who think they know more about global security than the security services, the White House and the Pentagon?

**Luke Pollard:** This is important, because the future of Diego Garcia is absolutely vital. Having accepted the principle that sovereignty could be secured only by a negotiated settlement—that was the decision taken by the last Government—it is right that we secured a deal, and right that we protect the base for operations for more than 100 years. The deal is good value for the UK taxpayer, because it secures the most valuable piece of military real estate on the planet, and keeps it under UK control for the next century and beyond.

### UK Military Bases: Security

12. **Sarah Hall** (Warrington South) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to increase security at military bases in the UK. [904902]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard):** Following the disgraceful criminal vandalism that we saw at RAF Brize Norton, we immediately implemented a series of enhanced security measures at that air base and at other defence sites to ensure the safety of personnel, assets and operations. The strategic defence review highlighted Brize Norton as being in need of investment after the hollowing out of our armed forces over the previous 14 years. We have directed that a wider review be carried out at pace, to assess and ensure protective security at all defence sites. Phase 1 of that review was completed this weekend, and I will make further, wider announcements in due course.

**Sarah Hall:** To what extent is the Ministry of Defence working with other Government agencies to ensure a joined-up response to emerging threats to military equipment and infrastructure?

**Luke Pollard:** Counter-terrorism police are still investigating the incident at RAF Brize Norton, and it is right that we allow them the space to complete that investigation. The wider review looks at security at not just RAF Brize Norton, but all defence sites. We are looking with colleagues across Government at what investment is needed, and at how we can work with others to secure the safety of sites to ensure that the UK maintains operational security for all its assets.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Almost by definition, RAF sites have to have very long perimeter fences, so it is understandable that they could be overcome at one point or another. Why were they apparently not fitted with sensors, at least, so that any intrusion would have sounded the alarm?

**Luke Pollard:** I do not want to pre-empt the findings of all the reviews, but the right hon. Gentleman is right that our air bases tend to cover a large area. The perimeter fences we inherited on many of our air bases were not designed to keep everyone out with large things, but to be a perimeter defence. In the ongoing security work, we are looking at how technological solutions and changes in guarding might contribute to enhanced security, given the increased threat that we face.

### Autonomous Weapons Systems

14. **Markus Campbell-Savours** (Penrith and Solway) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of regulations on the use of autonomous weapons systems. [904904]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard):** The strategic defence review sets out that the UK will harness new technology through dynamic networks of crewed, uncrewed and autonomous systems. We will always comply with the relevant regulatory framework and international humanitarian law. I can tell my hon.

Friend that IHL compliance is absolutely essential as we look to use more artificial intelligence enabled weapons systems in the future.

**Markus Campbell-Savours:** The strategic defence review rightly emphasises the importance of autonomous weapons systems in augmenting the UK's defence capabilities, but it also notes:

"The UK's competitors are unlikely to adhere to common ethical standards in developing and using"

those technologies. What specific measures are the Government taking to help prevent and mitigate the potential harms of autonomous capabilities, both in the UK and abroad?

**Luke Pollard:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we maintain responsible AI systems in the face of adversaries perhaps using AI in malign ways. The UK will adhere to our legal obligations and the values of the society that we serve. Through the UN and other processes, we are actively engaging in international dialogue on responsible AI, lethal autonomy and related strategic challenges, but all our activities will be in compliance with international humanitarian law.

### Topical Questions

T1. [904916] **Dr Al Pinkerton** (Surrey Heath) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):** Last week, 32 NATO nations came together at the summit in The Hague, united in collective deterrence and in our collective defence of the Euro-Atlantic area. I can report to the House that NATO is now bigger, stronger and more lethal than before. We signed a new defence investment pledge of 5% of GDP by 2035, with new capability commitments from each nation. It was a good day for NATO, a good day for British jobs, and a bad day for Putin.

Everyone at the summit agreed that Iran should never have nuclear weapons. We all want the ceasefire between Israel and Iran to hold, and we will work to support it. Finally, we also discussed it creating a new opportunity for a ceasefire in Gaza, which would be a vital step on the path to peace.

**Dr Pinkerton:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his response. Now that the Prime Minister has made a cast-iron commitment to meet NATO's 5% defence spending target, will the Secretary of State make a similarly welcome commitment to cross-party talks to establish a credible and durable path towards meeting that goal ahead of NATO's 2029 capability review?

**John Healey:** I welcome the Liberal Democrats' support for the commitment we have made at NATO; the Leader of the Opposition was unable to offer that support at Prime Minister's questions last week. If the hon. Gentleman has ideas about how we should fund that commitment in the next Parliament, I would be perfectly happy to hear them.

T3. [904918] **Mark Ferguson** (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): Nothing matters more than home, so I welcome the huge progress that has been made on



forces housing over the past 12 months, especially for forces families. Does the Minister agree that the Opposition's half-baked reprivatisation plan would be a huge threat to those in the armed forces and their families?

**The Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns):** That is a really valid point. The trouble is that the plan risks the deal we had with Annington. It would outsource all the housing, and take control away from the Government, the Ministry of Defence and the military families who would be living in that housing. Our housing strategy will come in after the summer, and it will be well thought through and delivered.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Secretary of State.

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Does the Secretary of State support the action taken by the United States to bomb Iranian nuclear facilities?

**John Healey:** As I said in my response to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Dr Pinkerton), we are absolutely determined that Iran should never have a nuclear weapon. We have been working with allies, on a diplomatic path. Now that a ceasefire is in place, the mind of all NATO leaders, including President Trump, was on putting our weight behind that diplomatic path. That is the way towards ensuring a sustainable and verifiable end to any nuclear programme.

**James Cartledge:** It is extraordinary that a British Secretary of State for Defence is unable to give his explicit support to the military action of our closest ally, the United States. Is the real reason why Labour cannot back US military action against Iran not the same as the reason why it will not U-turn on Chagos or on Northern Ireland veterans—that when it comes to choosing between legal theory and the national interest, this Prime Minister is a lawyer, not a leader?

**John Healey:** Absolute rubbish! The UK and the US are the very closest of defence, intelligence and national security partners. The US was strongly behind the deal we have done on Diego Garcia, because it knows that that deal secures the operational sovereignty there of the UK and the US for the next 100 years and beyond.

T4. [904919] **Michelle Welsh** (Sherwood Forest) (Lab): ITP Aero supports over 700 jobs in Hucknall in my constituency. I recently went to visit the site with representatives from Unite to meet those highly skilled workers, who are essential not only in supporting our defence sector, but for protecting our national security. What are this Government doing to ensure that work done under future contracts is completed in the UK, by UK workers?

**The Minister for Defence Procurement and Industry (Maria Eagle):** I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the vital role of ITP Aero on some of our most important defence platforms, not least Typhoon and the A400M. The strategic defence review makes it clear that we will back British-based businesses where possible, and ITP Aero is already helping to show that defence is an engine for growth in her community.

T2. [904917] **Shockat Adam** (Leicester South) (Ind): In response to my written parliamentary question, the Minister for the Armed Forces said that the Ministry of Defence assesses support to foreign forces on “a case-by-case basis. UK training courses promote British values, including human rights...and...international humanitarian law.” How does that response square with our continued support of Israel's war crimes in Gaza? Will dual nationals serving in the Israel Defence Forces be held accountable?

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Luke Pollard):** All actions of the UK Government are in compliance with international humanitarian law. We want to see an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. We have fewer than five personnel from Israel on non-combat academic courses currently, but we keep all our training under review.

T5. [904920] **Tristan Osborne** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): Ministers will be aware of the recent launch of XV Excalibur in the south of England. It is an autonomous submarine vehicle that is the future of naval capability. What other investments are being made, under the strategic defence review, in autonomous vehicles, unmanned submarine technologies, and glider technologies?

**Luke Pollard:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that. Excalibur will be an incredible autonomous asset. The strategic defence review sets out that crewed, uncrewed and autonomous systems will be standard across our armed forces, and at the heart of the review is investment in the people who will be manufacturing and standing behind those systems. That is why, when the defence investment plan comes out later this year, there will be more opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, primes and businesses right across the country to invest in our uncrewed and autonomous future in a hybrid military.

**Rebecca Smith** (South West Devon) (Con): Last week, I asked the Chief Secretary to the Treasury what happened to the £4 billion earmarked for autonomous systems, including in Plymouth. That line was in the Chancellor's spending review speech, but not delivered on the day. The Chief Secretary did not know. Can the Secretary of State confirm that this funding exists, and will he accept an invitation to Turnchapel Wharf, where exciting marine autonomy is being developed?

**John Healey:** I can confirm that the £4 billion is funded. I can confirm that the investment in autonomous and drone technology in this Parliament is double what was planned before the election. I can confirm that we will spend and invest that money in this Parliament. I always like coming to Plymouth; my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces drags me down there frequently.

T6. [904922] **Chris Bloore** (Redditch) (Lab): Last week's historic NATO summit concluded with members laying the foundation for a stronger united NATO. With the changing nature of the threats we face, does the Secretary of State agree that working even more closely with our NATO allies is crucial to keeping the UK secure at home and stronger abroad?

**John Healey:** I do indeed. NATO is bigger, stronger and more lethal than ever before. It is our guarantee that we will never fight alone. That is why the leading contribution that Britain makes to NATO deterrence and defence is a big part of keeping us safe for the future.

**Chris Coghlan** (Dorking and Horley) (LD): Do the Government know if the US Government are still providing technical military intelligence support, such as electronic or imagery intelligence for Ukraine? If that were cut off by President Trump, would the Americans effectively restrict our British military technical intelligence support to Ukraine?

**Luke Pollard:** The hon. Member will understand that we cannot talk about sharing military intelligence on the Floor of the House, but as he and I have an interest in this, I would be happy to have a conversation with him.

T7. [904923] **Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): North Staffordshire Tri Service and Veterans Support Centre does a wonderful job supporting veterans across Stoke-on-Trent, but all too often, it finds that the military covenant is not working for them. In Stoke-on-Trent in particular, it seems to be failing. What action are this Government taking to ensure that the covenant is worth the paper it is printed on in cities like mine?

**Al Carns:** I highlight that the Prime Minister has made an announcement about broadening responsibility for the covenant, and the duty of care that it will deliver, from three Government Departments to 14. It will now be for other Departments to ensure that the duty is adhered to across all local councils.

T8. [904924] **Ben Goldsborough** (South Norfolk) (Lab): Some 3,537 of my constituents in South Norfolk are veterans. Being a veteran in a rural community is very different from being one in an urban community. What action are the Government taking to ensure that my veterans have the support they need?

**Al Carns:** As I have mentioned several times today, the Valour programme will accommodate that. It will not be a service that is a blueprint for everyone, but we will take the geographical differences into account and ensure that it is fit for purpose so that our veterans are given the deal that they deserve.

**Graham Leadbitter** (Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey) (SNP): The strategic defence review, published this month, clearly states:

“The foundation of the UK’s approach to deterrence remains a minimum, credible, independent UK nuclear deterrent, assigned to the defence of NATO... The UK’s nuclear weapons are operationally independent.”

Somehow, in the last 29 days, the UK Government have decided that they no longer see their Trident nuclear missiles as a minimum credible deterrent. Why was that major change in policy not announced in the SDR?

**Luke Pollard:** The Government have made it very clear that our support for our independent nuclear deterrent is solid and is not changing. We are investing in new submarines, we are investing in the base in Faslane, we are investing in new nuclear reactors in Derby, and we are backing the people who keep our country safe with that guarantor of our security, the nuclear deterrent.

**Ben Obese-Jecty** (Huntingdon) (Con): Since 14 June, an F-35B from the Prince of Wales carrier strike group has been stranded on the runway at the Thiruvananthapuram

civilian airport in India. What steps are the Government taking to recover the plane, how much longer will that take, and how will the Government ensure the security of protected technologies on the jet while it is in the hangar and out of view?

**Luke Pollard:** We continue to work with our Indian friends who provided first-class support when the F-35B was unable to return to the Prince of Wales when on a flight mission, and I am certain that the security of the jet is in good hands because Royal Air Force crew are with it at all times.

T9. [904925] **Joe Morris** (Hexham) (Lab): Given that as many as 35,000 Ukrainian children are still missing and are probably being held in occupied territory or in Russia, will the Minister assure us that the Government are not only taking action to help injured soldiers in Ukraine back on to the frontline, but doing all that they can to support the reunion of Ukrainian children with their families?

**Luke Pollard:** We are proud to be investing in Operation Renovator, our contribution to helping injured Ukrainian soldiers to recover and return to the fight to guarantee the safety of their nation, and we will continue to support that operation and our Ukrainian friends for as long as it takes.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): Infantry regiments cite difficulty in recruiting in their traditional communities and recruitment grounds. Further to the exchange between the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Helen Maguire), may I ask what more can be done to encourage, specifically, young British men to join the Army?

**Luke Pollard:** Last year 165,000 young people tried to join the British Army. We hired 9,500 of them, but 84% left because the process was too long. We have a superb “attract feature”, but we need to be better at converting, and we are making progress in that regard, although there is more to be done. I am happy to meet the right hon. Gentleman if he has any ideas that might support that.

**Peter Prinsley** (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): Sadly, we have all seen the devastation caused by modern missiles. Germany is preparing to receive the Arrow 3 missile defence system, ordered just two years ago, which can intercept intercontinental missiles at 2,500 km. What plans have the Government to equip this country similarly?

**John Healey:** One of the recommendations in the strategic defence review was that we develop an integrated air and missile defence system in this country. We must take our homeland security more seriously than we have in the past, and that is exactly what we will do.

**Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): During our last session of Defence questions, I asked the Secretary of State to join me in wishing a happy forthcoming birthday to Eastbourne’s last surviving war veteran, Eric Deach, who was shortly to turn 100. Unfortunately, tomorrow I shall be a pallbearer at his funeral; he did not make it. Will the Secretary of State, ahead of that funeral, join me in paying one final tribute to Eric for his service and everything he did to fight for our country?

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**John Healey:** It needs no words; the hon. Gentleman has heard the response of the House. We pay tribute to Mr Deach, and offer our deepest sympathies to his family, his friends and his comrades, and our thoughts will be with the hon. Gentleman tomorrow as he bears that coffin into the crematorium or the church for Mr Deach's final journey.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): Will the Government raise with the F-35 joint program office or the joint executive steering board the human rights breaches and the possibility of suspending Israel's access while maintaining supplies to other customers?

**Maria Eagle:** We always keep in mind our obligations under international law, and we obviously discuss matters that might pertain to it among the F-35 nations.

**Martin Vickers** (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): On Saturday, I had the pleasure of welcoming the Secretary of State to my home town of Cleethorpes, where we witnessed the national Armed Forces Day event. Earlier, he referred to the volunteers who made this possible. My constituent Alex Baxter, whom he met on Saturday, has masterminded the Armed Forces Day event in Cleethorpes for many years. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating Alex and his team on a splendid event?

**John Healey:** I had one of the best days in this job so far with the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes

(Melanie Onn) in his home town of Cleethorpes—they were there together. Behind the event was Alex Baxter, the absolutely formidable figure who organised the armed forces major events team that staged the Cleethorpes Armed Forces Day. Some 300,000 people were expected over the weekend. It was a great boost to our armed forces, to veterans and to the people of Cleethorpes.

**Mr Calvin Bailey** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Cadets are a wonderful source of social mobility in our country, and played a key role in last weekend's Armed Forces Day celebrations. I want to recognise my brilliant local air cadets: 12F Walthamstow and Leyton squadron, and 241 Wanstead and Woodford squadron. Will the Minister set out the Government's approach to increasing the size of cadet forces in communities like mine so that everyone can benefit from the opportunities that cadets have to offer?

**Al Carns:** I thank my hon. Friend for all his support for cadet forces and the armed forces. It would be remiss of me not to say that cadet forces provide an excellent social mobility platform for young children across the country by giving them hope, priorities and principles, and pushing them to be determined. This Government have committed to raising the cadet force by 30%, and to giving more children across the country better opportunities.

**Mr Speaker:** It is a pleasure to be the president of Chorley cadets.



## Welfare Reform

3.37 pm

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Liz Kendall):** With permission, I will make a statement on the Government's welfare reforms.

This Government believe in equality and social justice, and we are determined to build a fairer society in which everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential and achieve their ambitions, no matter where they were born or what their parents did. We know, as all Labour Governments have known, that the only way of unlocking the potential of individuals, and of our country as a whole, is to collectively provide real opportunities and real support.

I am proud of the steps that this Government have already taken to deliver on our promise of a better future for all. *[Interruption.]* We are creating more good jobs in every part of the country, including through our modern industrial strategy and plans for clean energy. We are—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I say to those on the Opposition Front Bench that the statement has only just started. You might not be interested, but I know my constituents are. I expect the same courtesy when you speak.

**Liz Kendall:** We are investing in our vital transport infrastructure and in skills, and getting the NHS back on its feet. Our landmark Employment Rights Bill will improve the quality of work, and our increases in the national minimum wage are helping make work pay. But alongside these vital steps, we need to reform the welfare state.

The principles set out in our "Pathways to Work" Green Paper are rooted in values that I know many MPs share: that those who can work must work, but often need proper support to do so; that those who can never work must be protected; and that the welfare state must be fair both for those who need support and for taxpayers, so that it is sustainable for generations to come. But the system we inherited from the Conservative party is failing on all those fronts. It incentivises people to define themselves as incapable of work just to be able to afford to live. It then writes them off, and denies them any help or support. The result is 2.8 million of our fellow citizens now out of work due to long-term sickness, and almost 1 million young people not in education, employment or training, which is a staggering one in eight of all our young people. The future sustainability of the system has also been put at risk, with the number of people on personal independence payment set to more than double this decade to over 4 million, with awards increasing at twice the rate of increases in the prevalence of disabled people in our society, adding 1,000 new PIP awards every single day.

I know that Government Members have welcomed many aspects of our reforms: our plans to bring in the first ever sustained, above-inflation rise to the universal credit standard allowance—the first permanent, real-terms increase in the headline rate of out-of-work benefits since the 1970s—which is an historic change in the direction of public policy; the biggest ever investment in employment support for sick and disabled people, quadrupling what we inherited from the Tories to £1 billion

a year; our plans to ensure that people with severe, lifelong health conditions will never be reassessed, removing all the unnecessary and unacceptable anxiety this brings; and our plans to legislate for a right to try, guaranteeing that trying work in and of itself will never lead to a benefit reassessment and giving people the confidence to take the plunge and try work, which many organisations have called for for years.

However, there have also been real concerns about our initial proposals. We have listened carefully, and we are making positive changes as a result. First and foremost, many Members of the House, alongside disabled people and their organisations, have been very concerned about requiring existing claimants to score a minimum of four points on at least one activity to be eligible for the daily living component of PIP when they are reassessed after November 2026. They have also been concerned that the pace of change was too fast. I fully understand that even though nine out of 10 people claiming PIP when the changes come in would be unaffected by the end of this Parliament, this has caused deep and widespread anxiety among existing claimants, because they rely on the income from PIP for so many different aspects of their lives. So we will now ensure that the new four-point requirement will apply only to new claims from November 2026. This means that no existing claimants will lose PIP because of the changes brought forward in the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill, and existing claimants of passported benefits such as carer's allowance will continue to get them, too.

Some people have said they are concerned that this will create a two-tier system, but I say to the House, including Conservative Members, that our benefits system often protects existing claimants from new rates or new rules, because lives have been built around that support and it is often very hard for people to adjust. For example, some people still receive the severe disablement allowance, which was closed to new claims in 2001. When Labour introduced the local housing allowance in 2008, existing claimants stayed on the old, higher rates of housing benefit, and many people are still on disability living allowance, which PIP replaced in 2013. We believe that protecting existing claimants, while beginning to focus PIP on those with higher needs for new claimants, strikes the right and fair balance.

The second important question raised by Members was about seeing more details of our wider review of the PIP assessment before being asked to vote on the changes in the Bill. Many MPs also want to know that the views and voices of disabled people will be heard at the heart of our plans. So we have today published the terms of reference for our wider PIP review, led by the Minister for Social Security and Disability, to ensure that this vital benefit is fit for the future, taking account of changes in society since it was first introduced. The review will look at the role of the PIP assessment, including activities, descriptors and the associated points, to ensure that they properly capture the impact of long-term health conditions and disability in the modern world. It will be co-produced with disabled people, their organisations, clinicians, other experts and MPs before reporting to the Secretary of State by autumn next year, and implemented as soon as possible thereafter.

The third issue of concern was that our plans to freeze the universal credit health top-up for existing claimants, and for future claimants with severe lifelong health

conditions and those at the end of life, would not protect incomes in real terms, even with the increase in the universal credit standard allowance. I can today confirm that we will ensure, for those groups, the combined value of the universal credit standard allowance and the health top-up will rise at least in line with inflation, protecting their income from these benefits in real terms, every year, for the rest of this Parliament. Together, with the changes to our proposals for PIP, that will ensure that no existing claimants are put into poverty as a result of the changes in the Bill.

Finally, while there has been widespread support for the extra investment that we are putting into employment support for sick and disabled people, I know that many Labour Members have been concerned that that is not enough. I can today announce that we are putting an additional £300 million into employment support for sick and disabled people. We will be delivering a total of £600 million for support next year, £800 million the year after and £1 billion in 2028-29, increasing our total spending on employment support for sick and disabled people to £3.8 billion over this Parliament, because disabled people who can work should not wait to have the same rights and chances to work as everybody else. The measures that we are announcing today will cost around £2.5 billion in 2029-30, and the overall savings and costings of our reform package will be certified by the Office for Budget Responsibility in the normal way at the next fiscal event.

Welfare reform is never easy, but it is essential because there is no route to equality or social justice based on greater benefit spending alone. The path to a fairer society, where everyone can thrive, where people who can work get the support they need and where we protect those who cannot work—that is the path we seek to build with our reforms. Our plans are rooted in fairness for those who need support and for taxpayers. They are about ensuring the welfare state survives, so that there is always a safety net for those who need it and that it lasts for generations to come. Above all, our reforms are rooted in our fundamental belief that everyone can fulfil their potential and live their hopes and dreams if we provide them with the right help and support. This is the better future that we seek to build for our constituents and our country. I commend this statement to the House.

3.48 pm

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I thank the right hon. Lady for advance sight of her statement.

This is a Government in chaos: open rebellion from their own Back Benchers, unfunded U-turns costing billions, and welfare plans that are not worth the paper they are written on. Their latest idea is a two-tier welfare system to trap people in a lifetime on benefits and deny them the dignity of work, while leaving the taxpayer to pick up the ever-growing bill.

It is a long-held Conservative belief that those who can work, should work. Work provides security and purpose. That is why we launched universal credit, simplifying complex benefits and ensuring that work always paid. And it works. In the decade up to the pandemic, we got the number of people on benefits and the benefits bill itself down. Some 800 jobs were created for every day that we were in office, giving millions of people the dignity and security that work brings.

But then, during the pandemic, we saw something new. The health and disability bit of our benefits system started to break. The bill is forecast to hit £100 billion by 2030. One in every four pounds of income tax will be spent on health and disability benefits—more than the entire defence budget. That is not fair for the taxpayer, not fair for people who are written off, and certainly not sustainable for the country.

Despite Labour having 14 years in opposition and now a year in government, they still do not have a plan to bring down the welfare bill or get people into work. What we have before us now is a rushed and chaotic compromise that is not reform in any sense of the word. It is woefully unambitious about savings, conspicuously lacking in compassion and achieves no meaningful change of a system we all know is broken. Thanks to the Government's latest climbdown, we are left with a plan that will save just £2.5 billion of a £100 billion bill by introducing a two-tier system. Two people diagnosed with Parkinson's a week apart will now receive different levels of support—all to clear up an internal Labour argument. The Government's own impact assessment shows that these plans will not get a single person into work. The idea that work is the guiding motivation for these changes is laughable.

There are things that the Government could do. They could reform the fit note system, which sees 94% of people who apply told that they are too sick to do any work at all. They could say today that they would make all sickness benefit assessments face to face. They could get a grip of the rising claims for common mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression. Claims for those and neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD are the main reason for the steep rise in the number of people on sickness benefits, making up more than half of all new claims. The Centre for Social Justice has found that the Government could save up to £9 billion by reforming those benefits. However, nothing that we have seen from Labour over the past couple of weeks suggests that it has the courage and conviction to grip that problem. In the meantime, our welfare bill will only continue to rise.

We agree on the need for reform and have set out the conditions under which we would support the Government: first, the welfare budget must come down; secondly, we need to get people back into work; thirdly, there must be no new tax rises to pay for increases in welfare spending. But with the welfare bill ever growing, unemployment rising and jobs disappearing, the Bill fails on all accounts.

Will the Secretary of State confirm whether the changes she is announcing today will be paid for through borrowing or taxation? Where are these good jobs she claims to be creating, when vacancies are going down and unemployment is going up? Has she read the impact assessment for the Government's Employment Rights Bill, which makes it clear that it will be harder for people to find work as a result? Why did it take the Government a year to publish the terms of reference for their PIP assessment review, and when can we expect changes if it does not report back until autumn 2026? Could I try one more time to ask what the difference is between the Secretary of State's right to try guarantee and our chance to work guarantee?

Finally, is this it? Are there any more savings? Are the Government not going to get any more people into work? Is this the extent of their ambition for

*[Helen Whately]*

reforming the welfare system during their time in office? In five years' time, will this be the Secretary of State's legacy?

**Liz Kendall:** I am in listening mode, and I listened carefully to what the hon. Lady said: once again, her strategy seems to be to rail against the problems that she and her party created. She has some chutzpah to talk about a two-tier system, when that is precisely what the Conservatives introduced when they protected people on legacy benefits when they moved on to UC and replaced DLA with PIP. They were part of that, and the hon. Lady should admit that rather than making those points. She said we should bring back face-to-face reassessments. We are doing so—it was the Conservatives who switched them off.

To be honest, I am still no clearer about what the Conservatives' policy actually is. The hon. Lady and the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Central Devon (Sir Mel Stride), claim that they had a plan to cut £12 billion from the welfare bill in their manifesto, but the truth is that it was nothing but a vague idea about turning PIP into vouchers. She talks about fit notes—I think the Conservatives tried to reform them about three or four times but completely failed, as have all their other efforts. The one change the Conservatives did propose was to the work capability assessment, and their consultation was ruled illegal by the courts.

What is beyond doubt is the mess that they left our welfare state and country in. Economic inactivity was rising; it is coming down under Labour. Disability benefits were doubling, with the cost to taxpayers soaring. We are putting in place real reforms based on our values—fair for those who need support and for taxpayers. That is the leadership that this country deserves.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for her statement. I absolutely agree that we must reform our social security system; under the previous Government, it neither supported nor protected disabled people. I am also very supportive of the principles that the Government have set out.

May I query some of the points that the Secretary of State has raised, however, particularly about a new PIP assessment process under the PIP review that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disability will be undertaking? The Secretary of State said that the four-point requirement will not apply until November 2026, and that the review will report in November 2026, but surely the PIP review should determine the new process. If this is being truly co-produced with disabled people and their organisations, the review should determine the new process, the new points and the new descriptors. We should not predetermine it as four points now.

**Liz Kendall:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and I look forward to giving evidence to the Select Committee about our overall proposals. The Bill brings forward a four-point requirement for all new PIP claims after 2026; I have been very clear that that will apply

only to new claimants. We are also committed to the wider review of PIP so that it is fit for the future. That will include considering the assessment criteria, the activities, descriptors and associated points to ensure that they properly reflect the impact of disability in today's world. The review will conclude by autumn 2026, and we will then implement as quickly as possible any changes arising from it.

We have to get the right balance here. I have been a long-standing champion of co-production, including when I was the shadow Minister for social care. We have to do that properly, but the four-point minimum will be in place for new claimants as we look to make changes for the future.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Steve Darling** (Torbay) (LD): The Prime Minister and many Ministers have identified that the benefits system is broken and its cost is skyrocketing, but balancing the books on the backs of the poor is wrong-headed in the extreme. The proposals today are a leap into the dark. My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I are really concerned that they are rushed proposals. Legislation that is rushed is often wrong, with unintended consequences. As the Member of Parliament for Torbay, I am concerned, as my Liberal Democrat colleagues are, about the disabled and long-term sick, their children, their families and carers.

There are some root causes. Our broken NHS and social care system needs to be resolved so that support is there for those most in need. Our Access to Work scheme is broken and needs resolving as a matter of urgency. There are some real challenges, so I hope that the Secretary of State will give some genuine answers. What consultation has she undertaken with carers? What cost shunting for our care and social needs system has she identified in the proposals? Finally, will she consider withdrawing these proposals so that there is adequate consultation and scrutiny to avoid any bystanders being hit?

**Liz Kendall:** I know that the hon. Gentleman cares passionately about these issues. He raises the urgent need to ensure that our NHS is back on its feet. We are beginning to make a difference, with waiting lists down for the first time in two years and with 4 million appointments—more than double we promised—created in our first year.

The hon. Gentleman talks about the failings of Access to Work. I absolutely agree: that is why, as part of the Green Paper, we are looking to reform it so that it is available to more people in future. We care passionately about family carers. As I said in my statement, existing PIP claimants will be protected as a result of the changes announced today, as will those carers whose carer's allowance is a passported benefit.

We are also looking at the future of social care with the review by Louise Casey. We are bringing these changes forward because we do not think it acceptable that the UK has one of the widest disability employment gaps in western Europe, at 28%, which is much higher than Germany, France and Sweden. We think that is unacceptable and we want to change it. That is why we are making these reforms.



**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Can we try to speed up questions and answers? No, it is not the Secretary of State's fault; I am just thinking of the numbers. Everybody wants to make a comment, and I understand why. Johanna Baxter will give us a good example.

**Johanna Baxter** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, the additional £300 million for employment support and that the PIP review will be co-produced with disabled people and their representatives, but many of my constituents are relying on the Scottish Government for employment support and for getting waiting lists down to help them back into work. Will she outline what discussions she is having with the Scottish Government to address those concerns?

**Liz Kendall:** Our new jobs and careers service applies in all parts of the UK—including Scotland—to help get more people back into work with personalised support. The spending review has delivered an additional £9 billion for Scotland. It is the biggest ever settlement in the history of devolution. I hope that the SNP matches our ambition to get more people into good work instead of cutting the employability budget as it has done in recent years.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I think that the vast majority of people in this country believe in a welfare system that is compassionate to the vulnerable, and particularly to the disabled, but they can no longer understand why so many people here—in contrast to other similar countries—are in this situation where they are not working.

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): It's because you were in power for 14 years.

**John Glen:** Yes, we were in power for 14 years, and during covid, when I was a Minister, we made decisions such as stopping face-to-face assessments because we could not do them. We all recognise that the recovery from that covid time has not gone as well as it should, but if the Secretary of State cannot deliver a shift in the numbers, the economy will be in a death spiral. She needs to recognise that these changes need to be reset radically to meet the country's expectations.

**Liz Kendall:** I absolutely believe that we have to reset the system. We have to make sure that everybody who can work gets the opportunity to do so and the support they need. That is precisely what we are trying to do with these plans. I gently say to the right hon. Gentleman, who I admire, that it is precisely that failure and that mess that we are now trying to tackle.

**Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for the movement made in the last week. It would have been good to have had those conversations earlier, but we are where we are. In response to the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, my right hon. Friend spoke about the November deadline and the four points kicking in. Will she explain to the House the rationale for settling on those four points in one category prior to the Timms review?

**Liz Kendall:** Our objective here is as it always has been, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend and others for all their engagement with us. We are making these changes because we have to both get more people who can work into work and try to begin to focus this really important benefit on those with higher needs so that it is sustainable for the future. That will not affect existing PIP claimants, who will have their incomes protected; that is a very positive change that we are making. The Timms review will look at those descriptors and the points that are allocated as part of a much wider assessment, because we have to ensure that this benefit lasts for the future so that it is always there for those in greatest need.

**Dame Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): The Secretary of State tells us that this week's U-turn will cost £2,500 million a year by 2029. Will she tell the House how she proposes to cover that expense?

**Liz Kendall:** This change will be fully funded, and that will be set out in the normal way at the next fiscal event, as I am sure all hon. Members will appreciate.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome progress, but I cannot countenance sick and disabled people being denied support to enable them to be independent in the future, and 150,000 people being pushed into deeper poverty. Nor can disabled people across our country support these measures. It is a matter of conscience. Will the Secretary of State set out why we are voting on these matters tomorrow, when the Timms review means that there could be real changes to the criteria used in assessments for people to score four points? It feels like signing a blank cheque.

**Liz Kendall:** I know my hon. Friend cares passionately about these issues, but no existing claimant will be put into poverty as a result of the changes in the Bill. The figures that she is giving are about notional future claimants, and they take into account none of the record levels of employment support that we are putting into the system. We have published very clear evidence that proper support programmes can get sick and disabled people into work and to stay in work, making sure that they can improve their incomes and their lives. We have absolutely committed to co-producing the Timms review; indeed, we will be working very closely with disabled people on our reforms to access to work, and how we ensure that the pathways to work investment gets the best results for disabled people and their families. That work will take time, but we will implement the decisions as soon as possible.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): My constituent Steve had been a fit, active working person until about a year ago. Since then, he has been debilitated by ME, which has left him able to get out of the house for only about an hour every fortnight. Even getting dressed leaves him needing a lie down. PIP is already difficult for people like Steve to access. He told me that he would rather have lost both his legs than have got ME. Could the Secretary of State tell Steve why, if he had got ME two to three years later, he almost certainly would not have been eligible for any PIP at all?

**Liz Kendall:** I am deeply concerned to hear about what the hon. Lady's constituent has been through. I have many constituents myself who have real needs but

[Liz Kendall]

have struggled to get PIP. We absolutely want to make sure that the whole assessment process works as effectively as possible. I urge her and her constituents to feed into the Timms review. Once again, existing claimants like her constituent will not lose their income as a result of the changes in the Bill. It is very common throughout the benefits system to have existing claimants protected on old rules and old rates. That is what we are doing today.

**Dr Marie Tidball** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I welcome the words of the Secretary of State that recognise the need to enable disabled people to fulfil their potential. Since April, I have engaged with the Government, making it clear that I could not support the proposals on PIP. Our manifesto committed to championing the rights of disabled people and the principle of working with disabled people. Having no public consultation on these plans excludes the voices of disabled people. This is not just about process; this makes disabled people worse off. The principle of fairness means that disabled people had a legitimate expectation to be consulted, in order to fulfil the public sector equality duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. Why did the Department for Work and Pensions choose not to consult with disabled people on the PIP proposals, and what work will it do to win back the trust of disabled people?

**Liz Kendall:** My hon. Friend is a powerful voice, and I know she will always remain so in this House. We are absolutely committed to co-producing this PIP review, led by the Minister for Social Security and Disability. She may know that we are also setting up collaboration committees on access to work and pathways to make sure that we really get this right. I look forward to meeting her and many other disabled people and their organisations to make sure that we get this right as we go forward.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): To describe it as fair and equal to treat people with identical conditions differently purely on the basis of whether they are an existing recipient of benefits is Orwellian newspeak on stilts, isn't it?

**Liz Kendall:** So why did the Conservative party do it for 14 years?

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham North) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. Will the Timms review have the powers to review the planned budget savings for future claimants of PIP and universal credit health components? Also, if claimants request a reassessment because of worsening health conditions, will they be assessed on the current criteria or the new eligibility criteria?

**Liz Kendall:** The PIP review is not driven by an objective of making savings; it is about making sure that this vital benefit is fair and fit for the future. As is the case now, people can request reassessments whenever they want. Existing claimants will remain under the current rules, unless they request a reassessment, until November 2026. From then onwards, there will be that four-point minimum.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): If this is what Labour thinks people voted for and what people wanted when they voted in July last year, why was it not in the Labour manifesto? Why did Labour not put in its manifesto that it was going to cut the winter fuel payment, keep the two-child cap and push 150,000 more disabled people into poverty? Is it perhaps because the Secretary of State realised how deeply unpopular and wrong these changes would be?

**Liz Kendall:** I do not expect the hon. Member to have read every line of our manifesto, but reforming the benefit system was in it. So too was our commitment to tackling child poverty, and I am beyond proud that the Chancellor invested the resources we need to extend free school meals to all families on universal credit and lift 100,000 children out of poverty. That is a down payment on our child poverty strategy this autumn.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee.

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab): We all agree that the welfare system needs reform but many of us in this place believe that changes to disability support should not take place without listening to disabled people's voices and experiences. Over the last few days, I have been hopeful that the Government have shown strength in listening and moving on what they have heard. However, I have a question on sequencing. What is the logic of making changes for future claimants before finishing the Timms review, which is now to be co-produced with disabled people? Could this lead to not just two tiers but three: existing claimants; new claimants, who will lose out; and post Timms review claimants?

**Liz Kendall:** No, that is not correct. As I set out in my statement, existing claimants on PIP will be protected. The reason we are making the changes for future claimants is that we want to start to focus that, for future claimants, on those with higher needs. For current claimants of both PIP and the universal credit health top-up, no one will be pushed into poverty as a result of the changes in the Bill.

**James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): Health and sickness benefit spending is set to hit £100 billion by the end of the Parliament, so why is the Secretary of State not bringing forward proper reforms rather than these rushed cuts imposed by the Chancellor that save only £2 billion, and that duck the difficult decisions to deal with the scale of the challenge that we face?

**Liz Kendall:** Perhaps the hon. Member should make that point to those on his Front Bench, who had 14 years.

**Jessica Toale** (Bournemouth West) (Lab): I welcome the clarity that my right hon. Friend has set out, particularly for existing PIP claimants and those with severe conditions, but my constituents who I met this weekend want to have an active part in designing the changes that affect them. Can she confirm that my constituents will be able to feed their direct lived experience into the PIP review?

**Liz Kendall:** Yes; as I set out my statement, we intend to co-produce the Timms review with disabled people, the organisations that represent them, other experts



and MPs, so my hon. Friend's constituents will absolutely be able to feed their views into the review. We want to strike the right balance here, because co-production takes time. We want to do it as quickly as possible, but it has to be done as effectively as possible. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend and involving her constituents' views.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I spoke to a resident—a friend—in my constituency over the weekend. She is a wheelchair user since a failed back operation some years ago. She currently gets PIP. She gets three points for dressing and undressing and two points for washing and bathing. She needs help with both, yet she fears, as do I, that anybody with her exact needs applying after next November will be left without help. We are right, are we not, to be concerned and to fear that? That is unjust and uncaring, isn't it?

**Liz Kendall:** I repeat to the hon. Gentleman that it is common through the benefit system to protect existing claimants from new rules and rates. I also say to him that we are putting billions of pounds extra into the NHS so people can get the health and social care support they need. We are putting in place the biggest-ever employment support investment for sick and disabled people because we know disabled people who are out of work are twice as likely to be in poverty. That is the investment we are making. His constituents will be protected and will not be put into poverty as a result of the changes in this Bill.

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for her commitment to bring forward a stronger Bill, working with colleagues across the House. The reality is that any one of us in this House could become disabled—disability does not discriminate. It is important for us to recognise the network of informal care that keeps our social care system going. The reality is that a number of carers would not be eligible for carer's allowance without the PIP eligibility, and so many carers who receive carer's allowance are in poverty. Those people do not do it for the money; they do it because they want to help a loved one or family friend. I know from personal experience, being a carer for my mum, the toll it takes when you help someone to bathe, to get out of bed, or to cook and clean. These people do not do it for the money, but they are scared. Can the Secretary of State confirm that we will protect those carers in any future PIP changes because it is right that those carers should not be pushed further into poverty?

**Liz Kendall:** My hon. Friend is a huge champion of these issues, and I have long championed what unpaid family carers do. As she says, many do not even think they are a carer; they are just a husband, wife, son, daughter, mum or dad looking after the person they love. I want to reassure her, as I said in my statement, that existing PIP claimants and all those who get passported benefits, like carers, will be protected as a result of the changes we have made. Indeed, I know my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary wants to do far more to support family carers in future because without them, our NHS would collapse.

**Sir Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that, while necessary at the time of covid, the removal of the requirement for face-to-face

assessments was an opening of the door to potential abuse? If so, will she commit in principle to the reinstatement of face-to-face assessments?

**Liz Kendall:** That is exactly what we committed to in our Green Paper.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): Presumably, the outcome of the Timms review will require some form of primary legislation to enact the changes to the system that will come from the Department for Work and Pensions. In which case, I suggest to the Minister that removing clause 5 from the Bill tomorrow and putting it into any future legislation means the Department can still have its thresholds in the future if it wants to, but only once everybody knows against what criteria those judgments will be made.

**Liz Kendall:** We are co-producing this review, and it may result in changes that require primary or secondary legislation or other action, and I do not want to pre-empt that. Let me just bring my hon. Friend and the House back to the purpose of these changes: to ensure that we have a system that is fair for those who need support and fair for taxpayers, and to try to put the welfare state on a more sustainable footing for the future. If we do not do so, my real fear is that it will not be there for the very people who really, really need support going forward.

**Adrian Ramsay** (Waveney Valley) (Green): Today's statement feels like a panicked political fix to an indefensible attempt to cut benefits from the most sick and from disabled people, but it lacks competence and compassion. Given that the Secretary of State talks about social justice, how can she justify people who might need that support in the future not receiving the support that disabled and sick people rightly receive today? Would the right thing to do not be to shelve these proposals so she can allow time to do what she has promised to do and to genuinely co-produce and consult with disabled people on the right way forward?

**Liz Kendall:** I fundamentally disagree with the hon. Gentleman's proposition. Our changes are rooted in the clear principles that those who can work should work and need the support to do so, and those who cannot work should be protected, but that we need a system that is fair and sustainable. I do not believe that we can wait while disabled people in this country who want to work are denied the opportunities to do so. We cannot have a system where one in eight young people is not in education, employment or training, with all the terrible long-term consequences that brings. We cannot see one in 10 of our fellow citizens trapped out of work and economically inactive, because that is not a good future for them or for our country.

**Derek Twigg** (Widnes and Halewood) (Lab): We already know that the Bill as published was flawed, because of the changes that have been made in the past few days and announced today. I welcome the wider review of PIP and the consultation with disabled people, their organisations and clinicians, but given the wider review and that the Timms review is yet to report, why are we pushing ahead at this stage?

**Liz Kendall:** Because we have to begin to reform the welfare state, to help those who can work to do so, to protect those who cannot and to begin to put our

[Liz Kendall]

welfare state on a more sustainable footing. The Bill protects existing claimants—they will not be affected by the changes. It ensures that people have a right to try, and that those with severe, lifelong conditions never face reassessment. It comes alongside the biggest-ever employment support for sick and disabled people. Together, this is a fair and balanced package that meets the needs of existing claimants and reforms the welfare state for the future.

**Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con): There were almost a million fewer workless households in 2024 than in 2010. One factor behind that was universal credit and reducing the barriers and perceived risks of going back into work if people were not sure how it would work out. Notwithstanding the right to try, if there are to be two different levels of health component outside the severe conditions criteria, will that not raise those barriers back up and do the exact opposite of the right hon. Lady's stated intent?

**Liz Kendall:** I fundamentally disagree with the right hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great respect. I actually think that universal credit sometimes locked people out of work, because they had to define themselves as incapable of working in order to afford to live. Less than 1% of people on UC move into work each month. That is not good enough for them, their incomes and their life chances, and it is not good enough for the taxpayer, either.

**Yuan Yang** (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State and her colleagues in the Department for their tireless work over the past week, and I very much welcome her commitment to co-production with disabled people in the Timms review. The atrocious handling of the pandemic by the previous Conservative Government has left the economy and disabled people paying the cost. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether the Timms review funding model will have the fiscal baseline of the inherited four-point system? If that is the case, how can that mean meaningful co-production with disabled people?

**Liz Kendall:** I agree with my hon. Friend's comments about the state of the economy. As I said in my statement, the four-point minimum will now not relate to existing claimants. It will come in for new claims in November 2026, but the Timms review and the co-production will look not only at the activities and the descriptors, but the points given to them. It is important that we do not set up a process of co-production and then overrule that. We want a benefits system that enables disabled people to have dignity and independence, and the same choices and chances to live the life that they want as anybody else has. It is a really important process, and I hope that she and many other hon. Members in the House will work with us to get this right.

**Calum Miller** (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I recently met a support group in my constituency of those who suffer from ME, chronic fatigue syndrome or long covid. Their description of the devastating impact of those variable conditions was very affecting. If one of those people were to have an improvement in their condition,

meaning that they were no longer eligible for PIP, and then to re-present for assessment, would they be entitled to return to the PIP level they were on previously, or would they be treated as new applicants under the terms the Secretary of State has described today?

**Liz Kendall:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, which is precisely what we want to look at in the PIP review, because it does not take into account fluctuating conditions. That is an important issue moving forward, and we will be absolutely determined to involve him, his constituents, and organisations that represent those with fluctuating conditions in the process of the review.<sup>1</sup>

**Patricia Ferguson** (Glasgow West) (Lab): I am grateful to my colleagues on the Front Bench for listening to what Back Benchers have been saying for months, and for making so many changes. However, I did not see any changes that affect young people, particularly care-experienced young people. Will the Secretary of State cast some light on what discussions are ongoing with young people about the processes involving them?

**Liz Kendall:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. As part of the process of the Green Paper we are establishing a youth panel to ensure that young people's voices are heard in our future reforms. Many of the youth guarantee trailblazers that we are putting in place as part of our £240 million Get Britain Working plan are looking to provide extra support for young care leavers, because they are in different circumstances and need extra help. I am sure there is far more that we could be doing in future, and I urge her to work with us to ensure that their views are at the heart of our plans.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Many on the DUP Benches want to support the Government in achieving the objective of getting people back to work, and being fair to those who cannot work, but does the Secretary of State realise how difficult her actions make it for us to give support? Last week the Deputy Prime Minister stood at the Dispatch Box and said, "These proposals will go before Parliament this week. They're fair, and if they don't go, there is a black hole in the economy that we cannot fill." This week we are now told, "Actually, lots of people were vulnerable, and it's not fair, and they rely on the income, and we will find the money." The only thing that has changed in the week is that 120 Back Benchers signed letters that would not support the proposals. Does the Secretary of State realise how cynical that appears? This is not about well-thought-out proposals, but simply a way of buying back the Back Benchers who were rebelling.

**Liz Kendall:** It might astonish the House that I think leadership is about sticking to our principles and values, and listening to ensure that we get things right. I believe that listening is a strength not a weakness, and I believe that in politics as well as in life.

**Gregor Poynton** (Livingston) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that our welfare system must do much more to support and reward work, and also support people who are looking to re-enter or enter work? What difference does she believe that the right to try guarantee will make in achieving that?

1.[Official Report, 16 July 2025; Vol. 771, c. 4WC.](Correction)

**Liz Kendall:** Labour's historic mission is to help more people who can work into good jobs in every part of the land. That is not only because we believe that is key to improving living standards, but because of the self-respect, dignity and purpose that good work brings. The right to try is an important step—we know that around 50% of sick and disabled people say that the reason they are not trying work is because they fear they will be reassessed for their benefits. We have got to put that right. We have also got to put in place the employment support. We have to create good jobs in every part of the country, and get those waiting lists down so that people can get back to health and back to work. We are taking action on all those fronts, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend in his constituency so that more of his constituents can benefit.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It seems entirely reasonable that a Government should want to control the amount that they spend on welfare, and entirely reasonable to want to focus that on the most in need. However, I do not understand why they brought out such rushed changes, which have done nothing but cause anxiety and distress, and left them in a worst position in which they have now U-turned and are neither making savings nor reforming welfare. Will the Secretary of State please explain the rationale for the four-point limit that she brought in?

**Liz Kendall:** For new claimants, it is because we believe that we need to begin to focus this vital disability benefit on those with higher needs. I am deeply concerned that a doubling in the number of people on PIP over this decade, from 2 million to 4.3 million, with claims and awards rising at twice the rate of the increase in the number of disabled people in society, risks the sustainability of the system in future. We have to ensure that it is there for those who really need it, providing that vital safety net going forward. The hon. Lady talks about having a reasonable approach, and I really do believe that this is reasonable. I believe that protecting existing claimants and beginning to make changes for future claimants, backed by the changes to the right to try, stopping reassessments and investing in real employment support, is the fair and right balance for the people who need support and for taxpayers.

**Tony Vaughan** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement and for her engagement. My question is about the co-production proposal. By what mechanism will that be given effect, and how is co-production different from consultation? Will disability groups have any entitlements or powers beyond simply giving their views?

**Liz Kendall:** We are not setting out the precise detail of how co-production works; I think that would go against the very essence of it. We are already in discussion with disabled people and their organisations. On our Green Paper, we have already set out what we call collaboration committees, reforms to access to work, our pathways to work and investment in employment support, because we want to get this right. We look forward to those discussions to ensure that people have a proper say and are fully engaged and involved, because we want to make sure that we get this right.

**Claire Young** (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): In her statement, the Secretary of State recognised that existing claimants

“rely on the income from PIP for so many different aspects of their lives.”

One aspect, for many, is work. Why does she think that new claimants will not have the same need and what “aspects of their lives” does she think they should curtail?

**Liz Kendall:** The hon. Lady raises a really important point. Access to work is there precisely to support people who have needs over and above the legal requirement on employers to make reasonable adjustments. We need to fix that system because the backlogs are too long and not enough people are getting that support. That is precisely why we are consulting on the future of access to work. We will make the changes that people need, so that they can get the help they need to get good meaningful work and to stay in work, and we will deliver that as soon as possible.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): Despite the changes, is it not the case that over 400,000 disabled people—our constituents—who need assistance to cut up their food, wash themselves, go to the toilet and dress themselves, will be denied PIP from next year, when they currently would have got it? Is not the reality that Labour MPs will have to deal with that, week after week, in their constituency surgeries? Would it not be better if, rather than trying to save political face, the Government pulled this artificial, politically imposed deadline of tomorrow? It is important not that we save face, but that we get it right.

**Liz Kendall:** Many hon. Members have understandably raised concerns because their constituents who are on PIP, right here and now, are extremely anxious, even though if they are still on PIP at the time when the changes come in, nine out of 10 of them will not be affected—they will be protected in future. The Timms review will look at this vital benefit going forward—the activities, the descriptors and the points they get—and I really hope that my hon. Friend will engage with us throughout the process to ensure that we get it right.

**Ann Davies** (Caerfyrddin) (PC): The UK Government's amendments to the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill were not included in the initial statement on the Bill's compatibility with the European convention on human rights. Discrimination is a real concern, given that two people with the same condition could receive different support, based on when they become sick or turn 18. Will the Secretary of State make an updated statement on compatibility and confirm that her Department has complied with the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010?

**Liz Kendall:** I can indeed confirm that we have complied with all our legal requirements.

**Ms Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I do not doubt the Secretary of State's commitment to getting this right. She will be very aware that, as it stands, the legal advice we have had is that these proposals will breach our obligations under the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The previous Government did that, and we rightly challenged them on it. So that we do not make the same mistake, will she give a commitment



[Ms Stella Creasy]

to write into a Bill that these proposals will be compliant with that commitment to ensure that persons with disabilities have social protection and the enjoyment of that right without discrimination on the basis of their disability?

**Liz Kendall:** I simply say to my hon. Friend, who knows that I have deep respect for her, that I would not be making any changes that I believed were incompatible with the law.

**Paul Holmes** (Hamble Valley) (Con): I am sure that the Chancellor will be delighted that the flip-flopping of the Prime Minister means she has to find another £2.5 billion in taxation on people in this country. Does the Secretary of State think that it is fair that a two-tier system has been created? Why would anybody on the old rate seek work when they know that if they go into work, it does not work out and they claim again, they will get a reduced rate under her Government?

**Liz Kendall:** Because PIP is not an in-work benefit.<sup>1</sup>

**Dame Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central and West) (Lab): The north-east has the highest rate of disability in the country—31%—and more than a quarter of those of working age live in poverty, so the Secretary of State is absolutely right to say that welfare reform is hard, essential and must reflect Labour values and disabled voices. Will she set out how the co-production of the new system with disability groups will ensure that it is a fairer system? How will disability groups in the north-east be able to be involved?

**Liz Kendall:** We will absolutely ensure that the views and voices of disabled people right across the country, including in the north-east, are fully involved in our process of co-production. My hon. Friend is a powerful champion of that, and I hope that she, too, will get involved with our plans. The Minister for Social Security and Disability, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms), will develop the process of co-production in close conduct with disabled people and their organisations, and I am sure that he will update the House shortly as those plans progress.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): On page 3 of her statement, the Secretary of State asked herself a rhetorical question about a two-tier system. Somebody who is now eligible for personal independence payment gets it, but can she simply confirm that somebody who suffers the same kind of condition whenever this Bill becomes law will not be eligible for the personal independence payment? Their support will be from friends or family, or they will have no support at all. Is she really happy that we are deliberately creating a two-tier system for people with profound needs and disabilities who quite rightly expect the community as a whole to recognise and support them?

**Liz Kendall:** I simply say to the right hon. Gentleman that there are many differences in the benefits system already—people are on different rates and have different rules depending on the time they came into the system. That has always been a part of the social security system,

including under previous Labour Governments. The Timms review will look at the different descriptors and the points that are delivered to them, alongside much wider changes. PIP came in more than 10 years ago, and there have been huge changes in the nature of disability, the world of work and society. We have to ensure that this vital benefit stays in future, and that is what the Timms review seeks to achieve.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I think it would be helpful to let Members know that I plan to allow this statement to continue until 5.15 pm. It would therefore be helpful if questions were short.

**Alex McIntyre** (Gloucester) (Lab): Over recent months, I have consulted with constituents who have lived experience of disability and the welfare system and their representatives. I know that they will welcome the Secretary of State's statement that protections for existing claimants will be protected, but one of the most heartbreaking stories I heard in those consultations was about a young constituent who applied for hundreds of jobs and attended dozens of interviews and simply could not find a job. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss what more we can do not just to support disabled people in my constituency, but to encourage employers to take on some of the talented, brilliant people living with disabilities in my constituency?

**Liz Kendall:** My hon. Friend raises a really important issue, which is the world of work and the need to ensure that employers recruit and retain more people with long-term sickness or a disability. That is precisely why, in addition to the huge advances in our Employment Rights Bill, we have asked Sir Charlie Mayfield, the former boss of John Lewis, to look at what more we can do to support employers to recruit and retain disabled people. We are also overhauling our jobcentres so that they provide more personalised, tailored support. Indeed, we have set our jobcentres a new goal of reducing the disability employment gap, which I believe will also make a huge difference.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call Cameron Thomas.

**Cameron Thomas** (Tewkesbury) (LD): Welcome back, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Government's recent compromise with their own MPs secures PIP for existing claimants, but not for those who come hereafter—a distinction born not of compassion, nor apparently of economics, but to secure the Government's own political footing. If I am wrong, will the Secretary of State describe the moral foundation for this distinction between those who suffer today and those who will suffer in the future?

**Liz Kendall:** I am not going to take any lectures on compassion. I have fought my whole life to tackle poverty and drive up opportunity for people, no matter where they are born, what their parents did, their gender, their sexuality or the colour of their skin. The social security system has many different rules for new and previous claimants. I do not believe that is an unfair system; I believe it is the way in which we protect people who have come to rely on a benefit. I am proud of the changes we have announced today—I think they are

1.[Official Report, 16 July 2025; Vol. 771, c. 4WC.](Correction)

positive and get us to a good place. Listening is a sign of strength, and I am absolutely determined to continue to listen.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement, and for the steps she has taken to improve the Bill. In launching the Timms review, she has accepted that the current PIP assessment criteria and descriptors are not fit for purpose. Can she confirm that the difference between the timetable for implementing the change that will require applicants to achieve four points in a single category and the timetable for completing and implementing the Timms review will result in some people falling between the old system and the new one? They will be required to achieve four points on criteria that are not fit for purpose. For how long will that happen, who will be affected, and what will happen to those people in future?

**Liz Kendall:** I know that my hon. Friend has worked extremely hard on all of those issues. That question was raised previously by another colleague, and the answer is that there will be two sets: the people who are on the existing system, who will be protected; and those who will be on the four points as we go forward. However, the Timms review will indeed look at the descriptors and the different points that they get. Those changes will come in as soon as possible—the review will report by autumn 2026 and we will try to put the changes in place as quickly as possible. We do not yet know what the review will say or how those changes will be enacted, but we are determined to ensure that they are put in place as soon as possible.

**Nick Timothy** (West Suffolk) (Con): Is the problem for the Government not the failure of the Prime Minister to even seek a mandate for what he is trying to do? He said that he would limit spending increases to £9.5 billion a year, but he has increased spending by eight times as much, and the effect on the fiscal rules is the root cause of this problem. He also won the Labour leadership by promising to

“abolish Universal Credit and end the Tories’ cruel sanctions regime”,

but then he masqueraded as a welfare reformer. Does the Secretary of State now realise that to win a mandate, one needs to be straight with people, including one’s own MPs?

**Liz Kendall:** I am very proud of our Prime Minister, who changed our party so that we can change our country, and the mandate can be seen by the number of MPs on the Benches behind me.

**Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): Increasing access to employment opportunities for disabled people and improving the retention of disabled workers were urgent before, and they are even more urgent now. My right hon. Friend did not mention the Mayfield review, although she has just mentioned it in response to a question. Can I please push her on that review? First, can she expedite it; secondly, can it include disabled people more meaningfully than it has until now; and thirdly, will it indicate how the Government will implement our manifesto commitment to increase access to reasonable adjustments?

**Liz Kendall:** The Mayfield review will be reporting before the Budget. Sir Charlie Mayfield wants to work closely with disabled people and the organisations that represent them. He has seen inspiring examples of what good employers are doing and good things that other countries are doing, and that will provide some insightful lessons. The Minister for Social Security and Disability has already said that we are looking at whether we should put in place a timeframe within which employers need to respond to requests for reasonable adjustments. We want to make sure that those adjustments are made as quickly as possible, so that more disabled people can get work and stay in work.

**Helen Maguire** (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): Why are the proposed PIP cuts still being applied to new claimants, many of whose needs are as urgent and severe as those of existing claimants?

**Liz Kendall:** The reason we are protecting existing claimants and beginning to focus PIP on those with higher needs in future is because we want a system that is sustainable and lasts. I do not believe it is sustainable to have a doubling of the number of PIP claims every decade, adding 1,000 people a day. The rate is rising faster than the increase in prevalence of disabled people in this country. The truth is that the parts of the country that have the highest disability benefit claims and incapacity benefit claims are the places that were decimated by the Tories in the ’80s and ’90s, when whole industries closed. Those places are yet to have the investment they need to create jobs and have not had the investment in the NHS. I have always believed in the social model of disability. We have to put these things right urgently, because disabled people deserve a better life than they had under the Conservatives.

**Darren Paffey** (Southampton Itchen) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for her work on this issue and for making the statement today, although I share hon. Members’ concerns that making changes before a review is putting the cart before the horse. I must just press her on this. While I welcome the changes that bring immediate security and protection for existing claimants, can she please confirm whether, if an existing claimant or someone on a legacy benefit is reassessed, the new measures or the existing ones will apply? On carers, future applicants will face increased eligibility criteria. Will carers be included in the co-production review carried out by the Minister for Social Security and Disability?

**Liz Kendall:** Absolutely. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disability and I met carers’ organisations and many other disability organisations the day after we published the Green Paper. I want to be crystal clear: people who are currently on PIP and are on PIP by the time these changes come in—November 2026—will remain on that benefit under those old rules.

**Jim Allister** (North Antrim) (TUV): In the first lines of her statement, the Secretary of State affirmed that this Government believe in equality. Where is the equality in evaluating one person’s eligibility for the daily living component of PIP on the practical consequences of their disability, and evaluating another on the date of their application?

**Liz Kendall:** This is a really common issue in the benefit system. If we could never change it, we could not undertake reforms to make it sustainable for the future. Existing claimants will remain on the current rules, even if and when they are reassessed. Changes will come in for new claimants from November 2026, but our review will look, as I have said many times, at the different activities and descriptors, and the points that they will get, because we need to make sure that this vital benefit is sustainable for the future.

**Ruth Jones** (Newport West and Islwyn) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for coming this afternoon. I welcome her announcement that the Timms review of the PIP process will be undertaken in partnership with people with disabilities; that is critical, because in more than 70% of appeals, PIP outcomes are overturned in favour of the claimant. We need to get the assessment right first time and every time for all applicants. Does she agree?

**Liz Kendall:** Yes.

**Josh Babarinde** (Eastbourne) (LD): I decided to go into politics because I believed that luck played too great a role in shaping people's course and their quality of life, but unfortunately the system that has been announced today leaves the fate of many disabled people down to luck—to whether they applied before November 2026, or after. I hope that the Secretary of State will reverse her decision and drop the Bill tomorrow, but in case she will not, may I ask her to commit to engaging with Kathy, a disabled person in my constituency who runs a Facebook group of 44,000 people advising on PIP and disability-related matters, to ensure that their voices are at the centre of the plans?

**Liz Kendall:** I will absolutely commit to ensuring that those views and voices are heard, and I am sure that, as a strong champion for his constituency, the hon. Gentleman will do so as well. However, I do not believe that this is about luck; I believe that certain parts of the country, and different types of people, have been repeatedly neglected and denied opportunities and support. There is nothing about luck here. This is about people and places that have been written off and denied opportunities for too long. Governments, if they are determined, can make a difference, and that is what we intend to do.

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): I have conducted a survey of my constituents on the subject of welfare reform, and I submitted the findings to the consultation. I have also met disability groups across Swansea and disabled constituents to hear their concerns. The problems that I have found to be the most prevalent in Gower are the incompetence of Capita and the inconsistencies of Department for Work and Pensions decision makers. That is why I genuinely welcome the announcement of the Timms review, but what reassurances can the Secretary of State give that the review will address this matter and give people confidence in the decision-making process?

**Liz Kendall:** My hon. Friend should, 100%, send me the details of those findings and concerns. One of the reasons we are not only bringing back face-to-face assessments but recording them as standard is our wish to get to the bottom of this and make sure that we put it right.

**Jim Dickson** (Dartford) (Lab): Over the weekend, I had the privilege of engaging in a number of in-depth conversations with people and families living with disabilities, and I thank Dartford's Kindness Community for arranging that event. One comment that I heard again and again from the people I talked to was about how poor the health service had been at helping disabled people to manage their conditions over many years. How can the DWP and the Department of Health and Social Care work together to ensure that disabled people are properly supported and helped into work?

**Liz Kendall:** My hon. Friend has made an important point. There is far more that the health service can do to help people with long-term sickness and disability to manage their conditions better, because they cannot do it on their own; they need the right help and support. Our joint work and health unit is working on precisely those issues, and I am indeed working closely with my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary, because getting people back to health and back to work is so important. We know that good work is critical to good health, and good health is critical to people getting into work. Those are two sides of the same coin. We must end these false divides and get this sorted out, so that we can help people to fulfil their ambitions and work.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. It is vital for us to have a social security system that protects the most vulnerable, the ill and the disabled, so will she clarify one provision in the Bill? Will both the standard element and the health element of universal credit rise in line with inflation? If that does not happen, disabled people will be pushed further into poverty and hardship.

**Liz Kendall:** I want to make it very clear that the combined rate of the standard allowance and the health top-up will indeed rise in line with inflation, so that existing claimants are protected in real terms, and the incomes of those with severe lifelong conditions and those at the end of their life are also protected in real terms through the combined universal credit standard allowance top-up.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): The Bill still leaves over £3.5 billion of cuts falling on disabled people and unpaid carers, with hundreds of thousands of new claimants set to lose thousands of pounds each year. Protections for existing claimants are welcome, but a two-tier system will generate hardship for many and create societal divisions. We are being asked to vote without vital evidence—without the Office for Budget Responsibility impact assessment, or the Timms and Mayfield reviews. Serious questions remain unanswered, and we are without clarity on outcomes and implementation. Will the Secretary of State continue to listen, withdraw this Bill, and co-design welfare reform with disabled people's groups?

**Liz Kendall:** I say to my hon. Friend, for whom I have great respect, that none of this takes into account the biggest ever investment in employment support for sick and disabled people. People have often said, "Wait for the OBR's assessment," but we have published very clear evidence that good employment programmes can help disabled people into work—programmes such as



Work Choice, a Labour programme ended by the Tories, which saw 40% more disabled people in work for eight years. That is based not just on economic theory, but on practical reality. That is the difference that this Labour Government want to make.

**Nadia Whittome:** Disabled people's organisations have been clear that even with these concessions, they oppose this Bill. The Government talk of co-production of the PIP review, but it is not co-production if the starting point is delivering cuts, and if the Government are asking disabled people where they would prefer those cuts to be, rather than how we can create a system that truly supports disabled people. Does the Secretary of State not accept that, after months of the Government ignoring disabled people, the only way that meaningful co-production can take place is if the Bill is pulled and they go back to the drawing board?

**Liz Kendall:** I gently say to my hon. Friend that we will protect existing claimants. That is the very purpose of the announcements we have made today. No existing PIP claimants, or people receiving universal credit and the health top-up, will be put into poverty as a result of this Bill—far from it. We are changing the system so that many more sick and disabled people who want to work can actually get work. That is about building a better life in future. This Labour Government believe that if someone can work and wants to work, they should have the chance and choice to do so. Some 200,000 sick and disabled people say that they would work right now with the right help and support. We are not cutting the support for that; we are actually increasing it, because we believe that work is the key to a better life.

**Kirsteen Sullivan** (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement, and for the recent move to protect existing claimants. I appreciate that the adult disability payment is devolved to the Scottish Government. However, my constituents are really concerned about the potential for different qualifying criteria across the nations, which may result in limited access to passported benefits from November 2026. What assurances can the Secretary of State give my constituents that they will not lose the benefits to which they currently have access, and the vital support on which their households rely?

Following the Secretary of State's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), it is really unclear whether the House is being asked to agree to a four-point assessment without knowing the outcome of the Timms review with regard to descriptors—or could that review result in more fundamental reforms that would rip up the current PIP system?

**Liz Kendall:** On my hon. Friend's first point, she will know that PIP is devolved to Scotland. I believe that the Scottish Government are reviewing the ADP at the minute, including the eligibility criteria. That will be a matter for them, but I want to be clear to the House that the new four-point minimum requirement will come into force in November 2026 for new claims, and existing claimants will be protected. Of course, the Timms review will look at the different descriptors and the points for them in future, but the four-point minimum and the daily living component for new claimants will remain.

**Matthew Patrick** (Wirral West) (Lab): The Conservative party presided over multiple reforms of welfare, and the results were a disaster. Perhaps cruellest of all was the fact that adults who had an irreversible health condition, and who could never work, were forced to go through reassessment after reassessment, and to jump through hoops. Can my right hon. Friend please confirm that, with these Labour reforms, that cruel legacy will be ended once and for all?

**Liz Kendall:** Yes, I can. I believe that the unnecessary and unacceptable stress that that created was not right, and we will fix that with the reforms in the Bill, because people need to live in dignity and security.

**Mark Ferguson** (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): The Labour party is defined by work and by the dignity of work, and so is my community in Gateshead and Whickham. People have the belief that they should be able to work to provide for themselves, their family and their community, but too many in my community have been let down by successive Governments of all parties who have not created the jobs we need and by a failed system. Not one person who has spoken today—not one—has defended the existing indefensible system. What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that communities like mine, where work or a lack of work is the problem, receive the support we need?

**Liz Kendall:** My hon. Friend speaks powerfully about Labour's historic mission to help people who can work to do so, and about the fact that his constituents have been denied that support for so long. We want to transform that. With an ageing society in which more of us will be living with a disability or with one, two or more long-term chronic conditions and in which we will be caring for people, we believe that we have to change the welfare state. We have to provide more support to help people work, and the world of work needs to change. That is why not only have we commissioned the Mayfield review, but we are putting in the biggest ever employment support for sick and disabled people, with the additional £300 million of support I have announced today.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** Order. I encourage Members to keep their questions short, or they will not all get in.

**Harpreet Uppal** (Huddersfield) (Lab): Having met disabled constituents over the last few months, I have no doubt that the initial proposals caused anxiety, so I do welcome the changes for existing claimants and the Timms review. However, can I urge the Secretary of State to look at the sequencing to make sure that the review happens before we assess new claimants? I have one final point about the assessors themselves. There is no doubt but that the involvement of private companies such as Capita and Maximus has caused problems, as has having assessors who do not understand health conditions. Can we make sure that we look at that properly?

**Liz Kendall:** Yes, we are absolutely committed to looking at that. In fact, we announced in the Green Paper that we are overhauling our entire safeguarding process, including the training of assessors, because we

[*Liz Kendall*]

want to get this right. We will not only bring back face-to-face assessments, but record them as standard, which I believe together will make a real difference to the process and ensure we get the decisions right first time.

**Ian Byrne** (Liverpool West Derby) (Lab): These so-called concessions go nowhere near far enough, and tomorrow I will be voting against these cruel cuts, but I want to ask this. Can the Secretary of State name a single disabled person-led organisation that supports this legislation?

**Liz Kendall:** I understand why disability organisations are making the points they are. That is their job; our job is different. Our job is to take the right decisions—ones that we believe are fair—to make sure we have a system that works for the people who need support, but that is also sustainable for the future. That is not easy—that is a statement of the obvious—but I believe we have a fair package. It is a package that protects existing claimants because they have come to rely on that support, as is often the case in the social security system. It begins to tackle the perverse incentive that encourages people to define themselves as incapable of work just to be able to afford to live, and it puts in place employment support to help the hundreds of thousands of disabled people and people with long-term conditions who want to work. That is the right way forward, and I hope that my hon. Friend and his constituents will get involved in the Timms review to ensure future changes make this vital benefit fit for the future.

**Rachel Taylor** (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): Last week, I spoke to one of my constituents, Mike, a disabled person who speaks on behalf of many disabled constituents across Warwickshire. He is really pleased that he will have the right to try work, and he is also really pleased that disabled people will be treated with dignity and will be part of the co-production of the new proposals. However, he is still fearful that these changes may mean losses and difficult situations for disabled people like him. Can the Secretary of State reassure Mike that one of her Ministers will meet him to discuss these changes? In particular, how will we look at fluctuating conditions such as ME and MS, which my partner suffers from, so that such people do not lose out and so that we make the changes positive for every disabled person up and down the country?

**Liz Kendall:** We want to work with MPs, disabled people, their organisations and other experts, as part of co-producing the Timms review. The point about fluctuating health conditions is really important and something we have to crack for the future, because so many people have those conditions. They may be able to work one day and not another, or to work three days at home but not five days. We must make it fit for the future, because the reality is that we are living longer, more of us have disabilities and more of us have two, three or more long-term conditions. The welfare state in its broadest sense—the NHS, as well as the benefits system—and the world of work have to wake up to that. As we live longer, we will have to work for longer, but we have to make that practical and decent.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): This is a relatively small Bill, but one core part of it has now been delegated to the PIP review and that will not report until November 2026. Can my right hon. Friend say just how many disabled groups have indicated they want to participate in the PIP review? She has set out a number of red lines today that I doubt they would agree with. If they were to propose that we do not have a two-tier system, what would be the Government's response?

**Liz Kendall:** The Minister for Social Security and Disability and I have met many disabled organisations. In fact, he has spoken to many already about the review. We will continue to discuss with them precisely how the system of co-production will work, but I want to assure my hon. Friend that it is serious. We want to make sure people's views and voices are heard, and I encourage him, as a Member of Parliament, to get involved in the process too.

**Josh Fenton-Glynn** (Calder Valley) (Lab): As a signatory to the reasoned amendment, I welcome the listening that has gone on, because a lot of people with disabilities will sleep more soundly in their beds knowing that their benefits are protected. However, on a specific point, if someone currently receives PIP but their condition is getting worse and they ask for a reassessment of the level of their PIP, will they be assessed under the current system or under the new one?

**Liz Kendall:** They are an existing claimant and they will be assessed—let me be really clear about this—under the existing rules.

**Dr Lauren Sullivan** (Gravesham) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. PIP is, of course, a passport to freedom for many other things such as the carer's allowance, and many local authorities use PIP for blue badges and bus passes. Does the Secretary of State have a plan to mitigate the impact of the potential changes to PIP eligibility on access to blue badges and bus passes for disabled people?

**Liz Kendall:** As I said in my statement, existing PIP claimants will continue to have that benefit. It will not be affected even if they have a reassessment, and neither will all the passported benefits. Carer's allowance is the best known, but all passported benefits will be included in that protection.

**Graeme Downie** (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): This morning I met Parkinson's UK, which is very concerned about the changes to both PIP and universal credit, and in particular that they will not take account of those with variable conditions. Will the Secretary of State make a commitment that Parkinson's UK will be involved in the co-design of the changes to PIP, universal credit and other welfare benefits, and that any welfare change will fully consider those with Parkinson's and other variable conditions?

**Liz Kendall:** I am absolutely sure that Parkinson's UK will be involved closely in the PIP review.

**Alice Macdonald** (Norwich North) (Lab/Co-op): Two weeks ago, I held an in-person consultation on the welfare reforms. Many of my constituents were deeply



concerned about the proposals, so I welcome the changes the Secretary of State has announced for existing claimants. I want to ask about employment support. I welcome the additional support being brought forward. When will we get more detail on how that will be allocated to schemes across the country, and will the people who need it most be involved in the co-production of those schemes, so that they work effectively?

**Liz Kendall:** Yes, we already have what we are calling a collaboration committee on the pathways-to-work funding to ensure that it really meets the needs of sick and disabled people. As I have said in the House before, it really is about a pathway to work—for some people, just getting out of the house, or getting out of bed, is a huge achievement; for others, it might be about going along to a group, beginning to speak to other people and getting their confidence back. It really is a pathway to success. We will be setting out precise allocations of the pathways-to-work funding in due course, but I want to reassure Members that it will be available in every single part of the country.

**Tom Hayes** (Bournemouth East) (Lab): I grew up caring for two disabled parents. As a kid, I saw at first hand the harms that happen when the British state routinely lets down disabled people. It is why disabled civil rights activists have a phrase, “Nothing about us without us,” and it is why I am looking for genuine and meaningful co-production.

On Friday, I brought together seven Bournemouth support organisations and people with lived experience, and they wanted me to raise two issues. The first is continuing concern about the eligibility criteria. The second is whether the mental health support that the Government are rolling out will be in place in sufficient quantity to support potential new claimants by November 2026.

**Liz Kendall:** My hon. Friend raises an important point about mental health support. This Government are determined to ensure that there is parity of esteem between physical and mental health. We have already recruited 6,700 of the 8,500 additional mental health workers we promised in our manifesto, and we are putting in place new emergency mental health services and bringing in new Young Futures hubs, which will include mental health support. I know that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary is determined to ensure that that support is available in every part of the country. I am sure we will hear more in the coming weeks and months.

**Chris McDonald** (Stockton North) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for acknowledging at the Dispatch Box the anxiety of disabled people. I am also grateful for the time of the Disability Minister in listening to my concerns about the PIP assessment process—concerns that I now see reflected in the Timms review. I am sure the Secretary of State will be disappointed to hear that at a recent consultation event in the north-east, some of my constituents found that the venue was not fully disability compliant. Will she assure me that the Government will ensure full accessibility for participation in the Timms review?

**Liz Kendall:** That is unacceptable, and I will sort it.

**Neil Duncan-Jordan** (Poole) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. I wonder if she will reflect on whether the Bill before us tomorrow is the best way of making welfare policy. Would it not be better to withdraw the Bill and wait for the Timms review to complete its important work?

**Liz Kendall:** Welfare touches on the lives of millions of people in this country every single day. Making changes to it is never easy—perhaps particularly for a Labour Government, because tackling poverty and inequality is in our DNA. However, I believe that we must begin to make these changes to ensure that those who can work get the support they need, to protect those who cannot and to begin to slow the rate of increase in the number of extra people going on to sickness and disability benefits. I believe that the route to equality and social justice can never come from extra benefit spending alone; it has to come from putting in place good jobs, a decent health service, skills and transport infrastructure—the good world of work that we know is key to bringing about a better life.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): It is clear that the central issues for many on the Government Benches remain. Rushing through legislation without full and meaningful consultation with disability groups is the wrong way round—we do not build policy first and ask questions later. The Government’s arbitrary deadline is not a necessity, but a political choice. They are forcing through decisions that risk pushing hundreds of thousands more disabled people into poverty. I therefore say to the Secretary of State with absolute sincerity on behalf of many Members: do the fair thing—and, more importantly, the right thing—and withdraw this Bill and listen to disabled people.

**Liz Kendall:** I believe that we are doing the fair thing and the right thing. We are beginning to make reforms to put our welfare bill on a sustainable footing for generations to come. We are beginning to put in place the employment support that sick and disabled people have been denied for too long. We are making sure that those with severe and lifelong conditions are never again reassessed, and that there is a new right to try. I believe that this is a fair and balanced package. Above all, I believe that it is the right one.

**Tom Rutland** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend’s statement and the Government’s work to ensure that help is there for those who need it now and in future. Many in this House will be worried that progress on closing the disability employment gap stalled under the Conservative party, at 28 percentage points. Will the Secretary of State confirm that that is one of the metrics that the Government are focusing on in the strategy, and that the gap must and will close under this Government?

**Liz Kendall:** We are absolutely determined to achieve that. I do not believe that it is acceptable that in this country the disability employment gap is 28 percentage points. That is one of the widest in all Europe: in France, Germany and Switzerland, I think it is at about 22 to 23 percentage points. We have to tackle that, because if we believe that the rights of disabled people who can work are equal to those of anybody else, we have to start making a difference.

[Liz Kendall]

I know that this is an issue of deep concern for many Members across the House, but I believe that the package we are putting forward today is a fair one and is the right one. I will continue to listen to Members of this House, but we cannot wait to reform the welfare system. People need us to make changes, and our country demands it.

**Jenny Riddell-Carpenter** (Suffolk Coastal) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for listening to the concerns of Back Benchers and for making some real and meaningful improvements based on the concerns that we have been raising privately. I also thank her for confirming explicitly, a moment ago, that my constituents who are reassessed post November 2026 will be reassessed under the current system. May I gently encourage the Secretary of State to go further and to overhaul and radically rethink the role of jobcentres? Far too often, they hold people back rather than breaking down the barriers to people's progress into work.

**Liz Kendall:** Our Minister for Employment is indeed overhauling our jobcentres so that they provide personalised, tailored support for people to get into work, not some sort of endless tick-box process, and so that they are much more linked to the wider system in local areas: to the local NHS, to skills providers and, above all, to employers. I do not think it acceptable that only one employer in six has ever used a jobcentre to recruit. That is why we are overhauling our strategy with single account managers for employers, to fully involve and engage them, because we need their involvement if we are to help more people to get work and get on in work.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** Order. For the final question, I call Sarah Coombes.

**Sarah Coombes** (West Bromwich) (Lab): My borough, Sandwell, has one of the highest rates in the entire country of young people not in education, employment or training. This generation of young people have been let down by years and years of system failure by the Conservative party. As we go through this necessary piece of reform, we must do it carefully. Will the Secretary of State commit to working with the Department for Education and the Department for Business and Trade? For young people to get the jobs that will transform their life chances, they will need the right qualifications as well as needing the jobs to be available.

**Liz Kendall:** I absolutely agree. Let us be honest: today's economy is brutal for people without skills. We are already setting out our plans to reform the system of apprenticeships. We want to see new foundation apprenticeships. We are bringing in new six-week SWAPs—sector-based work academy programmes—that will give people guaranteed work experience and a guaranteed interview, which I think will make a real difference to young people. There is much more to do, but our commitment to a youth guarantee so that every young person is earning or learning is the key to a better future for young people and for our country as a whole.

## Glastonbury Festival: BBC Coverage

5.19 pm

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Lisa Nandy):** With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the events at Glastonbury over the weekend. Members of Parliament will have seen, as I have, the appalling and unacceptable scenes at Glastonbury on Saturday, where chants of “death to the IDF” and “river to the sea” among others were broadcast to the nation.

I have been in touch with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary as to whether there has been any criminal offence committed. The House will know that decisions relating to specific cases are an operational matter for the police. Avon and Somerset police has confirmed that video evidence is being assessed by officers to determine whether any offences may have been committed. It just announced in the last few minutes that that is now taking the form of a criminal investigation. As I hope hon. Members will appreciate, therefore, it would not be appropriate for the Government to comment on an ongoing investigation at this stage, but let me be clear that the Government will not tolerate antisemitism, which has no place in our society. It is a poison and a cancer that must be rooted out, and we will be relentless in our work to do so.

The Government work closely with the police and community partners to ensure the safety and security of Jewish communities. We will continue to do so following the enormous impact that these events have had on them over the weekend.

Let me turn to the role of the BBC. On Saturday afternoon, just after the broadcast, I called the director general to ask for an explanation and what immediate steps the BBC leadership intended to take. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, it is essential that the BBC explains how these scenes came to be broadcast.

The BBC has rightly apologised and took the immediate decision not to put this content on iPlayer. I welcome that. However, key outstanding questions remain, including: why the performance was broadcast live given concerns regarding other acts in the weeks preceding the festival; why the feed was not immediately cut when the chants of “death to the IDF” began; and what due diligence was done prior to the decision to broadcast this particular act to the nation. I expect answers to those questions without delay. I have made that view clear to the BBC leadership, and I will update the House as soon as I can.

Over the weekend and this morning, I have also had conversations with members of the Jewish community, including those who were present at Glastonbury. They have raised a number of concerns about imagery and slogans that were on display at the festival over the weekend, which I am told led them to establish their own safe space at the festival. As a Government, we take that incredibly seriously. We are urgently looking into the specifics of those alarming reports and reaching out to the festival organisers.

Finally, I want to be clear about the Government's role. As a Government, we strongly support freedom of expression, and as Culture Secretary I will robustly defend the independence of our broadcasters and the right to artistic expression, but we do not accept that incitement to violence, hate speech or antisemitism

is art. There is a clear difference between speaking out for Palestine, which is the right of everybody in this House and everybody in our country, and antisemitism, which is not and never will be. When the rights and safety of people and communities are at risk and when our national broadcaster fails to uphold its own standards, we will intervene. In the coming days, I will be having further conversations with the BBC and festival organisers to ensure that lessons are learned and action is taken.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the shadow Secretary of State.

5.23 pm

**Stuart Andrew (Daventry) (Con):** I thank the Secretary of State for her statement, for advance sight of it and for her tone. I have always been a strong advocate for the BBC, which is a cornerstone of British public life with a proud history of cultural contribution. The events of the weekend, however, have made that incredibly difficult. During coverage of the festival, as we have heard, the artist whose real name is Pascal Robinson-Foster led the crowd in a chant of “death to the IDF”, a moment that, extraordinarily, was transmitted by the BBC.

Let me be clear: a national broadcaster funded by licence payers must adhere to the highest standards of impartiality, responsibility, and commitment to social cohesion. I hope we can all agree that in this instance it has failed profoundly. Free speech and political activism are the sign of a healthy democracy—they are essential to it—but when someone crosses the line to incitement to violence, there must be a consequence.

Broadcasting is not a passive act. Every second of broadcast transmitted is an active choice. Airing Robinson-Foster’s hateful rhetoric was not just a lapse in editorial judgment; it was a disgraceful affront to the Jewish community and a violation of the BBC’s own public charter to entertain without undermining the fundamental values of our society. As the Secretary of State said, let us be clear that hateful rhetoric should never be cloaked as artistic expression.

This incident also raises fundamental questions about the BBC’s institutional culture. This is a broadcaster that has time and again given airtime to representatives and supporters of Hamas, while refusing to clearly identify the group as what it is: a terrorist organisation. The BBC has repeatedly failed to call out antisemitic rhetoric when it emerges under the guise of political commentary, and has faced serious allegations of minimising attacks on Jewish communities.

The BBC’s decision to also broadcast material from Kneecap, a group whose members have openly called for Members of Parliament to be killed, is as indefensible as it is shocking. We have already seen the devastating consequences of political violence in this country, with the loss and tragic murder of Jo Cox and Sir David Amess. For the BBC to amplify voices advocating similar violence is grossly irresponsible. Even more troubling is that a leading member of the group is currently facing a terrorism charge. That fact alone should have prompted an immediate editorial intervention. Instead, the BBC gave the group a platform on a publicly funded service.

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has spoken to the director general, and I am grateful to her for coming to the House to report on that exchange; however, I would like to press her further to ensure that

the gravity of this matter is fully recognised. Is she satisfied with the BBC’s explanation that it originally decided that streaming the performance was in line with its editorial guidelines, and has now decided that

“we will look at our guidance around live events so we can be sure teams are clear on when it is acceptable to keep output on air.”

Does she think that the BBC’s editorial guidelines were not clear enough, or that the BBC misinterpreted them in the first place, and does she think that that sort of weak response will be of cold comfort to the Jewish community?

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has spoken to the Home Secretary. I wonder whether she could also assess whether the BBC’s actions constituted a breach of section 22 of the Public Order Act 1986. Does she believe that the BBC’s current editorial oversight mechanisms are adequate, specifically across the commercial broadcasting arms like BBC Studios, and does she think that it is still right that the BBC gets to mark its own homework in the first instance before Ofcom gets involved, or is an independent inquiry what is needed? In the light of the repeated failings, will the Government commit to a full review of the BBC’s impartiality and governance standards as part of the royal charter renewal, and can she provide an update to the House on why the charter renewal framework and Green Paper have not yet been published?

I thank the Secretary of State for her work so far. She will have the support of the Opposition, and I welcome her commitment to come back to the House to update us.

**Lisa Nandy:** All those involved in the events of this weekend will hear the very strong feelings on both sides of the House, so I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that. I share his view about the importance of the BBC. Those of us who believe in the importance of our national broadcaster are probably more angry than anybody about what has happened over the last few days. It is precisely because we understand the importance of the BBC that we know the BBC has to do better. He asked whether I am satisfied with the explanation that I have had so far. I am not. I have been very clear with the BBC leadership about that, and clear that I expect to get a full explanation immediately, without delay.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the possibility of an independent inquiry. I would say to all Members of this House that I am not sure that we need an inquiry to establish that it should have been foreseeable that there would be problems with broadcasts this weekend, that the decision to broadcast live without any delay should have been reviewed, and that the live feed should have been pulled immediately when the chants of “death, death to the IDF” began. What I want to see from the BBC—I know the right hon. Gentleman shares this—is rapid action to ensure that this cannot happen again. I promise to update the House on these developments but I should also say that I am still expecting a response from the BBC about an earlier decision to broadcast a documentary about Gaza, which it was then discovered fell short of the BBC’s own editorial standards. I expect a response swiftly, and I expect action as well.

Finally, can I thank the right hon. Gentleman for mentioning the Jewish community? Having spoken to friends and colleagues across the Jewish community over the weekend, I cannot describe how much this has impacted on them, particularly those members of the Jewish



[Lisa Nandy]

community who were at Glastonbury. I was extremely distressed to hear that there were organisations that are about to be proscribed by the Government whose logo was emblazoned very visibly on T-shirts and banners. I was concerned to hear reports that there were images associated with Hamas and others, as well as Nazi imagery.

Most people who go to Glastonbury, I think, go for exactly the reasons that I have been in the past, and I suspect the right hon. Gentleman has as well. It is because music festivals are an incredible way to bring people together, to show support and solidarity, to bind a nation and to showcase great British talent. It is our job, collectively, to ensure that those festivals become again, and remain, a place where everybody in our country is welcome.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): As well as the despicable chants, the monologue that preceded them by the artist in question clearly drew on the influence of Jewish power in music, an age-old antisemitic trope. Could the Secretary of State say a bit more about what conversations she will have with the BBC, not just on what it broadcasts but on what was allowed to happen at Glastonbury? Does she also agree that those age-old antisemitic tropes, whether they are in Parliament, on stage or in public life, should be a red line for all of us?

**Lisa Nandy:** Yes. My hon. Friend has a long history of standing up to antisemitism, including when it stained and sullied our own party, and I am grateful to him for his leadership on this. Those questions about what happens at Glastonbury are not for the BBC. There are serious questions for the BBC about what it broadcast and the decisions that it took, but there are also wider questions about the sorts of things that we want to see in our country.

As the Secretary of State, I have been very clear that it is not for the Government to try to determine what can be seen and what can be heard, but I also have a view about this as an individual: I do not want to see that sort of thing, I do not want to hear it, and I take great exception to it. The Prime Minister was very clear on that point as well. It causes harm to people in the real world, and I have felt that very strongly this weekend. That is why this Government are determined that, wherever we see that form of antisemitism—including the appalling comments that my hon. Friend referenced that were targeted towards an individual in the music industry simply because they were Jewish—we will always stand up to it and not hesitate to take action.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Max Wilkinson** (Cheltenham) (LD): We welcome the Secretary of State's statement. Sadly, rather than devoting our attention today to how this House can push for a just and sustainable resolution to the horrors of the conflict in the middle east, we are talking about something else. On this occasion—there have been past occasions, too—it is the deeply inappropriate language used by a shock jock, attention-seeking musician and a public service broadcaster's apparent failure to fulfil its responsibility to uphold its own editorial standards. Bob Vylan's chants at Glastonbury this weekend were absolutely appalling. We can never accept hate-filled

chants calling for death to anyone in our society, at a music festival or anywhere else, whatever the subject. It is right that there has been widespread condemnation, including from the organisers of Glastonbury festival, and I associate myself and my party with those words.

Of course the UK must push much harder for a ceasefire; of course we must put pressure on Netanyahu's Government to roll back their military campaign and build a sustainable two-state solution; and of course Liberal Democrats believe that cultural events must be a place for debate. But there can simply be no place for hate speech, antisemitism and incitement to violence, at Glastonbury or anywhere else. It seems that an editorial failing took place in the BBC's coverage. The decision to proceed with broadcasting this act is particularly hard to understand given the BBC's correct decision to take a more cautious, but ultimately fruitless, approach to the broadcasting of Kneecap. A cursory look through the social media of Bob Vylan raises the question, "How exactly was this not foreseen?" Of course, we also know that Kneecap has in the past called for the death of Members of this House.

The failure to use delayed coverage effectively and to remove the coverage in a timely manner is baffling. Will the Secretary of State tell us whether, when she asked the BBC about this issue, the subject of charter renewal was raised? Can she give us concrete reassurance that change will happen and we will never have to put up with this dreadful antisemitism appearing on our screens again?

**Lisa Nandy:** I thank the hon. Member for his comments and the tone in which he made them. It is the responsibility of all of us always to stand up to antisemitism. It is sadly a battle that is never won. The lesson of history is that it falls to every generation to fight antisemitism and fight it again, and certainly I can promise that this Government will always do that.

Let me turn to the specific question about the BBC and charter renewal—with apologies to the right hon. Member for Daventry (Stuart Andrew) for not answering his question on this earlier. I have not discussed charter renewal in the context of Kneecap and the other acts broadcast from Glastonbury this weekend. We have, of course, discussed charter renewal, and it is absolutely right to say that editorial standards must be part of that discussion. When we release the terms of reference, which we are due to do shortly, everyone in this House will see a clear commitment to that as part of the ongoing conversation we will have about charter renewal.

Finally, I welcome the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Max Wilkinson) saying that chants of death must not be made to anyone. Chants of death—to anyone—are not welcome in our society. There was something particularly pernicious about chanting, "Death, death to the IDF". Many colleagues will know that in Israel, there is a conscription model. Every young person is required to serve in the IDF, which means that chanting "death to the IDF" is equivalent to calling for the death of every single Israeli Jew. That is one of the many reasons why we take this so seriously and why it cannot be argued that this did not cross a very dangerous line.

**Johanna Baxter** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement. I share her concern that although freedom of expression must be protected, this incident raises serious concerns

about the editorial standards and judgments exercised. As a long-standing supporter of the BBC, I am deeply disappointed in it. What conversations the Secretary of State having with the editorial team to ensure that a serious incident like this can never happen again?

**Lisa Nandy:** As well as speaking to the director general of the BBC on Saturday, a number of officials have been in touch with the BBC's senior leadership team. We have put to them a series of specific questions that we expect immediate answers on, and we will continue to press hard to ensure that they are forthcoming. I will of course update the House at the earliest opportunity, and I expect to speak to the chairman of the BBC in the coming days.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the Chair of the Select Committee.

**Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con):** I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I thank the Secretary of State for that strong and welcome statement. The BBC editorial guidelines on livestreaming are actually quite clear. They say,

"The level of monitoring should be appropriate for the likely content. A producer should normally be in a position to cut the feed from a live stream if it becomes necessary."

What explanation has the BBC given for why the livestream was not cut? It cannot be for lack of staff on the ground; the BBC took a reported 400 people to Glastonbury at the weekend—what were they all doing? For such a vast operation with multi simultaneous live shows going out across various different parts of the site, has the Secretary of State had the opportunity to ask the BBC who has the final say on which bands are deemed suitable for live broadcast and why on earth it chose this one, and who makes the final decision when it becomes necessary to cut a livestream?

**Lisa Nandy:** The hon. Lady asks a series of typically important and relevant questions, some of which I have put to the BBC directly, but I will make sure that I ask it all those questions, with a response expected as soon as possible. She is right to raise the number of staff who were present at Glastonbury festival or working on the broadcast and to ask what they were doing, but this also raises very serious questions at the highest levels of the BBC about operational oversight and the way in which editorial standards are understood and reflected in the decisions of individual staff. I have already had that conversation with the BBC board in relation to a Gaza documentary, but I expect to have it again in the coming weeks.

**Tom Rutland (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Lab):** I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the BBC and a former employee of the Prospect and Bectu unions, which represent BBC staff. I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the BBC's own statement today, which makes it clear that the performer's antisemitic sentiments were utterly unacceptable and have no place on our airwaves, and that the BBC will examine its guidance on live events to ensure that teams are clear on when it is acceptable to keep output on air. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is possible to express concern about the appalling suffering in Gaza without using language that risks fuelling hatred and division or inciting violence?

**Lisa Nandy:** My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. As somebody who has been associated with the Palestinian cause for nearly two decades and has consistently spoken out about the Israeli Government's treatment of people not just in Gaza but in the west bank, I know that it is entirely possible to stand up for the Palestinians and never, ever to stray into antisemitism. Many Members of this House have managed to do precisely that over many years. Nobody is objecting to the comments that said, "free Palestine". What everybody is objecting to is the comments that were clearly antisemitic, incited hatred and caused real-world harm to people in the Jewish community in our country. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend and I support him on that.

For those who say that this is a freedom of speech issue, I say that it is nothing of the kind. This is about standing up against hatred, discrimination and racism in all its forms, but particularly antisemitism, of which we have seen an enormous rise in our country in recent years. Every single one of us needs to be vigilant to make sure that it is never allowed to spread.

**Jim Allister (North Antrim) (TUV):** What we saw was an appalling pro-terrorist broadcast on our national broadcaster. Those who chant "kill the IDF" are endorsing those who kill them—and those who kill them are Hamas. It was an endorsement of the terrorism of Hamas, yet the BBC deliberately chose not to cut the broadcast. Therefore, perhaps it is time for the Government to consider cutting the licence fee.

**Lisa Nandy:** This Government's view of Hamas is clear: they are a terrorist organisation. They are banned in the UK and there is a good reason for that. We will continue to be outspoken about that and robust in relation to them. I was very concerned to hear that there may have been imagery, symbols and graffiti in support of Hamas at the festival this weekend. We will not hesitate to ensure that we deal with and get to the bottom of that in order to stand with our Jewish communities and with everybody in this country who stands against Hamas and is at risk from them.

On the licence fee, the hon. and learned Gentleman will know that this Government support the BBC. We believe that it is an important institution. That is why we are so disappointed that this has happened and have been so exasperated with the lack of account from the leadership not just about this, but about a previous Gaza documentary and a number of other issues. The BBC is one of the most important institutions in our country and that is why it is held to the highest of standards. It is essential that we hold it to the highest of standards as we seek to start the charter renewal process, which should not just safeguard the future of the BBC for the next 10 years but put it on a solid footing for decades to come. These are questions that we, as a Government—collectively with the BBC and all Members of this House—are determined to grip.

**Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab):** I thank the Secretary of State for her excellent statement. The murder of hundreds of Jews at the Nova music festival in October 2023 sparked this war, and the irony of broadcast antisemitism at Glastonbury here in the UK is not lost on any of us. How are Jews in this country, such as myself, to be reassured about editorial processes at the BBC, and who on earth will be held accountable for this error?

**Lisa Nandy:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point about accountability. That is not lost on me as the Secretary of State, and it is something that I have impressed upon the BBC's leadership. When there is one editorial failure, it is something that must be gripped; where there are several, it becomes a problem of leadership. I very much take his point about that. He raised a point about the strength of feeling that people have about this issue, given that this was a music festival, and it was at a music festival on 7 October that so many young people lost their lives, with others kidnapped, never to return to their families, and some are still being held hostage. At that moment, it would have been the perfect place to express support, love and solidarity with those who are still suffering. I know there were those at the festival who were doing precisely that, but they were hindered by some of the appalling scenes that we have seen. That is why we are determined to grip this and ensure that music festivals are a safe and inclusive space for everybody. The Government are reaching out to other music festivals, and to Glastonbury, to see what more can be done to express solidarity with those who are still suffering as a consequence of the appalling events of 7 October, and to see what we can do to support those efforts.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement—I agree with practically everything she has said. When I heard these reports, I thought of the Mayor of Wilton, Councillor Alexandra Boyd, who is Jewish, and about what it would have felt like for her to have watched that with her family. We in this place all understand the fine editorial judgments that BBC staff have to make, but this is of a completely different order. When people are losing faith in the great institutions of this country, I urge the Secretary of State in her follow-up conversations to ensure that the BBC identifies accountability to individuals. My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) set out clearly the guidance that exists. Somebody did not follow that guidance, and I think the country expects people to be held individually to account for why they failed to do their job properly.

**Lisa Nandy:** People do expect people to be held to account for the way they do their job, be that on the frontline or at senior levels. That is a point I have made to the BBC, and it will have heard what the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket (Peter Prinsley) said about accountability. It is a point that I will continue to press.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The Secretary of State has spoken about responsibility at the BBC, and of those who said those dreadful words. What responsibility do those who were organising the festival have both legally and morally to be held responsible and accountable, and to ensure that this does not happen again?

**Lisa Nandy:** I deliberately included some words about the festival itself in my statement, because I agree with the hon. Lady: we all have a responsibility to uphold the highest standards, and to ensure that people are safe, welcome and included at our shared national events. The reports I have had over the weekend, and this morning, are incredibly alarming, and they suggest that that was

not the case this weekend. We are reaching out to festival organisers and investigating those reports, to ensure that this cannot happen again.

**Richard Tice** (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Another week, another month, and once again the BBC has got it horribly wrong, in its Glastonbury broadcast, with regard to Hamas and to antisemitism, and once again there has been another grovelling apology. I ask the Secretary of State: how long must this go on before, regrettably, many in the Jewish community and millions of British people conclude that the BBC is institutionally antisemitic?

**Lisa Nandy:** The hon. Gentleman's views about the BBC are very clear, but those of us who support the BBC and believe it is an incredibly important institution will know that it should and does, in some instances, play an important role for all communities to be heard and to feel valued as part of our public life. That is the standard that we expect the BBC to be held to, and this Government will hold it to that standard. We will not hesitate to take the necessary actions to ensure that it rises to meet those standards.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on her statement. History tells us that normalising, condoning and tolerating the kind of things that we saw at Glastonbury over the weekend never ends well—it ends extremely badly. As a neighbouring MP, I have written twice to Worthy Farm with my concerns about Kneecap, following reports about one of its members advocating the killing of MPs. There was no reply—and none is expected. Instead, the festival scheduled Bob Vylan, who, as we heard, also advocates killing people—this time Jews. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is no good for Glastonbury's very wealthy organisers to be banging on about their festival being a safe space for everyone while it continues to facilitate operations like that?

**Lisa Nandy:** I share the right hon. Gentleman's concern about how this was able to happen, and I am sorry to hear that he has had no response to very serious concerns, which were raised in his capacity as a democratically elected Member of Parliament for people in the area who deserve answers. I am happy to follow that up on his behalf, and with him after the statement. I share his view that festivals, and particularly music festivals, must be safe, inclusive and welcoming spaces, and I fear that we fell way short on this occasion. I have visited Glastonbury before and know that it provides an incredible showcase for a lot of up-and-coming British artists, not just those at the top of their game. However, as the organisers rightly acknowledge, a line was crossed at the weekend, and that must not be allowed to happen again.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and the sentiments contained therein, but would she agree that in the run-up to the festival it was clear to many of us, given the track record of some of the participants, that this, or something like it, was going to happen? The Government were aware that something was going to happen, as was the BBC, yet still it happened. Where does the sanction lie, who is going to implement the sanction, and when are we going to know what it is?



**Lisa Nandy:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiment that much of this was foreseeable; none of us could know precisely who was going to say what, but even a cursory glance at Google would show that this particular artist has a history of provoking extreme statements and behaviour, particularly in relation to events in the middle east. So it would not have been too difficult to foresee that, and there are therefore serious questions to answer about livestreaming, due diligence and other factors. I expect a response from the BBC on those questions and about the action that it will take to ensure that this does not happen again. If those answers are not forthcoming, I have various levers with which I can hold the BBC to account, and I want to be clear with the hon. Gentleman and with the House that I will not hesitate to use them, if I need to do so.

**Jack Rankin (Windsor) (Con):** Had those chants called for the deaths of people of any other nationality or ethnicity, there is no question in my mind that the live feed would have been pulled straightaway. I welcome the Secretary of State's robust statement, but does she agree that this problem is systemic, and that there has been a decades-long, deep-rooted bias against Israel at the corporation, which seems unwilling to deal with it, or incapable of doing so?

**Lisa Nandy:** I feel the strength of feeling, anger and emotion behind what the hon. Gentleman says. I felt that from the Jewish community over the weekend, and from all of us, including myself, who feel very strongly that this should not have been allowed to happen, and it certainly should not be allowed continually and repeatedly to happen. He asks whether there is in-built bias at the BBC, but I think that what has happened is a serious failing of editorial standards, leadership and oversight, which I need to ensure we address.

The hon. Gentleman said that if the chants had been about any other group, the live feed would probably have been pulled straightaway, but I am not sure that we can say that with any confidence. As the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage), made clear, there were hundreds of BBC staff involved in the production, and the BBC was represented at Glastonbury at the most senior levels, yet the feed was not pulled and the standards were not upheld. Regardless of which community it affects, it is my job to ensure that those standards are upheld. I give him my word that I will use every lever at my disposal to ensure that happens.

**Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind):** I wish we lived in a world where there was no chanting of death. Any form of racism is vile, be that Islamophobia, antisemitism or any other kind. The Secretary of State will recall that only last November, Israeli football fans were chanting, "Death to all Arabs" and, perhaps more sickeningly, "There are no schools in Gaza, because there are no children." That kind of speech and chanting must equally be condemned. What is sad is that although we have had a ministerial statement today, we had no ministerial statement when that chanting happened—it is the hypocrisy that is causing an outrage in the British public. Does the Secretary of State not agree that that is what is happening out there in the community?

**Lisa Nandy:** I could not disagree more. I and every Member of the House utterly condemn chants of "Death to all Arabs" as disgusting and disgraceful, as a principle by which we hold ourselves—there is no hesitation from anybody in this House to do that. The reason I have brought a statement to the House today is because our national broadcaster, funded by the licence fee that is paid by the public, has broadcast something that is deeply offensive to a community in this country, and that has made many, many people feel unsafe, and may actually have made them unsafe. That is extremely serious and rightly a question for Government, which is why I did not hesitate to bring the statement to the House today. If the BBC had broadcast the chant that the hon. Gentleman described, he would be hearing the same statement from this Dispatch Box and the same response from other hon. Members.

Let me also say to the hon. Gentleman that I have stood up for the Palestinian cause in this House for the best part of two decades, especially when it was hard and unpopular. That cost me friends and colleagues, but I stood alongside many Members of the House to highlight the plight of the Palestinian people. So as a long-standing supporter of justice for the Palestinians, I say to him that he does nothing for the Palestinian cause by aligning himself with antisemites.

**John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con):** A blind man on a horse could see that there were going to be difficulties broadcasting a band called Kneecap, named after a terrorist punishment, who had called for the death of people in this House. We should take a moment to reflect that Airey Neave and Ian Gow were both killed by republican murderers. Given the events of the weekend and previous incidents, is there not a pattern emerging? Will the Secretary of State at least test the idea that the BBC has a fundamental problem with Israel?

**Lisa Nandy:** Let me first recognise that the BBC has been criticised by all sides in the conflict for bias, which shows the difficult editorial line that it has to walk, but let me also be clear that, in relation to what happened at the weekend, as the BBC itself has rightly acknowledged, the coverage, the standards and the enforcement of those standards fell well short of what was expected. I acknowledge that it is not the first time in recent months that that has happened. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government take this incredibly seriously. We are having discussions with the BBC at the most senior levels to ensure that this is gripped. As I said previously to other colleagues, I have levers at my disposal and will not hesitate to use them, should I need to.

**Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP):** Anyone who witnessed the disgusting images of young, middle-class, educated morons chanting "Death to the IDF" at the weekend can only be alarmed that we have stooped to this level in our society. Even worse, the state broadcaster broadcast those images across the nation. I welcome what the Secretary of State said, and the way in which she said it. She has called the director and asked for immediate explanations, and expects answers, but given that the BBC has already ignored calls from this House to explain its bias, does she really expect to get any satisfactory answers from an institution that I believe is antisemitic at its very core? Does she have any confidence

[Sammy Wilson]

in any police investigation, given that the police have already decided not to prosecute the member of Kneecap who called for the killing of Tory MPs?

**Lisa Nandy:** In the last few minutes before we came into the Chamber for this statement, the police announced that there is an ongoing criminal investigation, and it is important that we allow the police to do their work. Of course, I would not hesitate to call the director general of the BBC and ask for an explanation. I expect that explanation to be forthcoming and satisfactory, by which I do not mean that I expect excuses about what has or has not been done in this instance. I expect a full and honest explanation of what has clearly gone wrong on this occasion, and a full explanation of what will be done, not through another review, with months and months of delays, or by spending public money on trying to get the bottom of what has gone wrong, but immediately to ensure that this cannot happen again.

**Ayoub Khan:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Towards the end of the Secretary of State's answer to my question, she said that I did no favours to the Palestinian cause by aligning myself with antisemites. At no stage did I say in my question that I was aligning myself with anyone at the Glastonbury event. Will the Secretary of State clarify what she meant? If she did not mean that, I apologise, but I would like some clarity.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, which was in fact not a point of order. I do not intend to allow the debate to continue via points of order.

## Prax Lindsey Oil Refinery

6.3 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks):** With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement about the Prax Lindsey oil refinery. Today its owners have declared insolvency at the refinery, and the Government are urgently acting in response to that deeply concerning news. I know that will be extremely worrying news for workers at the refinery, as well as for the wider community in Lincolnshire. Let me say very clearly that the Government stand with the workers, their families and the wider community at this difficult time. They have been let down by the company, but we will ensure that they are supported.

Let me take the House through the chain of events leading up to today, and the actions that we will take in response. There have been long-standing issues at the refinery since it was acquired in 2021. At the end of April, the Government were informed of ongoing commercial difficulties, and the Energy Secretary met the chief executive on 13 May to see how the Government could provide support. The Secretary of State was reassured by the company that there was no immediate closure risk at the refinery.

A week ago, the business changed its position, and said that it feared that it could no longer be a going concern. We repeatedly asked it, at an official and ministerial level, what the financial gap was, to work out whether the Government could help to bridge that gap, but the company was unable to share that basic information. As a result of today's decision by the company, an official receiver and administrators have been appointed to take over different parts of the business. The Government will ensure that supplies are maintained, protect our energy security, and do everything we can to support the workers, including engaging with trade unions and industry bodies.

Let me update the House on the Government's response. First, we will work with the official receiver over the coming days and weeks to manage the situation at the Lindsey oil refinery site, and to determine the next steps. The official receiver will take immediate steps to ensure safe operations at the site, ensure continued fuel supply and explore all credible options for a sale. Unfortunately, the refinery has consistently failed to make a profit since it was bought by the current owners from Total in 2021; it has recorded a total of around £75 million of losses between its acquisition in 2021 and the financial year ending February 2024. That has left the refinery in very bad shape, and the company has left the Government with very little time to act.

We are supporting the official receiver in carrying out its statutory duties, including managing the situation on the site to determine next steps. That will include urgently reporting back on the steps, including all potential uses of the site, prior to the wind-down of the refinery. As to the wider business, extensive operational and financing interdependencies in the Prax Group mean that the refinery's parent company, State Oil Ltd, has also been placed into administration today, along with a small number of other group entities. However, other parts of the group, including its UK retail business, have not gone into administration. The retail business will trade as normal, while the administrators look to secure a sale in due course.



Secondly, there are questions that must be answered about how the owners allowed this situation to happen. That is why my right hon. Friend the Energy Secretary has today written to the Insolvency Service to demand an immediate investigation of the conduct of the directors and the circumstances surrounding that insolvency.

Thirdly, as we engage in this work, our immediate priority is to ensure that affected workers at the Prax Lindsey refinery are supported through this difficult time. The Government believe that the business's leadership has a responsibility to the workers and the local community. We call on it to do the right thing and provide support to the workers through this difficult period. The wealthy owner cannot wash his hands of his obligations to the workers and their families. That is why we call on him to put his hands in his pockets and deliver proper compensation for the workers. The Government will now urgently work with the company and trade unions to explore what further support can be offered to the workforce, including the maximum possible help to ensure that workers can pursue new job opportunities if the refinery cannot be sold.

Fourthly, we are committed more widely to securing the long-term future of the UK's refinery sector. It is important to say that the UK has a refining sector with a number of well-run operators. I met the refining sector earlier this month for a ministerial roundtable, and it told me that it had not had such a meeting with Government for 13 years. The reality is that the previous Government left the UK's refining sector facing significant long-term challenges. We know that there are global challenges too, including competition from larger refining operations in the middle east, India and Africa. We have already seen the effects of years of negligence from previous Governments, and this Government have been left to pick up the pieces.

The UK Government are determined to work with industry, workers and trade unions to ensure that we safeguard our refineries for the future. That is why we are reviewing the methodology for the energy-intensive industries compensation scheme that we inherited from the last Government. The refineries sector is not covered by that scheme, and the review will help assess whether sectors such as this should be covered in the future, and whether more can be done to help their competitiveness. That is not all: in less than 12 months in office, we have invested in carbon capture, usage and storage, which can help key refineries, such as Phillips 66 and Stanlow, through Viking and HyNet. We have funded Project Willow at Grangemouth—a project that can help all refineries meet future challenges—and we are driving forward with the sustainable aviation fuel mandate, to help the refining sector maximise the opportunities created by the clean energy revolution.

From the moment we were informed of these issues, the Government have been focused on securing the future of the Prax Lindsey oil refinery site and supporting its workers. Today, those workers have been badly let down by the company, but we are committed to supporting them and the wider community during this difficult time. The Government are absolutely committed to a long-term future for the UK's refinery sector, and over the weeks and months ahead, we will provide further updates on the steps I have set out in this statement. I commend this statement to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the shadow Secretary of State.

6.10 pm

**Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I thank the Minister for advance sight of his statement, and for taking the time to speak with me on this issue earlier today.

Today, hundreds of jobs are at risk, and a strategically significant asset is in jeopardy. The Lindsey oil refinery has a capacity roughly equivalent to 35% of British petrol consumption and 10% of British diesel, and it supplies aviation fuel to Heathrow airport via a pipeline. Refineries represent a core strategic interest for the United Kingdom. We are reassured that the oil and gas fields to the west of Shetland are not at risk, nor is the network of petrol stations affected by today's announcement—I would like to reiterate that that side of the operation is not at risk. The refinery has been loss-making since it was acquired from TotalEnergies in 2021, and we are aware of long-standing financial issues with the Prax group, including its being unable to provide accounts to the Government. As such, we support the Government in ordering an investigation into the conduct of the directors and the circumstances surrounding this insolvency.

However, despite the management issues facing the company, which, as the Minister has said, are multiple, it is clear that the refining industry as a whole is being driven into the ground by the high cost of energy in this country. In the late 1970s, Great Britain had 17 oil refineries; if the Lindsey refinery in the Humber closes its doors, only four will remain. Energy is the single largest cost of operating a refinery, so the sky-high cost of energy to industry in the UK is pushing manufacturers in energy-intensive industries such as refining out of business. As Sir Jim Ratcliffe at INEOS has said, the chemicals sector is “facing extinction” because of “enormously high energy prices and crippling carbon tax bills.”

Industry in the United Kingdom is uncompetitive, with two oil refineries closing within six months. It is quite clear that we need a rethink. If our route to lowering emissions in the UK comes at the price of deindustrialisation, and costs jobs, livelihoods and economic growth—if it means impoverishing the UK and increasing dependence on imports, and a fragile supply chain for fuel and essential oil products—then we must rethink. If the Secretary of State brings refineries within the scope of the energy-intensive industries compensation scheme, he will be providing only a sticking-plaster response. Exempting specific industries from policy costs such as the renewables obligation, the feed-in tariffs, the contracts for difference subsidies, and capacity market payments does not fix the foundations. This piecemeal approach simultaneously accepts the devastating consequences of green levies for the industry and abdicates responsibility for fixing the root problem.

We are already seeing the real impact on working people's livelihoods and communities of not taking action. Some 400 jobs have been lost at Grangemouth; 60 have been lost at Moorcroft pottery in Stoke; over 1,000 have been lost at Vauxhall in Luton; and 250 have been lost at Nippon Electric Glass Fibre Works in Wigan. Now we see the same at the Prax Lindsey oil refinery, where 440 people are employed. Unite the union has warned the Government that their policies “have placed the oil and gas industry on a cliff edge”.

[Andrew Bowie]

This Government are driving up the cost of energy, increasing our reliance on imports, and offshoring our carbon emissions. That is not good for the climate, and it is very bad for Britain.

Refineries have consistently raised the issue of the existential issues that the sector faces, including the cost of the emissions trading scheme and eye-wateringly high energy bills. Since the closure of Grangemouth, this Government have taken no action to tackle the fundamental problem: the need to reduce the burden on businesses, make UK manufacturing more competitive, and back British industry. I have some questions for the Minister. What are the Government's plans for the Lindsey refinery? Does he expect to find an operator? How long will the Government support the refinery, and what plans do they have for the refinery if no buyer is forthcoming? What action will the Minister and his Government take to ensure that the situation is not replicated at Britain's four remaining refineries? How many petroleum refineries does he expect to be left by the time the Labour Government leave office in 2029, and what will the Government do to bring bills down for all industrial energy consumers, not just those covered by the energy-intensive industries compensation scheme?

**Michael Shanks:** I thank the shadow Minister for rightly reiterating the fact that it is not the whole of the business we are discussing that has gone into administration today. It is really important to say that there is certainty in other parts of the business—we will be able to outline more of that in the days and weeks ahead. I also thank him for his and his party's support for the investigation into the conduct of the directors that the Secretary of State has launched. Clearly, something has gone badly wrong here, and it is important that we get to the bottom of it.

The shadow Minister asked three specific questions. First, the Government have backed the official receiver, who is now running the refinery in the short term. We will use that time to see whether there is a possibility of finding a buyer—clearly, our very first option is to see whether someone wants to take on the refinery as a going concern, and we will put every effort into trying to find one. If that is not possible, we will look at what the wider future of the site might be and what possibilities exist for other industries on that site.

Turning to the shadow Minister's wider questions, he spoke about fixing the root of the problem. I have to gently say to him, though, that he and his party oppose the action that will fix the root of the problem, which is our continued exposure to volatile fossil fuel prices that have driven up the cost of electricity. As he rightly said, households and businesses right across the country are paying the price for that. We have an answer to that, which is to move much faster towards a clean power system including renewables and nuclear that brings down costs and delivers that power here in the UK, rather than relying on the casino for volatile fossil fuels. However, the shadow Minister opposes that plan. He cannot call for us to fix the root of the problem—as he puts it—while opposing the very action that will do so. We have outlined a credible plan for how we will deliver cheaper electricity for all consumers across the country, including businesses, and we are getting on with delivering it. The Conservatives oppose all those initiatives.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the Chair of the Select Committee.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Minister recognises the importance to our energy security of securing the fuel supply at Lindsey. He also recognises the importance of engaging with the trade unions to attempt, at least, to reassure the workforce. I thank him for those actions and congratulate him on them, and indeed on the engagement that the Government have had with the sector since the election.

Refinery operations are increasingly challenging, not least because of the volatility and uncertainty in international fossil fuel markets that the Minister just mentioned, but also because of the competition across the world. Phillips 66 and Stanlow, which he mentioned in his statement, are adapting to the changes in our energy system, taking advantage of carbon capture and the production of sustainable aviation fuel and biofuels. Will the Minister ensure that the UK refinery sector is part of the energy transition and a key part of our energy and industrial strategies, so that refineries play a key part in the future for the communities and workers that depend on those jobs at the moment, and so that we do not see a cliff edge?

**Michael Shanks:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. First, he is right to restate what I said in the statement—when I brought in the refinery industry for a roundtable, it was frankly extraordinary to be told that it was the first time in 13 years that that had happened. That is an extraordinary state of affairs. I am glad that we have now held that roundtable, but what it has highlighted is just how much engagement with the sector is now necessary. I am determined to drive that engagement forward.

My hon. Friend is also right about the nature of the transition. Refineries will be important at all stages of the transition. Clearly, they are critical to delivering our fuel security today, and they will play a really important role in that area in the future—in sustainable aviation fuel, biofuels, and the wider work we need that sector to do. We will support refineries to transition into some of those future technologies.

The bottom line in this case is that we seem to have had a business that was far from doing that—it was not driving forward the investment that was necessary. We will now, at pace, try to get to the bottom of what the directors were doing with this company. It is a shocking state of affairs and a sad day for the workers, but I genuinely believe that there will be a strong refining sector in the future.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

**Pippa Heylings** (South Cambridgeshire) (LD): I, too, thank the Minister for advance notice of the statement today. Our thoughts are with the workers at the Prax Lindsey refinery who have heard this last-minute, shocking news today, which has put their futures and jobs on hold.

We understand that this is just one refinery within the Prax Group, but the threatened closure will send shockwaves across its wider operations, with its newly acquired oilfields to the west of Shetland and roughly 200 petrol stations in the UK under the Breeze and Harvest Energy

brands. While those facilities are outside the insolvency process as things stand, workers in those upstream businesses and the wider community will understandably be worried about the impact of the insolvency on their jobs.

There are questions to be asked of the company bosses in both State Oil and the Prax Group, and it is good to hear the Secretary of State's announcement of an investigation into how the company bosses have let workers down. We welcome the Minister's words that the company should bear some responsibility and accountability for jobs and skills for those workers, if it turns out that the company closes.

We welcome the Government's proposals to consider adding refineries to the network charging compensation scheme for energy-intensive industries. Once again, as we have heard, we see UK industry buckling under soaring energy costs—some of the highest in Europe—with workers left to pay the price. Many in this House will feel a troubling sense of *déjà vu* following the Grangemouth job losses. We have heard from the Minister about the state of the refining industry and how the industry had not met the Government for 13 years. Such situations make it yet clearer that the Government must set out a comprehensive and strategic plan for workers in the oil and gas industry to support the redeployment of skills and training as part of a just transition.

A recent report by Robert Gordon University warned that the UK risks losing tens of thousands of offshore energy jobs by 2030 unless urgent and co-ordinated action is taken immediately. Rather than the irresponsible and reckless race backwards to volatile fossil fuel dependency that the Conservatives have put forward today, the report calls for honest dialogue to settle on a common UK policy framework—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes):** Order. The hon. Lady will know that the time limit for responses to statements is two minutes for the Liberal Democrats. I am sure she has finished her comments.

**Pippa Heylings:** In conclusion, many thanks, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Michael Shanks:** I think I got all the hon. Lady's key points down. Importantly, I agree with many of them. First, I echo the point that she makes about this being shocking news for the workers, as it always is. Given how quickly it has happened, it has been as much a surprise to us, but for the workers it will be particularly shocking news.

I will reiterate two things that the hon. Lady said, just to be clear. She mentioned the upstream business west of Shetland. That is not filing for insolvency. The petrol forecourts will continue to operate as normal, and the administrators are exploring the prospect of a sale of those retail operations. There is no need for anyone to be concerned about any of that.

There is an argument that it is critical, whatever the outcome, that the company takes some responsibility for the actions it has taken up to this point and for the workers who were employed in its business and kept it running for a long time. I have been clear in my statement today, and we will continue to reiterate it, that we expect the owners to put their hands in their pockets and provide the support that those workers deserve.

Finally, I was in Aberdeen last week talking to people about a comprehensive plan, and I will continue to do that, because it is right that we put in place a comprehensive plan for the future of those working in oil and gas. There is a bright future for that workforce in oil and gas for many decades to come, but increasingly they will transition into new industries. We are determined that we will deliver those jobs. A plan is crucial, and I am working on it at pace.

**Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes) (Lab):** I thank the Minister for his statement, and he is right that this news has sent a shock reverberating around our local area. Back in April, I visited the Prax site, which sits in the constituency of my neighbour, the hon. Member for Brigg and Immingham (Martin Vickers). I spoke with the staff and trade union reps about the importance of their work, and I was impressed by their commitment to the company. There was absolutely no hint of the scale of difficulties—beyond how challenging it is in the refining sector anyway—or how deep and uncomfortable the company's financial situation was. It is astonishing that the company could not answer basic questions about its finances when the Government asked for those details.

The decision taken by State Oil puts more than 400 local jobs at risk, with around 65% of those workers living in north-east Lincolnshire. I appreciate the efforts that the Government are making to support our workers, and I hope to work closely with the Government to help find a new buyer to preserve the jobs and support domestic fuel production as a strategically important asset. However, as things stand, I understand that State Oil is required only to make statutory redundancy payments to those workers. Does the Minister think that the billionaire owner of the refinery could do more to better support those workers in the event that they lose their jobs? Surely that is the least they could do, after what appears to be gross mismanagement.

**Michael Shanks:** I thank my hon. Friend for her questions. By talking of her recent visit to the refinery, she underlines the issues that have come to light in such an incredibly short space of time, although the truth is that in uncovering some of this, we have discovered that it goes back some time. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced that he has asked for an inquiry into the decisions that have been made. We need to get to the bottom of this and learn any lessons that we can.

My hon. Friend is right that we have to do everything we can to support the workers. We will continue to do that, and we will look at what support we can provide for them. At the moment, these are jobs at risk rather than redundancies that have been announced. We are doing everything we can to see whether someone is interested in buying the refinery as a going concern, in which case the workers would be retained. We will do everything we can to support those workers should that not come to fruition.

My hon. Friend is right to point out that under the current process, those workers will be entitled to statutory redundancy only. It is clear that the business's leadership have a responsibility to those workers, not only because it is right and prudent for all owners of businesses like this to take responsibility for the workforce, but because, particularly given how this business has ended, they should



[Michael Shanks]

take responsibility for the workers and the local community. We call on them to do the right thing and support the workers through this incredibly difficult period.

**Martin Vickers** (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): I thank the Minister for his statement and for the briefing he gave me earlier today. It is disturbing that when the Government reached out to the company for additional information, it was not forthcoming. The shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) asked some pertinent questions, one of which was how long the Government are prepared to support the workers and the refinery. It would be reassuring for many of my constituents who work there if the Minister could give some indication that there will be support at least in the medium term.

**Michael Shanks:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his time earlier today. This will be a distressing issue in his constituency, so it was good to have the chance to speak to him about it. He is right. With this decision having been made last night in the courts and made public this morning, we have not had much time to fully work through the timeline of what will happen in the coming weeks. The Government are funding the official receiver to continue the safe operations of the refinery. The first priority will be to make sure that safe operations proceed, but then we will see whether a buyer is interested in the site. We will then move as quickly as possible, if that is not possible, to see what alternatives there are for the site.

I cannot give the hon. Gentleman assurances on exact timescales at this point, but he can be assured that the Government are determined to do the right thing, and we will do whatever we can to get either a buyer or a sustainable future for the site. I reiterate to the House that this is a difficult set of circumstances with little time to prepare, and the refinery has been loss-making since it was taken over from Total some years ago. It is a difficult position, but we will do everything we can.

**Brian Leishman** (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): I am glad that the root cause of the problems that we face has been identified. We have touched on it, but this is what happens when private capital is in charge of such a key piece of infrastructure. We saw that play out at the Grangemouth refinery in my constituency, and it is good to hear my hon. Friend the Minister in agreement with me in condemnation of the owners of the Prax Lindsey refinery. It gives me hope that the Government will learn important lessons and assume at least some form of ownership in the future industries that will be come at Grangemouth and potentially at other sites. Can we get an update on that, please?

**Michael Shanks:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the work that the Government are doing following our £200 million commitment to support the future of Grangemouth through the national wealth fund. There have been 84 serious and credible inquiries about projects there, and I have been meeting those involved in some of those projects to discuss what more the Government can do to ensure that they are delivered. We will say more about that in due course, but we are working collaboratively with the Scottish Government and Scottish

Enterprise to bring the projects forward. As we have said since day one, we are determined to deliver a sustainable, viable industrial future for Grangemouth. The difference between Grangemouth and the Prax Lindsey refinery—I want to separate the two slightly—is that while we may have issues with the owners of various sites across the country, an 18-month redundancy package was put in place at Grangemouth and that is not the case in this instance, which is why the Government are particularly calling on the owners of this refinery to do the right thing for the workers there.

**Graham Leadbitter** (Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey) (SNP): Westminster's mismanagement of the energy sector is clearly being felt across these islands, and the Government were right to arrange a statement today to address the possible closure of the Prax Lindsey oil refinery. However, that is not a courtesy that the Labour Government have ever extended to Grangemouth in Scotland: they have not once come to the Chamber to make a statement about it. We have seen Labour pull out all the stops for Scunthorpe and now begin that process for Lindsey. Will they think again and do the same for Grangemouth?

The Shetland gas plant is also owned by Prax, and is also a significant employer. What steps are the Government taking to secure the future of this site, and why did the plant not feature in the statement, if only for the purpose of an assurance?

**Michael Shanks:** Let me deal with that on two fronts. First, we have come to the House repeatedly to talk about Grangemouth. I have had meetings with a number of Members over the past year to discuss Grangemouth, probably more than I have had to discuss any other issue, and I have weekly meetings with Scottish Government Ministers, businesses or others to discuss Grangemouth's future. No one wanted the outcome that we got from Grangemouth, but we have done everything in our power to turn that around and deliver a viable economic future for the site, so I do not entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's criticism, which I think is misplaced.

Secondly, I apologise to the House for being unable to give explicit details about every part of the business, but one of the problems is that we have not been able to obtain clarity from the company about all the interdependencies within its own business group. We will discuss more of this in the coming days as we engage with the official receiver. It is important to separate the issue of insolvency for the refinery—the specific issue that we are discussing today—from the wider group issues, but I have no doubt that we will return to some of those in due course.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The shadow Secretary of State mentioned Moorcroft in Stoke. A small glimmer of light in what is otherwise a rather gloomy story is the rescue of that company by Will Moorcroft, the grandson of its founder, and the jobs that are potentially coming back. However, those jobs were put at risk, much like the jobs at this refinery, because of the eye-watering industrial energy costs that we face in this country. The Government have announced the British industrial competitive scheme, but it will not come alive for industrial energy prices until 2027, which is two years away.



I thought I heard the Minister say that the Government would consider the potential for changing the criteria for the energy intensive industry compensation scheme to bring in new sectors that could be offered some immediate help and some respite between now and the introduction of that scheme. If that is the case, will the Minister be clear about it at the Dispatch Box, and if he is able to look at the EIIC criteria, can he also look at the existing energy supercharger scheme, which would give ceramics companies in my constituency access to the support that they need in order to continue to thrive?

**Michael Shanks:** My hon. Friend is right to mention the impact of high electricity costs across industry. Since we came to office we have been doing everything possible—through the industrial strategy, and through other work that my colleagues in the Department for Business and Trade have been doing—to try to drive down energy costs, and we are doing wider work across the energy system to deliver clean power by 2030, and to bring down bills and reduce the volatility in bills that affects too many households and businesses throughout the country. We are looking at all the possible options, and I have said to the refinery sector that we are willing to look at all the schemes on a case-by-case basis. There is no easy answer to many of these questions, but we will, for example, consider eligibility for the industrial competitiveness scheme following the consultation that will open shortly, and it will be reviewed in due course.

I understand that the question relates to how fast we can move on some of these matters, but we need to ensure that we get this right, and we are doing everything we can, where we can, to move faster with some of the decisions.

**Harriet Cross** (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): The Government stood in to secure British Steel, citing national security and protecting jobs; now they are standing in to support Prax Lindsey, citing the need to protect energy security and workers. As the Minister knows, tens of thousands of jobs and many, many companies in north-east Scotland are nearing a cliff edge because of the Government's policies. To prevent the need for another eleventh-hour standing in by the Government, will he now support the North sea by ending the energy profits levy and allowing new licences there?

**Michael Shanks:** I should avoid straying into taxation policy, which is not in my brief. However, I will say that we are doing everything we can to issue a speedy response to the consultation on the future of energy in the North sea, which is all about how we strategically plan the future of oil and gas in this country to ensure that we are building up the future industries at the same time as supporting existing oil and gas supply chains and jobs, and we are moving that work forward.

Let me be clear about what the official receiver does. The official receiver is in post with statutory duties, but that is not in the same bucket as nationalising an industry. It would not be right for the Government to underwrite failing businesses, but we have a responsibility to ensure that an active refinery is wound down in a way that is safe, or that we can find a buyer to continue it.

**Carla Denyer** (Bristol Central) (Green): I stand in solidarity with the workers in the oil industry who are facing such uncertainty and fear. This incident illustrates perfectly why a carefully managed worker-led transition

away from oil and gas is so desperately needed to avoid a chaotic collapse in which workers pay the price. Will the Minister agree to implement my Energy and Employment Rights Bill, whose proposals include the publication of a plan for the redeployment and retraining of oil and gas workers, paid for by oil and gas companies across the industry rather than piece by piece and crisis by crisis?

**Michael Shanks:** I do not agree with the hon. Lady's proposed piece of legislation, so I will not be supporting it. I think that that is the wrong approach, although she has highlighted the right problem. We are moving as quickly as possible to plan the transition properly, although we should have been doing that many years ago when it started, and as a result we have lost a third of the workforce in the past 10 years. More than 70,000 people have lost their jobs because we failed to plan for this.

I recognise the problem that the hon. Lady has described, but I think that the answer is for us to do two things: to manage the existing fields and support the industry for the lifetime of those fields, and to build up, at speed, investment in the industries that come next. In the spending review the Government supported industries in respect of carbon capture and storage and hydrogen, and, of course, significant investments in the supply chain through Great British Energy to ensure that we are building infrastructure in this country again and securing the jobs that come with it. The transition is important, and we are doing all that we can to ensure that workers are at the heart of it.

**Charlie Maynard** (Witney) (LD): I appreciate the Minister's words of support for the workers who are facing such horror and shock, and the Liberal Democrats will work hard to hold him to those words. I have two questions for him. The carbon border adjustment mechanism leaves UK refineries at a disadvantage when it comes to the trade in international fuel. Will the Government now consider including that trade in CBAM so that our UK refineries can be level pegging with the rest of the world? Secondly, the UK now has only one refinery left facing the North sea. How many refineries is it okay for us to have when it comes to maintaining fuel security? Can the Minister be precise in telling me how many more can fall after Grangemouth and the one that we are discussing?

**Michael Shanks:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his questions and his promise to hold us to account; I look forward to that. He was right to reiterate the point that I made at the beginning about the importance of support for the workers, and we are calling for the company's owners to do the right thing. As for the carbon border adjustment, we have looked at three factors: the UK emissions trading scheme, the carbon leakage risk, and the feasibility and effectiveness of inclusion. The refining sector does not currently meet all those criteria and is therefore not included in scope at present. We are looking beyond 2027 and also considering whether there is more we can do in the short term, but clearly there are questions about carbon leakage and other matters that we need to work through. That is partly why I got those in the sector together—the first time that had happened for 13 years, as it turns out—to talk about some of those issues, and about their own views.

[Michael Shanks]

I am not going to answer the hon. Gentleman's second question with a specific number, because I do not think that is the right way to look at anything around business planning. What I can say is that refineries are incredibly important to this country. They are crucial parts of our energy infrastructure, and they are important businesses, but businesses have to operate as successful businesses. While some refineries are absolutely doing that, this one is clearly an example of where that has not happened. We will do everything we can to support the sector, but I am not going to put a specific number on how many refineries we should have in the future.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Whatever the specific reasons for the company's failure, the fact of the matter is that the refining industry has been squeezed for decades as a result of Government policy. When the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero stands up and demonises fossil fuels, it is hardly surprising that there is not investment in the refining sector. If we add the energy costs, the carbon taxes and all the other impediments, of course we will see businesses disappear. Given the fact that we have seen aluminium, steel, oil and now oil refinery disappear from the scene in the UK, does the Minister not understand that as long as we pursue this demented net zero policy, we will have regular announcements of job losses, greater insecurity in our fuel supplies, and the loss of heavy industry?

**Michael Shanks:** I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman on any of his assessment—it will not come as a huge shock to him or the House for me to say that. Aluminium and steel have not disappeared from our industrial landscape in this country, but he is right to read out a number of things that this Government inherited and have had to fix. We had 14 years of failure in industrial policy, and that is why we recently announced an industrial policy, which I am sure the right hon. Gentleman has read and supports.

We are not agnostic about our industrial future. It matters that we build things in this country again, and we need a credible plan to do that. That is what we have outlined in the industrial strategy, but I will make a wider point: the right hon. Gentleman is against all the investment in the clean power that will give us the energy security that he talks about, which will take us away from the volatility of fossil fuels. I repeat this point to him, as I have done before: that investment will deliver the re-industrialisation of our communities, and will give certainty to the industries he talks about that bills will be under control and falling, rather than subject to the ups and downs of an international fossil fuel marketplace. That will drive forward economic growth and investment, and he opposes all of that.

**Richard Tice** (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): I understand that Lindsey oil refinery has gone bust because it was uncompetitive because of high energy prices,

just months after Grangemouth closed. We are witnessing the disappearance of the oil refining sector in this country because of high energy costs. We are witnessing the deindustrialisation of Britain because of high energy costs because of this Government's obsession with net stupid zero—that is the harsh reality. That is the simple fact, and thousands of jobs are disappearing in front of our eyes. The Minister accepts that our energy costs are too high, and the Government promise that energy bills will come down, so could he tell the British people when?

**Michael Shanks:** I am always delighted to give the hon. Gentleman an opportunity for his soundbite. Of course, the problem with soundbites is that one needs some detailed, credible proposals underneath them, and they are in short order from the Reform party at the moment—it has no credibility whatsoever. He seems to have concluded a whole series of things about why this refinery closed. If he is party to information that the Government do not have, I would be grateful if he shared it with us, because we have not concluded the investigation that the Secretary of State only launched today.

The refinery has not made a profit since 2021, so for the hon. Gentleman to say that the situation is the responsibility of this Government's energy policy is quite misguided. The truth is that while the Reform party chooses to oppose the investment that will drive forward jobs and opportunities across the country, including in his own constituency, we are determined to deliver that, because it is the right plan for re-industrialisation, for economic growth, for bringing down bills, for energy security and for tackling the climate crisis, which he might not care about, but children across this country, who will have to face this planet in the future, do care about it.

**Sorcha Eastwood** (Lagan Valley) (Alliance): I thank the Minister for his responses so far. I, too, stand in solidarity with workers at the Prax Lindsey site. Whenever big companies are responsible for the stewardship of our energy, and sometimes for its generation, I worry that the cost will be passed on to consumers. I am also worried that workers at the Tata Steel site in my constituency of Lagan Valley, who are currently engaged in industrial action, have had their meeting cancelled by management. Does the Minister agree that these jobs are important and key to our transition for the future, and that those workers should not be left behind?

**Michael Shanks:** That is a very powerful and well-put point that I am very happy to agree with. Workers are right at the heart of our entire economy and will be at the heart of the transition in the future, and we need these skills to power the future industries that we are driving forward at the moment. We cannot afford to lose them, and the hon. Lady is right to make that point. I did not quite pick up on the cancelled meeting, but if she wants to write to me, I will happily look into it.

## Deprivation of Citizenship Orders (Effect during Appeal) Bill

### *Second Reading*

6.45 pm

**The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Of all the duties of Government, none matters more than keeping our country safe. It is an awesome task, and one to which we attach the utmost significance, as this House and the public would expect. For people to flourish, they must have confidence that they are safe as they go about their lives. For a society to excel, its values must be protected from harm and its laws upheld. For a nation to thrive, its leaders must be unrelenting in the pursuit of these critical aims. That is why the Prime Minister has made national security a foundation of the plan for change, and it is why we work around the clock with our partners in policing and the security services to keep the United Kingdom and its people safe.

In the face of a complex and evolving threat picture, it is essential that we keep the powers, tools and measures available to us under constant review. Where steps are needed to maintain the safety and security of our country, this Government will not hesitate to act. It is with that intention that we have brought forward this Bill, which, although narrow in its scope and intent, is vital to our ongoing efforts to protect the United Kingdom.

Before I come to the detail of the Bill, I will provide a little bit of background. The British Nationality Act 1981 provides for the removal of an individual's British citizenship. This is also known as a deprivation of citizenship. Deprivation is an important and effective tool to maintain public safety and preserve national security. It is used in two different situations: where citizenship has been obtained by fraud, or where deprivation is conducive to the public good, which means that it is in the public interest to deprive a person of British citizenship because of their conduct and/or the threat that they pose to the United Kingdom.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I accept the Minister's point that this is a very narrow Bill, but is he able to tell the House how many individuals who currently have an appeal that has not yet been heard, and to whom this Bill will ultimately apply, have been deprived of their citizenship?

**Dan Jarvis:** I am happy to do that. If my hon. Friend bears with me for just a couple of moments, I will provide him with the information that he has requested.

In the latter category especially—where deprivation is conducive to the public good—deprivation is used against some of the most dangerous individuals, including terrorists, extremists, and serious and organised criminals. Someone in the UK who has been deprived of their British citizenship no longer has any immigration status, steps may be taken to remove them from the UK, and they may be held in an immigration detention in the interim. If they are overseas, they cannot re-enter the UK using a British passport. In both circumstances, this is clearly an effective way to disrupt the threat posed by dangerous individuals.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): First, I commend the Minister and the Government for bringing forward this Bill. There is no doubt but that it is absolutely necessary. National security is paramount when considering revoking citizenship, as the Minister has outlined, and the Bill is necessary to close a particular loophole and ensure that no person can bypass it.

In Northern Ireland, many people claim both Irish and UK citizenship, as they are able to. I understand that the Bill will make sure their UK citizenship can be revoked, but they will still have the right as an Irish passport holder to travel to Northern Ireland. That is a very peculiar case. I am quite happy if the Minister wants to come back to me on this, but I just want to make sure that no one can get around these measures by using an alternative passport—an Irish passport or whatever it may be—and that Northern Ireland will be under the same laws as the rest of the UK.

**Dan Jarvis:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for his intervention, as I always am, and he is absolutely right that it is necessary to close this particular loophole, and that is the purpose of the Bill. He has raised a very interesting example, and I am grateful to him for saying he is happy for me to come back to him. If he lets me reflect on it further, I will respond to him when I make my concluding remarks at the end of the debate.

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): The Minister keeps referring to a "loophole". In fact, it has been an important principle of British justice that successful appeal equals vindication. This Bill is trying to remove that presumption. That is not a loophole; it is a basic judicial right on which we all rely.

**Dan Jarvis:** Again, if the right hon. Gentleman bears with me, I will come to his specific point in a moment, and if he is not satisfied that I have responded adequately then, I am happy to give way again. I will make some progress.

Deprivation decisions are made following careful consideration of advice from officials and lawyers, and in accordance with international law. Each case is assessed individually. Decisions to deprive, where it is conducive to the public good, are personally taken by the Home Secretary. The power is used sparingly. It complies with the UN convention on the reduction of statelessness, and always comes with a right of appeal.

Turning to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), let me give the House a sense of the frequency with which deprivation powers are used. From 2018 to 2023, on average 12 people a year were deprived of their citizenship where it was conducive to the public good. The available period for fraud-related deprivations is slightly different, but from 2018 to 2022 there were an average of 151 cases per year in that category.

Let me turn to the Bill, dealing first with why it is required; I hope this will go some way to responding to the point made by the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse). In a recent case, the Supreme Court decided that, if an appeal against a deprivation decision is successful, the initial deprivation order will have had no effect and the person will be considered as having continued to be a British citizen. This means that people who have been deprived of



[Dan Jarvis]

British citizenship will automatically regain that status before further avenues of appeal have been exhausted by the Home Secretary.

**Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Dan Jarvis:** I am going to make a little bit of progress, if I may. I will give way in a moment, but I want to address the point that has been raised.

There are very good reasons why the Government may wish to stop citizenship being regained until all appeals are determined, withdrawn or abandoned. These include to prevent someone who is outside the UK and who poses a risk to our national security from returning when a further appeal may be upheld pending the Home Secretary's decision, or to prevent a person from renouncing their other nationality and putting themselves in a position where, if further appeals are successful, a further deprivation order would not be possible as it would unlawfully render them stateless.

**Gareth Snell:** I thank the Minister for that explanation, but hypothetically there exists a circumstance in which the Home Secretary could deprive an individual of their citizenship, that individual could go for an appeal and have it reinstated, and this law would prevent them from retaining that citizenship and the Department could simply choose not to appeal further. How does the Department ensure that the individual is then allowed to access future appeals to try to regularise their citizenship status?

**Dan Jarvis:** For reasons that I do not understand, my hon. Friend is progressing a hypothetical scenario; I do not know whether it is based on a particular case that he has in mind. I have not personally dealt with such a set of circumstances, but I am happy to look at the matter he has raised.

**Deirdre Costigan:** Southall Community Alliance in my constituency has long been a defender of human rights. Would the Minister confirm to the alliance that this Bill means we will continue to use the power to deprive people of their citizenship very sparingly, and that there will be no changes to the existing right of appeal or any widening of the reasoning under which we would deprive somebody of their citizenship in this country?

**Dan Jarvis:** I can absolutely give my hon. Friend and the organisation in her constituency that assurance. This Bill is very narrowly drawn; it has two clauses.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy** (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): I am confused. If the individuals in question have done something so bad that they have to be deprived of their citizenship, why would we not simply jail them? Why would we need to deprive them of their citizenship?

**Dan Jarvis:** I hope my hon. Friend heard the point I made a moment ago about how the Government have brought forward this legislation in response to a recent Supreme Court decision. Essentially, an appeal against deprivation has resulted in a requirement for us to bring

forward this clarification of the law. In response to her and my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan), this does not represent any widening of the existing arrangements. The right of appeal is completely unaffected by this legislation, which is incredibly narrowly drawn.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I am sure the Minister understands that due process is important and appreciates that the appeals process must be respected fully. He is intending making people temporarily stateless, so can he guarantee that the appeals process will be speeded up and people will have an opportunity to have their case heard in a timely manner, so they can have their case resolved, not hanging over them for a long time?

**Dan Jarvis:** The hon. Member is absolutely right about the point of due process. I can say to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall that these powers are used very sparingly. Each and every individual case is decided on by the Home Secretary. I know that this Home Secretary has—and I am sure previous Home Secretaries have—taken these responsibilities incredibly seriously. Decisions are made carefully, on advice and in accordance with international law, and I am happy to give the hon. Member and others that assurance.

**Kit Malthouse:** Will the Minister give way?

**Dan Jarvis:** Let me make a bit of progress, and then I will happily give way again.

The key point is that deprivation of citizenship on conducive grounds is rightly reserved for those who pose a threat to the UK, or whose conduct involves very high harm. We are talking about some of the most serious cases handled by any Government. Where a loophole is identified in the processes underpinning it, it is the job of any serious and sensible Government to close it, and that is precisely what this Government will do.

Let me turn to the substance of the Bill. The House will note its brevity and narrow scope; it contains just one substantive clause, focused solely on addressing the specific issues that have already been discussed. Its primary objective is to protect the United Kingdom from dangerous people, which includes those who pose a threat to our national security. The Bill will achieve that by preventing those who have been deprived of British citizenship from regaining that status automatically when their appeal is successful, until further appeals have been determined. That will replicate the approach taken on asylum and human rights appeals; in those cases, the effect of an appeal is suspended up to the Court of Appeal and extended to appeals to the Supreme Court.

To be clear, the Bill does not change any existing right of appeal or widen the reasons why a person could be deprived of their citizenship. Should an appeal mounted on behalf of the Government prove unsuccessful, then where there is no possibility of further appeal, British citizenship would be reinstated with immediate and retrospective effect.

**Kit Malthouse:** The Minister keeps referring to a loophole in justice. I do not understand why he cannot see that “innocent until proven guilty” should apply in these cases, as in any other. The idea that my winning an appeal would not automatically mean I was innocent,



as it does in every other case, seems a breach of a fundamental tenet. He is also not correct to say that the power is used sparingly. Since 2010, dozens of people have been denied citizenship on the say-so of the Home Secretary, despite there being nothing proven in court. That is what is different about these cases. This is effectively something that is done in secret, behind closed doors, without the facts necessarily being proven in any way. I have a lot of respect for the hon. Gentleman, but this is a case in which we should be even more reliant on due process, rather than trying to legislate judges out of the room, as we are trying to today.

**Dan Jarvis:** I know that the right hon. Gentleman will understand and appreciate, from his time as a Home Office Minister, the huge responsibility that the Government invest in the Home Secretary. The Home Secretary of the day has to make some incredibly difficult, finely balanced judgments. I hope that he would agree that we have to ensure that the Home Secretary, whoever they are, and whatever political party they are from, has the necessary power to make decisions that safeguard the security of our nation. I am certain that he and I agree on that. The Bill essentially ensures that the Government can continue to do that, precisely as the Government whom he served could.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** I thank the Minister for giving way again. I am again completely confused. His specific example at the beginning aside, I still do not understand why, if the individuals concerned pose such a huge threat, other pieces of legislation will not deal with them and keep the public safe. He also pointed to the fact that somebody could win their appeal and he could still wish to deprive them of citizenship. I want to understand the circumstances in which, after someone's appeal was upheld by a judge, the Minister would still wish to deprive them of their citizenship.

**Dan Jarvis:** Forgive me, but I do not think I said that; I think I said the opposite. I am very happy to discuss the matter further with my hon. Friend. I hope she understands, and I hope I have made it clear, that the Bill is incredibly narrow in its scope. It seeks to take us back to the legal position we were in a matter of months ago, prior to the judgment of the Supreme Court. It does not in any way undermine the right of appeal. If she has further concerns, I am very happy to speak to her, but I can give her an assurance. She is very welcome to look at the Bill. It will not take her very long to read it. It is two clauses, with a single substantive clause, specifically designed to take us back to the legal position we were in just a few months ago. I hope she will be reassured by that.

**Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** I have come to this debate without any prior knowledge of what is proposed, so I am making this point as a result of what I have heard so far. Am I right in thinking that what the Minister particularly has in mind is people with dual citizenship who might, for example, have gone abroad to fight for a terrorist organisation, such as ISIS. There would, in such a case, be nothing forbidding us from removing their British citizenship. If they came back, even if they could be convicted of anything at all, they would be imprisoned for only a relatively short time, if at all, and then the security services would probably have to spend many years monitoring them. Is that the sort of scenario the Minister has in mind?

**Dan Jarvis:** I am always grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. It is. Perhaps he did not hear me make that point earlier, but I specifically said that one of the reasons for the Bill was to prevent someone who is outside the UK, and who poses a risk to our national security, from returning when a further appeal may be upheld by the Home Secretary's decision. He is right: that is a potential scenario that we have to guard against, and the Bill will enable us to do that, just as Governments could prior to the ruling of the Supreme Court. I hope he finds that reassuring.

As I set out, deprivation is one of the most powerful tools we have in our ongoing efforts to protect the United Kingdom and its citizens from harm. For it to remain an effective part of our armoury, we need to legislate. Before I finish, I pay tribute to our world-class law enforcement and intelligence agencies. In turbulent and uncertain times, their tireless work to maintain stability and security at home has never been more crucial. They must be supported at every turn, because the safety of our country stands apart from everything else we do. It is the cornerstone of our society, and ensuring that safety is the primary purpose of everyone involved in public service, including in this House. It is a responsibility borne not just by those of us on the Government Benches, but by parliamentarians of all parties. In that spirit, I urge Members to support the Bill, which is required to preserve our national security. I commend it wholeheartedly to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** I call the shadow Minister.

7.7 pm

**Harriet Cross (Gordon and Buchan) (Con):** Keeping our country safe is, and must be, the first duty of any Government. That comes with decisions and choices that Governments must take to keep their citizens, our country and our way of life safe. That is why we Conservative Members support the Bill. It is much needed to close a recently created loophole that must be addressed, as Members from across the House should agree.

The issue tackled by the Bill arises from the Supreme Court's decision in *N3 v. Secretary of State for the Home Department* 2025. The Court held that if a person successfully appeals against a deprivation order, or if the order is withdrawn, they are considered never to have lost their British citizenship. That means that even where the Secretary of State intends to challenge such a decision through further appeals, the person's citizenship is automatically restored in the interim. In practice, that could allow individuals to return to the UK or renounce another citizenship or nationality before the Home Office has exhausted the appeals process.

The Supreme Court judgment created two vulnerabilities: an unlocked door through which dangerous individuals could return; and an escape route, allowing terrorists to regain citizenship, fly back to Britain and then renounce other nationalities to become untouchable. The Government's own assessment identifies specific risks: immediate re-entry attempts; terrorists becoming stateless to block future action; and foreign states interfering in our security measures.

The Supreme Court's interpretation has created a situation that is unprecedented among our allies. The United States, Canada, Australia, France and the Netherlands

[*Harriet Cross*]

all maintain revocation of citizenship throughout appeals. Until the February ruling, Britain's framework operated effectively. Now, because of the judgment, we face a unique vulnerability that no other comparable democracy tolerates.

Removing citizenship is quite rightly considered to be a serious step—one that is not taken lightly or without thorough consideration. The seriousness of such decisions is reflected in the fact that it is the Secretary of State who personally decides whether, based on public good and safety, an individual should be deprived of their British citizenship.

The Conservative party absolutely agrees with the importance of having the power of deprivation of citizenship in order to preserve national security. It is a power that has been used sparingly but necessarily, with previous Home Secretaries rightly depriving more than 200 individuals of their citizenship for being non-conducive to the public good. These individuals risk undermining not only our security, but our society at large.

British citizenship is a privilege, not an unconditional right. Those who choose to shatter their bonds of loyalty through terrorism or heinous organised crime forfeit their right to carry a British passport. That is why successive Conservative Governments never shirked from using those powers against terrorists plotting to kill our citizens, or against members of the Rochdale grooming gangs for their sickening abuse of vulnerable children. That is why we are happy to support the Government in their attempts to close this loophole today.

7.10 pm

**Josh Simons** (Makerfield) (Lab): On this island, citizenship is an idea still in its infancy. When Great Britain was forged in the Acts of Union in 1707, British people were not citizens, but subjects, equals by virtue of their relationship to the monarch. Only with the British Nationality Act 1948 was the concept of citizenship introduced into our laws. I say that because, to my mind, we live in an age when political imagination is needed more than ever. The recent experiment with politics as bureaucratic management is over, and we are now returning to a politics with a longer history in this country, forging the future through imagination and creativity, and exercising the collective power to change the values and systems by which we are ruled.

At a moment like this, the relative infancy of citizenship in Britain should encourage us to pause to examine an idea we too often glide over; and I hope that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will forgive me for doing just that. Citizenship, like the motivation behind this Bill, is connected to one of the great challenges of our time: controlling our borders and establishing systems of legal migration and asylum that are orderly, managed, humane and in our national interest.

Let me start with what my constituents in Makerfield tell me. They want to feel that they and their family belong in the community they live in, and they want their neighbours to feel that they belong there, too. That is why high streets full of vape shops, dog muck and smashed glass matter so much—they are a visible and constant reminder that others seem not to feel that they belong. When people treat their community with respect and love, they show that they feel that they belong.

Citizenship is belonging on a bigger scale—a larger us. It is the unchosen love we feel for our family, and even our town, projected on to the story of a country and its people—the monarch; the flag; the mountains, hills and seas; the industrial skyline of my home towns in northern England, and the cobbled streets of Cornwall. Citizenship is a feeling, and, like any feeling, it carries responsibilities. It is about not only what we are owed, but what we owe—responsibility, contribution, duty.

We live in uncertain times, with Europe at war, the middle east in crisis and the world order being remade at breakneck speed. In such times, I believe we should celebrate and nurture citizenship far more than we do. Now, we hide it away. We bury citizenship ceremonies in dingy, bureaucratic corners of town halls, making the test for those who obtain it their capacity to pay thousands of pounds for the privilege, not their commitment to our country and our values. For me, that is what citizenship should be about. I believe that citizens of this country should speak our language, know our history and share our commitment to fairness, tolerance, creativity and freedom. Those who wish to become citizens must, in the end, be willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with their fellow citizens to defend that freedom in a world where it really is threatened.

That brings me to the Bill. While I voted to remain, I did so after much thought. It was always true that the European Union changes the capacity of elected representatives to control borders, and places clear constitutional constraints on what Parliament can do. However, I am always suspicious of those who blame forces beyond Parliament for their failure to use its immense powers. My constituents understand a simple truth about this country's constitution, which is that our politicians can enact almost any law they please, and Governments with strong majorities can do almost whatever they want. If they choose not to use those powers, rarely is it because of some external force, whether that be Strasbourg or an arm's length body. Instead, it is because they are frightened to use their own power, or lack the imagination to use it well.

That is why I strongly support the measures in the Bill. It is not about making people stateless or subverting judges. Instead, it is about doing what this place is supposed to do, which is to assert the view of Parliament on what citizenship means and how it should be enacted. Valuing citizenship requires being clear about when and under what circumstances it should be taken away. Being an equal, full part of our society means sharing our values. British citizenship affirms a person's part in our country, and there must be a way to remove those who threaten it, where they have dual citizenship.

If the Home Secretary has decided in narrow and prescribed circumstances that it is in the public interest to remove a person's citizenship because they threaten our security, in my view, that is what should happen. Of course, we must have an appeals process—no one must ever be above the law in this land. However, an appeal should not mean that the will of elected officials is thwarted. This is part of a broader agenda of this Government that I strongly support: changing the process of judicial review to ensure that the few cannot hold up investment and infrastructure that benefits the many, and reforming the European convention on human rights to update human rights for the 21st century, strengthen national security and enhance control over our borders.

The British people are fed up with politicians passing the buck and blaming someone else for their own failure to act. If we do not create a modern citizenship regime, reform the ECHR and judicial review, establish digital ID or, for that matter, radically reform the British state, it is nobody's fault but our own—us, the British political class. I, for one, am sick of politicians throwing up their hands and blaming others for their own failures. I will always support a Government who take responsibility for using Parliament to deliver the radical change that this country needs, and that is why I support this Bill tonight.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

7.17 pm

**Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD):** The United Kingdom employs deprivation of citizenship orders more frequently than almost any other country in the world. While it is right, of course, that the Government should have the means to protect national security, both the current legislative framework and the Bill before us lack adequate provisions for transparency in and systematic oversight of when, why and how the Secretary of State exercises the power to deprive individuals of their citizenship.

The Bill is designed to ensure that if the Government take away someone's British citizenship, that person stays deprived of that citizenship while any appeals against the decision are ongoing. In practical terms, if the Government deprive someone of their citizenship and that person appeals, the deprivation order remains in effect through the entire appeal period, meaning that even if that person wins an initial appeal, they will not get their citizenship back until all possible appeals from the Government—up to the highest courts—are finished, or the time limit for the Government to appeal has passed.

The Home Secretary has described the Bill as a necessary step to close a legal loophole—a description that has caused some debate already this evening. However, even if it is a loophole, that does not mean that these provisions deserve any less scrutiny. The power to deprive an individual of their citizenship is an exceptionally significant one, which in any democratic society should be exercised only in the most limited and extreme circumstances, and should be subject to rigorous oversight by Parliament.

We need to see proper reform of the whole citizenship deprivation process, not a piecemeal approach like we are seeing today. That principle has underpinned Lib Dem policy on the deprivation of citizenship since 2019, when it was most recently updated. At that time, our party leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), set out clear and just principles that should govern its use: deprivation of citizenship should occur only in the most extreme circumstances, its use must never be political, and the legislation conferring this power must be used with transparency and should be the subject of continuous and meaningful parliamentary scrutiny.

The concerns about transparency have been echoed by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, a cross-House and cross-party body. Earlier this year, it informed the Government that their current approach to the deprivation of citizenship falls short of the UK's human rights

obligations. The Committee called for significantly greater oversight of powers, including periodic independent reviews of their use and regular reports to Parliament.

The current regulations on the deprivation of citizenship already place far too much power in the hands of the Secretary of State. The requirement that the Home Secretary be

“satisfied that deprivation is conducive to the public good”

is too low a bar for the deprivation of citizenship. The Liberal Democrats would therefore confine the power to deprive naturalised citizens of citizenship only where their citizenship has been obtained through fraud, false representation or concealment of material fact, or where they have done something seriously prejudicial to the vital interests of the United Kingdom and deprivation of citizenship is a proportionate response to such conduct and necessary for the national security of the United Kingdom. Furthermore, we are firmly of the view that no individual should be rendered stateless by the Government's actions except in cases in which British citizenship was acquired by misrepresentation or fraud.

The powers conferred by the Bill will transfer even greater authority to the Secretary of State. It is therefore essential that those powers be subjected to ongoing rigorous scrutiny. I would welcome further details from the Minister about the plans to ensure such oversight. For example, will the Government consider reforming the deprivation of citizenship process to require the Secretary of State to apply to a court for permission to make a deprivation order, thereby obliging the Secretary of State to demonstrate that all the proper requirements have been met? Will they commit to publishing annual reports detailing the use of deprivation of citizenship powers, and to facilitating a review of the exercise of these powers by the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation at least once every three years? Finally, will the Minister confirm whether the Government intend to ratify the 1997 European convention on nationality, thereby introducing an additional layer of international scrutiny of the UK's use of these powers, particularly where there is a risk of rendering an individual stateless?

The power to deprive individuals of their citizenship engages fundamental rights and must be exercised with appropriate safeguards, transparency and oversight. Deprivation of citizenship must be the strict exception, never the norm. The Bill risks further concentrating excessive power in the hands of the Executive with too few safeguards to prevent error or abuse. The Liberal Democrats will continue to press for reforms that ensure transparency, judicial oversight and proper parliamentary scrutiny.

7.22 pm

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab):** I agree that the most important role of any Government is to keep their citizens safe, but I do not believe that citizenship is a privilege; I believe that it is a right. I also do not believe that the Minister answered my questions adequately earlier. I want to understand why, if somebody is such a huge threat to this country, we cannot deal with them under other legislation. If we cannot, are there not other pieces of legislation that require our attention? I really worry, because it feels as if the Bill could turn due process on its head. We would not accept that in any other branch of justice.



[Bell Ribeiro-Addy]

I hope the Minister will understand that, following the Windrush scandal and the case of Shamima Begum, there is a sense of nervousness among many communities when any legislation that touches on citizenship is brought before this House. That is for good reason: they worry that it disproportionately goes against people of colour or people who are British-born or long-settled whose heritage or ancestral links are outside Europe. The idea that their citizenship can be revoked because they could be eligible for another nationality is problematic. That is a fear that many people hold.

I always worry about legislation that seems to circumvent the judiciary. I ask the Minister to consider these concerns and, please, to answer my questions. I understand that he was talking about a very specific case, but he needs to be able to apply it to the many different examples that Members have put before the House. As he has heard many times, the deprivation of citizenship is an extremely serious thing. We want to make sure that it happens only in the most extreme cases.

7.24 pm

**Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I want to reflect for a moment on the title of the Bill. It could easily have been called something a bit more prosaic, such as the Revocation of Citizenship Bill or the Withdrawal of Citizenship Bill, but the notion of deprivation is far more evocative. When we talk about deprivation, it is often in the sense of going without something that is fundamental to our existence, such as food, shelter, water or liberty—the very things that we rely on for life itself.

I believe that “deprivation” in this context is flawed terminology, as it seems to equate citizenship with an essential right. I apologise if I am damaging his future career by saying so, but I very much agree with the hon. Member for Makerfield (Josh Simons). Citizenship is not a right; it is a privilege. To those who receive that privilege, through our immigration system or otherwise, we must be clear that it comes with duties and responsibilities.

We welcome those who come to the United Kingdom lawfully, ready to participate in the freedoms that we offer and equally ready to take on the obligations that go hand in hand with them. But when an individual who has had the privilege of citizenship bestowed on them uses it to threaten our national security, that privilege should rightly be revoked until the Secretary of State has exhausted all avenues of appeal in regard to his or her decision. Citizenship of our country is to be prized, not abused—and not reduced to some sort of transactional process or tick-box citizenship test. The “Life in the UK” test is well worth a look, for those who have not seen the poverty of knowledge and scrutiny that it requires.

We should not be defending the importance of citizenship only at the point at which a person has it removed. Everyone, whether they are a citizen through birth or through our immigration system, should receive an education in how precious the covenant between country and individual is to promote understanding and appreciation of our value system and the fundamental principles that underpin it: tolerance and respect, the

right to equality before the law, the duty of loyalty to the United Kingdom—or, as an absolute minimum, a deep and abiding respect and commitment to the conventions and values that make up the British way of life—and, of course, the right to freedom of enterprise and aspiration. It is important not only to create wealth and opportunity, but to look at how our talents can be harnessed by making a contribution within our families and communities, whether that is through performing care obligations for young children and moulding them as the citizens of the future, caring for elderly or dependent family members, or leading local charities or community or faith groups.

Those values, and the rights and duties through which they are lived out, form part of our social contract—the ties that bind us as communities, societies and nations. They have supported our past flourishing and, if re-embraced, will also secure our renewal. Those who reject these values and seek to undermine and destroy them should not be citizens of our country. Although I agree with the measure contained in the Bill, my challenge to the Government is to ensure that respect for our national values and the rights and duties that underpin them is also at the heart of their forthcoming reform of our immigration system.

7.27 pm

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): As I hope the Minister knows, I have devoted much of my adult life to keeping individuals, neighbourhoods, towns, cities and indeed the entire country safe, but I have to confess that I have never been entirely comfortable with the deprivation of citizenship regime. Unfortunately, his Bill, which he is trying to pass off as an innocuous correction, has sparked that sense of unease.

The reason I am uneasy is that, although the objectives that the Minister proposes are laudable, I believe that the cost to our sense of self and the corrosiveness to our sense of citizenship and to the judicial process are perhaps too high. I will not detain the House for too long, but I want to raise three points. We have covered them to a certain extent, but they are worth reiterating.

First, the Minister’s sense is that the Supreme Court has created a loophole; my view is that it has corrected an anomaly. It has long been a tenet of the protections with which the judicial process provides me as an individual that an appeal equals vindication and that it is for my accuser to appeal, on the basis that I remain innocent, even prior to the first action that is taken against me. This regime will reverse that.

The second alarming point is that the legislation is retrospective. As the hon. Member for Makerfield (Josh Simons) asked, there may be a number of cases going through the courts for which this law will have a highly prejudicial impact. The Government are effectively moving the goalposts mid-litigation to get what they want. That, again, is not something we would normally tolerate, and it is a further development of the power.

**Dan Jarvis:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I always enjoy our debates. He says that the Government are moving the goalposts, but does he accept that we are ensuring that we have the same powers to deprive that he had when he was a Home Office Minister?

**Kit Malthouse:** The Minister is quite right—not that I ever exercised those powers. But as I said, in my view the Supreme Court has corrected an anomaly that the previous Government took advantage of. Yes, absolutely, hands up, they did—I am not saying that is correct. He is proposing that in the face of a Supreme Court decision that he does not like, he will change the law to say that the court was in effect wrong and that the fundamental right on which the Supreme Court has decided—we should not forget that the courts basically decide our rights within the legal framework—is somehow not to be tolerated.

**Sir Julian Lewis:** I have some sympathy with my right hon. Friend's argument, but surely the effect of this change will kick in only if, in the end, the Government's appeal succeeds. Therefore, it will be the case that the court previously was wrong; otherwise, the Government's appeal against its decision will not succeed.

**Kit Malthouse:** My right hon. Friend is exactly right. However, it does mean that the state can render someone stateless by inaction, because it can take many years for cases to work their way through the courts. It is also, as I said, highly prejudicial, because it means that for the duration of the legal action that person will not be able to come to the UK and therefore will have to litigate from outside our borders.

**Sir Julian Lewis:** I grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. As I said in my first intervention, I am new to this whole debate, but I thought I heard from the Minister that the idea was for this measure to stand only until the Government appeal was resolved or the Government ran out of time to appeal. How long would that period be? I do not see how that would put things off for the inordinate amount of time that my right hon. Friend suggests.

**Kit Malthouse:** As I am sure my right hon. Friend knows, there are various layers of appeal that can be taken, right up to the Supreme Court. The Bill says that, throughout that period, as long as the Government continue to pursue appeals, the person remains deprived of their citizenship, rather than what the Supreme Court is saying, which is that if the person wins any one of those appeals, they immediately become in effect innocent, and their citizenship is restored as if it was never removed in the first place. That is in the same way as if, were I accused of a crime and found innocent and the prosecutor decided to appeal my conviction, I would remain innocent until that appeal was heard and decided against me. If it were appealed beyond that, I would remain innocent then still.

The Government are attempting to revert to the erroneous situation as determined by the Supreme Court. In my view, they are moving the goalposts on an individual who frankly seems to have won a case fair and square in our highest court in the land.

Finally, I want to raise a more fundamental issue about this entire process. Call me an old romantic, but my view is that once you are a citizen, you are a citizen. Once you are in, you are in. Unfortunately, the development of this power over the last however many years since the 1981 Act, which brought it in, has created two classes of citizens in this country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross), who spoke for the Opposition—she is no longer in her place—said, “citizenship is a privilege, not an unconditional right.” That is not true. It is an unconditional right for me as a freeborn Englishman of two English parents going back I do not know how many years. I have no claim on citizenship anywhere else. It is my absolute, undeniable, unequivocal right to have citizenship in this country, and it cannot be removed from me by any means whatsoever. That is not true of my children. I am married to a Canadian citizen, so they have a claim on Canadian citizenship. If the Home Secretary so decides, they could have their citizenship removed. That is also true of every Jewish citizen of the United Kingdom, who has a right to citizenship in Israel. There will be millions of British people of south Asian origin who feel that they have a second-class citizenship.

This law applies only to certain of our citizens. It does not apply to me. I do not know whether it applies to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps it is making other hon. Members think about whether it applies to them.

While the Minister has been clear that we should trust him and has given us lots of undertakings, we do not make the law on the basis of a Minister we like, trust and respect; we make it on the basis that the law might fall into the hands of somebody we are not that keen on and who may be more cavalier with the powers bestowed upon them. As the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, said, we are a country that uses this power disproportionately more than any other western country. We have been free in our use of it, despite the fact that Minister after Minister has stood in the House and said, “We use it sparingly.” We do not. Dozens and dozens of people have been excluded, and we have to be honest about why. Sometimes it has been for safety, but sometimes, on balance, it has been to please the papers—because it looks good and plays well. We never ask ourselves about the cost of that to our sense of cohesion.

The hon. Member for Makerfield gave a lyrical and poetic view of citizenship, but if a large proportion of our fellow citizens believe that they have a second class of that citizenship—if some can say, “I am undeniably and unchallengeably a citizen, but you are not, so watch yourself”—what does that do to society?

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Does the right hon. Member believe just by looking at me and my hon. Friend the Member for Brent East (Dawn Butler) next to me that the legislation could apply to people who look like us?

**Kit Malthouse:** The hon. Lady makes the point powerfully. I do not know, but she does. This legislation leaves people from minority backgrounds, second or third-generation immigrants, and those like my children who are of two parents of different nationalities, with a lingering sense of doubt about how secure they are in this nation.

**Josh Simons:** The right hon. Member is portraying the United Kingdom as an exception to a global rule in which citizenship is a straightforward binary and a right. I am of Jewish ancestry and have a right to claim citizenship in Israel, though I have not. My wife is

[Josh Simons]

American and our children are dual citizens, so this very much pertains to me. I gently point out that the United States has a similar regime. If a naturalised citizen in America breaks certain laws and is demonstrated to be a national security threat to the United States, they too can have their naturalised citizenship revoked. It is not accurate to paint the United Kingdom as a complete exception to a rule in which citizenship, whether by birth or by naturalisation, is treated differently by the state, by the court and by the legislature.

**Kit Malthouse:** I understand the hon. Member's point, but I am afraid that I am not interested in comparisons with the United States. I would hold us to a higher bar. We are a more ancient country that should have, as he rightly pointed out, a better developed sense of how we build a cohesive society.

I would challenge whether the United States can be held up as a paragon of virtue on societal cohesion or whether actually it is a divided country, with part of that division coming from a sense that there are first, second and maybe even third-class citizens there. At the moment, it is going through a period of challenge as to what it means to be a United States citizen. We have seen litigation under—it has slipped from my mind. It starts, “We the people”. [HON. MEMBERS: “The constitution.”] That is the word—forgive me; a senior moment. The United States is seeing legal challenge under its constitution on precisely those grounds of what it means to be a citizen.

I do not want to detain the House for much longer, but we need to think carefully about the impact that this regime has beyond the people whom it targets. We may say of cases like Shamima Begum that what she did was completely appalling and she deserves to be punished. Obviously, the decision was taken to revoke her citizenship. I am not sure whether that was the right thing to do. I do think she needs to be punished. In many ways, I would rather she had been brought to this country, and punished and jailed here. She is nobody else's problem but ours. As I say, by promoting this regime I think we undermine the value of what it means to be a British citizen because, once acquired, citizenship should be a right. *Civis Romanus sum*. It should mean something. It is not the keys to the executive lavatory, to be removed when you lose the privilege and rights of your position; it is something that you acquire that is fundamentally in you once you are in the club, and we should be wary of the wider impact if we decide to remove it.

I have one final suggestion for the Minister. I realise that I am in a minority, and the House is not going to comply; he is going to get his legislation. However, I ask him to think carefully about the value of the judiciary in this process. Would it be possible to amend the process such that, when an appeal is won by an individual and the Government wish to continue to deprive that person of citizenship, the permission of the judge should be sought for that, pending a further appeal? The Government will have to seek permission to appeal in all circumstances; I ask the Minister to consider whether they should have to seek also permission to maintain the condition of a deprivation of citizenship, as part of that permission to appeal.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins):** I call the shadow Minister.

7.41 pm

**Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con):** I thank the Minister for his work and approach, today and every day. It is a pleasure to work across from him, against our enemies and in defence of our great country and its people.

Sometimes, fulfilling our duty to keep our country safe means taking action that we might otherwise wish to avoid, but it is completely right that depriving people of their citizenship under certain circumstances is a tool available to the Home Secretary. Those who hate our country and what it stands for, and work against our interests, should not be able to hide behind a British passport. Membership of a nation does not just imply rights; it also confers responsibilities. When British citizens engage in terrorism, support for terrorism or serious organised crime, they clearly disregard those responsibilities. It is clearly true that we cannot deprive such people of citizenship in all cases, particularly given that a worrying number of extremists are now homegrown, but where we can, we should.

If we accept that the deprivation of citizenship is an important tool in keeping our country safe, we should also accept that this power should be exercised pragmatically, with the safety of the British people coming first. Allowing potentially dangerous individuals to retain their citizenship while appeals are ongoing is absurd. This is not a power exercised lightly by any Government, and the idea that dangerous people might escape accountability by exploiting procedure is frightening. The current system also opens up the worrying possibility of dual citizens renouncing their non-UK citizenship during the appeal process, making it subsequently impossible to remove their British citizenship without rendering them stateless, so, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon and Buchan (Harriet Cross) said earlier, we support the Bill, which will ensure that deprivation of citizenship orders will continue to have effect until the entire appeal process is complete.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Josh Simons) rightly placed the Bill in its wider context, both historically and politically, and I agree with him on the desperate need to restore our broken border and make British citizenship extremely precious. He spoke of the citizenship ceremony. My grandmother swore allegiance to the King when she became a citizen, and talked of it often. I know that it was one of the proudest moments of her life. The hon. Member for Clapham and Brixton Hill (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) said that she considers citizenship a right rather than a privilege. On that, I am afraid that she and I disagree. As my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer) rightly said immediately afterwards, citizenship is to be prized, not abused.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) was right to point out that there is a balance to be struck. Deprivation has a cost to those who are deprived. I say that the cost in the scenarios in which the Home Secretary may exercise deprivation powers is more than worth paying to protect this country and her people. Similarly, and more specifically to the Bill, the cost of maintaining a deprivation until the conclusion of the process is also a price well worth paying. I say that as a British citizen who, unlike my right hon. Friend, is entitled to several other citizenships.

Finally, the Bill is not just a good example of decisive action taken in the interest of national security; it is also a good example of Parliament's role in our political system.



In this country, the main job of the judiciary is to interpret and apply Parliament's will. Unlike in other countries, judges are not the highest safeguards of our constitution. In Britain, that task is given to, and must remain with, the British people themselves. When the judiciary makes a decision that runs contrary to the will of Parliament, either as it was or as it is today, Parliament is perfectly entitled to overturn that decision; in fact, it must do so if our political system is to work as it should. In, say, the United States, the Supreme Court's job involves working out the intention of long-dead statesmen. That is not the case here in the United Kingdom, where Parliament is a living, breathing institution, embodying the sovereignty of the British people. It can clarify its will or issue new guidance.

That kind of institutional dialogue is healthy; indeed, it is the lifeblood of our politics. We therefore welcome not only the specific measures before us today but the approach taken by the Government on this matter. We have seen Ministers and Government Members behave as if the law is an entity unto itself—an authority above all others, entirely separate from the political process. That could not be further from the truth. We must never forget that the supreme authority in this country is Parliament, and that the job of Parliament is to legislate in the interests of the British people. When the legal process produces a result that is not in the interests of the British people, not only is this House well within its rights to overturn it; it must do so.

7.46 pm

**Dan Jarvis:** It is a pleasure to follow the shadow Minister. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken.

As I mentioned right at the beginning, the Bill is extremely narrow in its scope and intent, focusing solely on closing a loophole in the existing deprivation of citizenship process. As I outlined, the Supreme Court decided in a recent case that if an appeal against a deprivation decision is successful, or a deprivation of citizenship order is withdrawn, that initial order will have had no effect and the person will be considered as having continued to be British. That means that people who have been deprived of British citizenship will automatically regain that status before further avenues of appeal have been exhausted.

The Bill will therefore protect the UK from people who pose a threat to our national security by preventing those who have been deprived of British citizenship and are overseas from returning until all appeals have been determined. It will also prevent a person who has been deprived of citizenship on the grounds that it is conducive to the public good from seeking to undermine deprivation action while an appeal in their case remains ongoing by renouncing their other nationality and putting themselves in a position whereby a deprivation order would render them stateless. The Bill does not change any existing right of appeal or widen the reasons for which a person could be deprived of their citizenship. It is crucial that our world-class law enforcement and intelligence agencies have the necessary powers to protect the public and secure our borders.

Let me reflect briefly on the contributions made during the debate. I am very grateful to the Opposition Front Benchers for their support and their speeches. It is always my intention that national security should

never be a party political issue. That was the basis on which I approached it in opposition, and that is the basis on which I approach it in government. I am very grateful for the constructive and reasonable way in which they have presented their points today.

I am also grateful to the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart), for her contribution. She took the opportunity, as is absolutely her right, to call for wider reform, and she raised specific concerns about the process and about transparency. The Government believe that the measures in the Bill are necessary and proportionate, but I listened carefully to the points that she made about transparency. The Government believe that there is sufficient oversight and transparency of the use of the deprivation power. The Home Office publishes data in relation to the number of deprivation of citizenship orders, and the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration has the remit to review the power. The ICIBI has conducted independent reviews of the deprivation power, with reports published relatively recently, in 2018 and in 2024.

I also want to take the opportunity to further reassure the hon. Lady that deprivation decisions are made following careful consideration of advice, both from officials and from lawyers and, under this Government—I am sure it was the case under previous Governments as well—strictly in accordance with international law. Each case is assessed individually by the Home Secretary, and decisions to deprive, where it is conducive to the public good, are taken by the Home Secretary, and the Home Secretary alone. The power is used sparingly, it complies with the UN convention on the reduction of statelessness and it always comes with the right to appeal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Josh Simons) made a thoughtful speech, including about what citizenship means, and I know that the House will be grateful for the contribution that he made this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clapham and Brixton Hill (Bell Ribeiro-Addy) raised a number of specific concerns, and I want to do my best to respond to them. The deprivation of citizenship on conducive grounds is rightly reserved for those who pose a threat to the UK or whose conduct involves a very high harm. Deprivation on fraud grounds is for those who obtained their citizenship fraudulently, so were never entitled to it in the first place. Decisions are made following careful consideration of advice from officials and—in respect of conducive deprivations—lawyers, and in accordance with international law, including the UN convention on the reduction of statelessness. The Government take these matters very seriously, and I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that we have to ensure that we have the powers necessary to keep the public safe.

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** I hope the Minister understands the assurances I have been asking for. This will be the third time I have asked. I genuinely want to understand why someone who is such a danger to our public cannot be dealt with under other pieces of legislation. At the moment it seems that we cannot even stop them coming into the country because of the existing legislation. He also keeps saying that the Bill does not widen the situation under which people can be deprived of their citizenship, but it does; it does so on the basis that someone can win an appeal and then be told that they

[Bell Ribeiro-Addy]

are not going to be given their citizenship back because the Government have further rights of appeal. The Bill does widen that situation. We genuinely need those assurances and an understanding as to why such dangerous people cannot be dealt with under other pieces of legislation.

**Dan Jarvis:** I do not agree with my hon. Friend's second point. This Bill has been very carefully and narrowly drafted, and I do not think it does the things that she has said it does. As to why the Government would seek to use these powers, I hope she understands that we will do everything we possibly can—as I am sure the previous Government did—to keep the public safe and protect them from high-harm individuals such as extremists, terrorists, and serious and organised criminals, and that this Government, as was the case with the previous Government, consider that this is an appropriate, necessary and proportionate way in which to do that. I hope that the public and the House will understand why we are progressing in the way that we are.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer) made a very thoughtful speech. He has clearly thought about this matter long and hard, and he has done the House a great service with his contribution.

I want to reflect briefly on the contribution made by the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse). I enjoy debating these matters with him, and I am genuinely grateful for his contribution. He suggested at one point that he might be an old romantic. I couldn't possibly comment—but I could possibly say that he has advanced some interesting points. They are not points that the Government agree with, and I hope he does not mind me saying that they are not points that the majority of Members of this House agree with, but he has ensured that this debate has been richer than it would otherwise have been had he not made those contributions.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman acknowledges that the Government are acting in good faith in order to ensure that we are best placed to keep the country safe. I know that he is not satisfied with the measures that we have brought forward and does not agree with them. That is absolutely his right. I respect his right to make the case in the way that he has, but I would ask him briefly to consider an alternative scenario in which the Government of the day, regardless of their political party, did not put in place the necessary powers to keep the public safe. One can only imagine the criticism that any Government would face, were they not to do that.

**Kit Malthouse:** I can imagine that situation, but I have been an enthusiastic supporter of lots of powers to protect the public from people from whom the Minister cannot remove citizenship. For example, terrorism prevention and investigation measures, or TPIMs—previously control orders—were specifically designed to put restrictions on individuals who presented a danger to the country but from whom the Government could not remove citizenship. If those measures are good enough for those people, why are they not good enough for the people on whom the Minister is conferring second-class citizenship? He must see that this legislation

applies only to certain of our citizens, and that they are not the only ones who present a danger to this country.

**Dan Jarvis:** Again, I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution. I do not doubt that if he and I and others sat in a room and sought to design a system, we probably would not end up with the one that we have, but I hope he understands that, given the constraints on parliamentary time and the bandwidth of Government, we are seeking to go back to the position that we had a number of months ago—I know that he did not agree with it then—to ensure that we have the powers that we need so that we are best placed to respond in the circumstances that I have described.

I want briefly to come back to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), because I gave him an assurance that I would do so. I can say to him that a dual British-Irish national could be deprived of British citizenship and excluded by the Home Secretary. An Irish national who had been excluded from the UK would then require leave to enter. I hope that responds to his point.

This Bill, although short in length, will have an important impact on the safety of those in our nation. It will ensure that those who pose a threat to the safety and security of our country do not have their citizenship restored until all appeals have been determined. The safety and security of those in our country is the foundation on which everything else is built and, as I have remarked in this House before, for this Government nothing will matter more. With that, I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

### DEPRIVATION OF CITIZENSHIP ORDERS (EFFECT DURING APPEAL) BILL: PROGRAMME

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),*

That the following provisions shall apply to the Deprivation of Citizenship Orders (Effect during Appeal) Bill:

#### *Committal*

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

#### *Proceedings in Committee, on Consideration and on Third Reading*

(2) Proceedings in Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after their commencement.

(3) Any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee of the whole House.

(4) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee of the whole House, to any proceedings on Consideration or to proceedings on Third Reading.

#### *Other proceedings*

(5) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—  
(*Martin McCluskey.*)

*Question agreed to.*

## Rare Cancers Bill (Money)

*King's recommendation signified.*

7.59 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ashley Dalton):** I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Rare Cancers Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State, and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under or by virtue of any other Act out of money so provided.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur) for bringing forward this important Bill. The Government support it, and are committed to making a real difference for patients with rare cancers.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Just a quick one—I had hoped to speak to the Minister before she came to the Dispatch Box. In Northern Ireland, rare cancers account for a quarter of all cancer cases in both men and women. Will there be extra money set aside for Northern Ireland, where health is devolved, to deal with rare cancers? It is not just those who have rare cancers who have to deal with them; their families do, too. I ask that question of the Minister genuinely and respectfully.

**Ashley Dalton:** As the hon. Gentleman said, health is devolved. I am happy to write to him with the details of how we expect this private Member's Bill to be implemented by the devolved Governments.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

That the draft Marking of Retail Goods Regulations 2025, which were laid before this House on 5 June, be approved.—  
(*Martin McCluskey.*)

*The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 4.*

**Division No. 246]**

**[8.1 pm**

#### AYES

Abrahams, Debbie	Atkinson, Lewis
Adam, Shockat	Bailey, Mr Calvin
Ahmed, Dr Zubir	Bailey, Olivia
Akehurst, Luke	Baines, David
Aldridge, Dan	Baker, Alex
Alexander, rh Heidi	Baker, Richard
Al-Hassan, Sadik	Barker, Paula
Anderson, Callum	Barron, Lee
Anderson, Fleur	Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Baxter, Johanna
Arthur, Dr Scott	Beales, Danny
Asato, Jess	Beavers, Lorraine
Asser, James	Bell, Torsten
Athwal, Jas	Bennett, Alison

Betts, Mr Clive	Fleet, Natalie
Billington, Ms Polly	Foody, Emma
Blake, Olivia	Foster, Mr Paul
Bloore, Chris	Foxcroft, Vicky
Blundell, Mrs Elsie	Foy, Mary Kelly
Bonavia, Kevin	Furniss, Gill
Botterill, Jade	George, Andrew
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena	German, Gill
Brash, Mr Jonathan	Gilbert, Tracy
Brickell, Phil	Gittins, Becky
Buckley, Julia	Glendon, Mary
Burgon, Richard	Goldsborough, Ben
Burke, Maureen	Grady, John
Burton-Sampson, David	Greenwood, Lilian
Butler, Dawn	Griffith, Dame Nia
Byrne, rh Liam	Gwynne, Andrew ( <i>Proxy vote</i>
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	<i>cast by Chris Elmore)</i>
Campbell, Irene	Hack, Amanda
Campbell, Juliet	Hall, Sarah
Campbell-Savours, Markus	Hamilton, Fabian
Cane, Charlotte	Hamilton, Paulette
Carden, Dan	Harding, Monica
Carling, Sam	Hardy, Emma
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Hatton, Lloyd
Champion, Sarah	Hayes, Helen
Charters, Mr Luke ( <i>Proxy vote</i>	Hayes, Tom
<i>cast by Chris Elmore)</i>	Hazelgrove, Claire
Clark, Feryal	Healey, rh John
Coleman, Ben	Hendrick, Sir Mark ( <i>Proxy vote</i>
Collier, Jacob	<i>cast by Chris Elmore)</i>
Collinge, Lizzi	Hillier, Dame Meg
Collins, Tom	Hinchliff, Chris
Conlon, Liam	Hinder, Jonathan
Coombes, Sarah	Hopkins, Rachel
Cooper, Dr Beccy	Hughes, Claire
Costigan, Deirdre	Hume, Alison
Cox, Pam	Hurley, Patrick
Creagh, Mary	Hussain, Mr Adnan
Crichton, Torcuil	Hussain, Imran
Curtis, Chris	Ingham, Leigh
Daby, Janet	Irons, Natasha
Dakin, Sir Nicholas	Jameson, Sally
Dalton, Ashley	Jarvis, Dan
Darlington, Emily	Jermey, Terry
Davies, Jonathan	Jogee, Adam
Davies, Paul	Jones, rh Darren
Davies, Shaun	Jones, Gerald
Davies-Jones, Alex	Jones, Lillian
De Cordova, Marsha	Jones, Louise
Dean, Josh	Jones, Ruth
Dearden, Kate	Josan, Gurinder Singh
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Joseph, Sojan
Dickson, Jim	Juss, Warinder
Dixon, Anna	Kane, Chris
Dixon, Samantha	Kane, Mike
Dodds, rh Anneliese	Kaur, Satvir ( <i>Proxy vote cast</i>
Dowd, Peter	<i>by Chris Elmore)</i>
Downie, Graeme	Khan, Ayoub
Duncan-Jordan, Neil	Kirkham, Jayne
Eastwood, Sorcha	Kitchen, Gen
Edwards, Lauren	Kumar, Sonia
Edwards, Sarah	Kumaran, Uma
Elmore, Chris	Kyle, rh Peter
Eshalomi, Florence	Kyrke-Smith, Laura
Evans, Chris	Lamb, Peter
Fahnbulleh, Miatta	Lavery, Ian
Falconer, Mr Hamish	Law, Noah
Farnsworth, Linsey	Leishman, Brian
Farron, Tim	Lewin, Andrew
Fenton-Glynn, Josh	Lightwood, Simon
Ferguson, Mark	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Ferguson, Patricia	MacAlister, Josh



Macdonald, Alice  
 MacNae, Andy  
 Madders, Justin  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Martin, Amanda  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Mather, Keir  
 Mathew, Brian  
 Mayer, Alex  
 Maynard, Charlie  
 McAllister, Douglas  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McDougall, Blair  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McIntyre, Alex  
 McKee, Gordon  
 McNally, Frank  
 Miliband, rh Ed  
 Miller, Calum  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Mohamed, Abtisam  
 Mohamed, Iqbal  
 Moon, Perran  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Morris, Joe  
 Morrison, Mr Tom  
 Mullane, Margaret  
 Munt, Tessa  
 Murray, Chris  
 Murray, rh Ian (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Murray, Katrina  
 Myer, Luke  
 Naish, James  
 Naismith, Connor  
 Narayan, Kanishka  
 Nash, Pamela  
 Newbury, Josh  
 Niblett, Samantha  
 Norris, Alex  
 Norris, Dan (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Opher, Dr Simon  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Tristan  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Paffey, Darren  
 Patrick, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Perteghella, Manuela  
 Phillipson, rh Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, rh Lucy  
 Poynton, Gregor  
 Prinsley, Peter  
 Quigley, Mr Richard  
 Race, Steve  
 Ranger, Andrew  
 Reader, Mike  
 Reed, rh Steve  
 Reid, Joani  
 Rhodes, Martin  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Richards, Jake  
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny  
 Rigby, Lucy

Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Robertson, Dave  
 Roca, Tim  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Roome, Ian  
 Rushworth, Sam  
 Rutland, Tom  
 Sackman, Sarah  
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun  
 Savage, Dr Roz  
 Scrogham, Michelle  
 Sowards, Mark  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shanker, Baggy  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simons, Josh  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smart, Lisa  
 Smith, David  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Sarah  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Snell, Gareth  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Sollom, Ian  
 Stainbank, Euan  
 Stevenson, Kenneth  
 Stewart, Elaine  
 Stone, Will  
 Strathern, Alistair  
 Streeting, rh Wes  
 Strickland, Alan  
 Sullivan, Kirsteen  
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren  
 Swallow, Peter  
 Tami, rh Sir Mark  
 Tapp, Mike  
 Taylor, Alison  
 Taylor, David  
 Taylor, Rachel  
 Thomas, Fred  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thompson, Adam  
 Tidball, Dr Marie  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Toale, Jessica  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turmaine, Matt  
 Turner, Laurence  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twist, Liz  
 Uppal, Harpreet  
 Vaughan, Tony  
 Vince, Chris  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 Walker, Imogen  
 Ward, Chris  
 Ward, Melanie  
 Waugh, Paul  
 Webb, Chris  
 Welsh, Michelle  
 Western, Andrew  
 Western, Matt  
 Wheeler, Michael  
 White, Jo  
 White, Katie  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Williams, David  
 Witherden, Steve  
 Woodcock, Sean  
 Wrighting, Rosie

Wrigley, Martin  
 Yang, Yuan  
 Yemm, Steve  
 Young, Claire

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Martin McCluskey and**  
**Anna McMorrin**

## NOES

Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Easton, Alex  
 Lockhart, Carla  
 Shannon, Jim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Jim Allister and**  
**Sammy Wilson**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).*

## FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities etc.) (Amendment) Order 2025, which was laid before this House on 19 May, be approved.—(*Keir Mather.*)

*Question agreed to.*

## EDUCATION COMMITTEE

*Ordered,*

That Patrick Spencer be discharged from the Education Committee and Sir James Cleverly be added.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

## NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY (JOINT COMMITTEE)

*Ordered,*

That Sir Julian Lewis be discharged from the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy and Sir Gavin Williamson be added.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

## PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

*Ordered,*

That Richard Holden be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Sir Gavin Williamson be added.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

## COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

*Ordered,*

That Rebecca Paul be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Blake Stephenson be added.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

## PETITION

### Disability Support Cuts

8.17 pm

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on cuts to disability support, further to an online petition signed by more than 77,000 people.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that a 2% wealth tax on assets over £10 million could generate an additional £24 billion per year, considerably more than the £5 billion the government plans to save by cutting key financial support for disabled people.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take into account the requests of the petitioners and consider the resource benefits of wealth taxes as an alternative to cutting disability support.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

## Road Safety Powers: Parish and Town Councils

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Anna Turley.)*

8.18 pm

**Sam Rushworth** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Before I begin my speech, let me pay my respects to my constituent Curtis Davies, who was a resident of Shildon and worked for Durham police, who sadly died yesterday in difficult circumstances. I know that he will be missed by his colleagues in the police force and by his family. My thoughts and prayers are with them all.

Like many in this place, I spend a lot of my time knocking on doors and listening to residents. One thing that has never ceased to impress me about the people in Bishop Auckland is the way that they love their community and neighbourhoods, and the pride that people take in the little things such as the physical appearance and beauty of the local environment, but also the safety of our roads. I want to use this debate to highlight some examples of where people in villages and towns across my constituency are fed up and frustrated. They feel disempowered by the number of times they ask for simple changes to road safety to enhance their community, only to be knocked back by bureaucrats who apparently know better than the people living on those streets what their experience is.

**Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

**Mary Kelly Foy** (City of Durham) (Lab) *rose—*

**Sam Rushworth:** I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Chris Vince).

**Chris Vince:** I thank my hon. Friend for taking my intervention so soon, and apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy). I pay tribute to Roydon and Hastingwood speed watch for the work it does. One issue I come across when people in my constituency talk to me about road safety is that when they ask for changes to be made, the county council says, “There have been no fatalities; there have been no accidents on this stretch of road.” Surely we need to be proactive, not reactive, with these problems.

**Sam Rushworth:** I hear that same anecdote far too often for it not to be true. People are told, “Due to a lack of fatalities, we cannot intervene.” That is not how we risk assess. We do not wait for someone to die before we ascertain that there is a risk.

**Mary Kelly Foy:** Highway safety is something that I have been working on for a number of years, particularly with the communities of the A167 in Durham, Lowes Barn Bank, Toll House Road and Neville’s Cross. In particular, Shincliffe has 40% of all fatalities and road accidents in City of Durham. People have been told again and again that nothing can or will be done, despite the fact that other areas with fewer road accidents are seeing road improvements. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the biggest barriers to road improvements in County Durham is the arbitrary and rather baffling decisions of County Durham council highways department?

**Sam Rushworth:** I agree 100% with that assessment. It seems that it does not really matter who is in power; councillors do not seem to be listened to either. I think it is a problem for democracy that so many people are saying the same thing, only to be ignored over and over again, so I welcome that intervention. I am grateful that so many colleagues have attended this debate, which is testament to the frustrations we all feel. The experience that my hon. Friend expressed is probably one that we will hear several times. Indeed, I have deliberately kept my speech short so that I can take as many interventions—*[Interruption.]* I will give way.

**Deirdre Costigan** (Ealing Southall) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for inviting an intervention. In my constituency, road safety is a huge concern of local people, despite the fact that London boroughs have the power to set speed limits—indeed, most of Ealing Southall is a 20 mph zone. However, the council does not have the power to enforce the speed limit; only the Metropolitan police has that power. Does my hon. Friend agree it is important that we consider whether councils that already have the right to set speed limits should also have the power to enforce them?

**Sam Rushworth:** That is an excellent point that I had not considered, so I will tack it on to the end of my speech. I welcome that intervention. There will be a lot of interventions tonight, but I say to the Minister that perhaps we could have some sort of deal whereby if she gives in to my demands 30 minutes in, we will not take the debate to the full two and half hours that we could have.

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

**Sam Rushworth:** How could I not?

**Jim Shannon:** I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. We do not have parish councils in Northern Ireland, but councils have an important role. They are not the enforcers of road safety like the police, but they have an active role. It is clear that local knowledge—the thing the hon. Gentleman is referring to—is imperative when considering wide-ranging road safety issues. Does he agree that joined-up thinking between branches of Government is essential to improve safety and ensure that people power always wins?

**Sam Rushworth:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s point about joined-up thinking. I will make some brief progress in my speech, because at the heart of what I am asking for is for town and parish councils to be listened to. I meet them so often, and they are the most local level of government and the closest to people who live in those neighbourhoods. Time and again they ask for the same basic things and they are not listened to. I will give some examples.

The village of High Grange in my constituency has two 60 mph country lanes that run either side of it. I am speaking tonight on behalf of the children who ask, “Mam or dad, can I go across the road to the park?”, but whose parents do not feel safe letting them cross that 60 mph lane to get there. I speak also for the pensioners on the other side of the same village who want to get across the road to the allotments, but who do not feel safe crossing over.

**Mike Reader** (Northampton South) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Chris and Nicole in my constituency lost their daughter Beccy nearly 18 years ago. On losing her, they discovered a postcode lottery for bereavement services. Some police services provide them, but some do not. It is important that we discuss road safety measures, but I hope my hon. Friend will agree that it is also important that we end that lottery, so that every family who loses someone in a road traffic accident has the bereavement support they should get.

**Sam Rushworth:** It is difficult to disagree with that excellent intervention.

Another example is Howden-le-Wear, where Hargill Road comes down a fast lane. I spoke to a gentleman there recently who told me that he no longer feels safe going out in his electric scooter and going up the road, because of the speed at which traffic comes hurtling down the bank. People there have been asking for traffic enforcement measures, as was mentioned in earlier interventions.

**Linsey Farnsworth** (Amber Valley) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate, and we can see how many people this issue affects across the country. On speeding in our communities, does he agree with my sentiments, from my time as a borough councillor in Amber Valley for Kilburn, Denby, Holbrook and Horsley, about the fantastic work parish councils do through the speed watch scheme? That can be integral to ensuring that county councils or unitary councils listen and collect data, which can be so important when making changes in our local communities to speed limits and to important road safety measures.

**Sam Rushworth:** I welcome that intervention. Parish councillors do sterling work, and all who volunteer and give their time for speed watch schemes are making life that bit better for people in their communities. Nonetheless, people get frustrated when often that data is not taken where they want it to be taken.

In the village of Hamsterley in my constituency, the traffic through to Hamsterley forest on the weekend is often a cause of concern. Villagers there have asked if the village could be made a 20 mph zone, which sounds to me like a reasonable request. In fact, they have often asked me, “Why can’t we be more like Wales?” Welsh villages are allowed to be 20 mph zones, and my constituents get frustrated that they do not have that option.

**Dr Scott Arthur** (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): On that point, why should they be like Wales, when they could be like Edinburgh? Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to former councillor Lesley Hinds? One could never meet a more humble Labour councillor, but back in 2016, she rolled out Edinburgh’s city-wide 20 mile per hour zone. In 2022, independent peer-reviewed research showed that slight injuries had reduced by 37%, serious injuries had reduced by 33% and fatalities had reduced by 23%. Through the leadership of one person, lives had been saved. Does he agree that we should be using such measures right across the country?

**Sam Rushworth:** That important data gives force to my argument. We are not talking not about killing people’s joy but enhancing joy in their lives so that they feel safe to walk in the roads in their villages.

**Samantha Niblett** (South Derbyshire) (Lab): In South Derbyshire, we have created a network between my office and that of parish councils across the constituency. Several parish councils have raised the issue of road safety, from Repton all the way down to Overseal. They have carried out community speed watches, and made recommendations in a report about how we can make our roads safer, including by having a crossing right across the road from a school, improving safety on roads where haulage vehicles go up and down despite the fact that those roads are unsuitable, and using variable speed limits. Does my hon. Friend agree that those parish councillors are the best people to make recommendations about what should be carried out in their local communities?

**Sam Rushworth:** That is exactly the point I am making and I welcome my hon. Friend’s intervention.

**Matt Rodda** (Reading Central) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for raising this important matter. On a more serious note, I offer my deepest condolences to two people who lost their lives in a road accident in Reading recently, although I do not want to comment on that because it is under police investigation.

I commend my hon. Friend for the work that he is doing. Many smaller unitary local authorities, such as the borough council in my town, have a great deal of local knowledge, yet they are often held back because they are unable to enforce traffic offences, such as speeding, even when 20 mile per hour zones or other zones have been introduced. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) said, it would be wonderful if that power could be delegated to them rather than to the police, who are very busy?

**Sam Rushworth:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent intervention. I have mentioned High Grange and Hamsterley—I have only got to “H” on my list, so I had better move on. The residents in Coundon Gate, in my constituency, have to put up with 60 mph traffic driving past just 2 metres from their front windows, and they have asked for traffic calming.

**Leigh Ingham** (Stafford) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend deeply for securing this debate. The issue came up in the first visit that I made in my constituency, to Walton Hall academy, which is on a 60 mph stretch of road. Parents find it extremely stressful taking their children with special educational needs and disabilities to and from school. The young people there are campaigning to get the speed limit changed, but they are hitting brick walls with the difficulty in getting highways authorities to listen. Does my hon. Friend agree that community schools and young people should be supported by highways authorities and listened to on such matters?

**Sam Rushworth:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point about communities where there are schools. Toft Hill primary school, in my constituency, is on the A68, and children have to cross the road in difficult conditions—the school lost its lollipop person who had been helping the children to cross.

**David Smith** (North Northumberland) (Lab): My hon. Friend is being very generous with his time. As hon. Members have said, it is a testament to the importance



of the issue that we are all here this evening. The Minister can relax as on this occasion I will not talk about the A1—I will in future—but about the northern bypass in Morpeth, which has a 60 mph zone. In 2023, Labour party activists and the local parish council made a case to the county council that a safer crossing was necessary, but the issue has not moved on. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is local people, local parish councils and local town councils who understand their circumstances best, and that they should be listened to and given more power in this regard?

**Sam Rushworth:** On the matter of parish councils, I recently met members of Staindrop parish council, who have been asking for more than a decade to have two crossing points at the entrance and exit to their beautiful village, which is on the main road between Bishop Auckland and Barnard Castle. Traffic often does not drop its speed down to 30 mph. Pensioners in Staindrop have said that they feel put off from doing something as simple as crossing the road to attend a social function because of their fear of crossing that road. It is a travesty that Staindrop parish council can ask for the same thing over and over again, but the highways authorities just keep saying no.

**Noah Law** (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): As a proud Cornish MP, I am as strong an advocate as anyone for the role of parish and town councils. They have their eyes and ears on the ground, and understand where there is the most serious need for crossings, as my hon. Friend eloquently describes in his constituency. Does he agree that there is huge need for a crossing in Nansledan in my constituency, where the new Newquay strategic road has been built with little consideration for the flow of traffic coming into the village?

**Sam Rushworth:** I do not know if my hon. Friend needs a crossing in his constituency because I am not local to that area. But I will tell hon. Members who does know: his parish council and the people who live there. If that is what they are asking for, they should be listened to.

**Peter Swallow** (Bracknell) (Lab): My hon. Friend is being incredibly generous with his time. The point he is advancing is so important: this is not just about the safety of people, although that is really important. Just this week, we saw a horrible incident in my constituency where some geese were run over. That was a very traumatic incident for residents. Does he agree it is so vital that this Government set out a new national road safety strategy? Does he agree it is important that they listen to local voices from communities such as his and mine as they draw up that vital piece of work?

**Sam Rushworth:** We are all here and have all stayed late because we are the voices of the people we represent, and clearly they are all telling us the same thing. It falls to the Government to do something about the challenges we are raising tonight.

Let me quickly mention two or three other places, because I love my constituents, but they are jealous—I know that I will get grief if I neglect to mention places such as Fleet Street in Bishop Auckland, where there are just no road markings at a four-way stop and people do not know who to give way to. That is a regular source of concern for parents in the Cockton Hill area.

I will mention Stanley Crook and a lot of the hilltop villages where the traffic just does not want to slow down as people pursue their journey through residential areas. Let me also mention Kinninvie, where two years ago a car crashed into someone's dining room—the family was lucky not to be in the dining room at the time. That is an area where for donkey's years people have said it is a dangerous junction. People knew that, and eventually a serious accident happened.

**Amanda Hack** (North West Leicestershire) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this really important debate to the House. In my community there is an area called Griffydham, and residents there have been trying for years and years to have something happen to their local community. One of the interesting things is the benchmarks—local knowledge goes over and above those. Not a lot of the accidents get reported nowadays. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to look at local knowledge, which goes much further than reported accidents and incidents?

**Sam Rushworth:** That is an excellent point about local knowledge. I think back to High Grange, which I talked about, where only the local people understand the importance of the allotments and the park and the difficulty of crossing the road. Both those places are just outside the village, on the other side of the main road.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a testament to my hon. Friend's popularity that we are all here this evening supporting him on a really important issue. Whether it is Bambury Street in Sandford Hill, Newcastle Lane in Penkhull or Whieldon Road in Fenton, the local knowledge that he so rightly points to has come to me not via a parish council, because I have a very urban constituency, but through diligent and hard-working residents' associations. In urban constituencies, those often provide the very same function that my hon. Friend points out. When the Minister gets up and answers, perhaps we can encourage her to give proper consideration to the views of not only parish councils, but residents' associations in urban communities, which do so much for where they live.

**Sam Rushworth:** That is a fair point. Again, I pay tribute to all the people who serve at that level of government, particularly people who give their time freely to serve in residents' associations just to make life better for their neighbours and the people who live around them.

I will mention two more places before I move on. There is Chapel Lane in Evenwood, where residents often complain about speeding, as well as High Etherley. We have a bypass running through Bishop Auckland. A year ago, we had a new shopping area built on one side of it, and for a year people have been dangerously crossing the bypass from one side to the other. It is in the section 106 agreement that there is supposed to be a safe crossing point, but it seems to be the last thing on the developer's mind, with everything else coming first. Every week, people are taking risks as they cross over at that bypass; we have a petition out about that. Further up the bypass, lots of children cross the road at Bracks Farm.

**Alison Hume** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): My hon. Friend is being most generous with his time, and I thank him for securing this really important debate. There is a busy bridge on the A171 in my constituency, which is used by pupils in years 7 and 8 based at the Airy Hill site of Whitby School, as well as the parents and pupils who attend Airy Hill primary school and tourists photographing the steam trains that can be seen below. It is a very noisy and windy bridge with heavy road and foot traffic, and it is high above the estuary. Despite that, there are no zebra crossings or raised kerbs, and the speed limit is 40 mph. Understandably, local residents are really worried. They have tried to lower the speed limit to 30 mph, but North Yorkshire council is not interested, so they have raised a petition themselves. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is exactly why parish and town councils should be given road safety powers, including the ability to introduce speed limits?

**Sam Rushworth:** That is what I am calling for tonight: for parish and town councils to be able to decide the speed limits on the roads within their boundaries. They represent the voice of the people in those areas. I will move on from the tour of my constituency—although you are all welcome to visit some of these lovely villages sometime.

**Chris Vince:** By train.

**Sam Rushworth:** Any way you want to come.

For me, this started out as hearing one anecdote, and then I would hear another and another, until it became obvious that this is a serious issue. It is about not just fatalities—I accept that fatalities are low, thank goodness—but the quality of people's lives. It is about the fact that too many children are missing out on play, and that too many older people are missing out on social activities, because they do not feel safe crossing their roads.

I have looked at the regulations that these faceless bureaucrats are using when they so regularly say no to people, and it turns out that the Road Traffic Regulation Act came into effect in 1984. That is the year I was born, so it is as old as me, and it does not give powers to parish and town councils—they have no statutory role beyond advisory consultation.

**Josh Newbury** (Cannock Chase) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and echo the comments of other colleagues: he is being very generous with his time. I thank him for calling this debate and giving us the opportunity to debate the role of parish councils. It is something that we seldom do, but should do a lot more often.

In my constituency, an issue that is frequently raised with me in the context of road safety is that of parking on double yellow lines. In the face of completely absent enforcement, my local residents are always looking for creative solutions. In my home village of Norton Canes and the neighbouring village of Heath Hayes, both parish councils have asked our highways authority, Staffordshire county council, to allow them to pay for extra enforcement activity. That pragmatic solution was repeatedly refused by the previous Conservative administration. I am encouraging those parish councils to try again now that we have a new Reform administration, to see whether

the fresh thinking it keeps promising us will extend to parking enforcement. Does my hon. Friend agree that whether it is traffic calming, speeding or parking, our parish and town councils could play a much greater role in keeping their residents safe?

**Sam Rushworth:** I welcome my hon. Friend's extension of the debate to parking, which is also a road safety issue. I have lost track of how many times residents in the different villages and towns I represent have talked to me about ambulances that could not make their way up a street because there was no space given that people are not respecting traffic rules. That is just another way in which people feel that they do not have control over the very street they live on.

Parish and town councils operate under the Local Government Act 1972, and have no highway or transport powers unless they are explicitly delegated, so powers could be delegated to them. They can raise local issues, but cannot initiate or enforce any regulatory changes. As such, my asks of Government are simple: first, could we look at primary legislation to grant town and parish councils the power to set enforceable speed limits? If that is a step too far, could we at least provide stronger statutory consultative powers, so that they can force a review of speed limits, and stronger powers to appeal the bad decisions that get made and demand proper explanations for the number of times that the computer says no?

**Mark Sowards** (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): My hon. Friend has done tremendously well tonight, and he has been so generous with his time.

I am fortunate enough to represent two parish councils, one town council and numerous residents' groups. Across my constituency, I have got dozens of councillors in Gildersome, Drighlington and Morley who obviously have the expert knowledge—the street-by-street knowledge, and in some cases the house-by-house knowledge—to make these decisions for themselves. My hon. Friend agrees that those councils should have the power to change speed limits in their area, so perhaps he would like to comment on the mean average speed tests that are often used to restrict speeding limits on certain roads? Maybe when she sums up, the Minister would also like to comment on that issue. I am tired, as are my residents, of being told that the mean average speed is too low to change things, even though people on those roads know through their lived experience that the outliers are causing all the problems. Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale):** Order. Before we proceed, I think I am right in saying that every Member present who is likely to want to intervene has done so; well done. I would not wish hon. Members to believe that ordinarily they are likely to get away with the length of interventions that they have got away with tonight. I understand that this is an important issue, and that there are constituency matters that need to be raised and placed on the record, but do not take the lenience of the Chair for granted. Members should bear in mind, as one hon. Lady has not, that if they intervene, they are expected to stay till the end of the debate to hear the Minister's response.

**Sam Rushworth:** Thank you for your wisdom, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will move to the end of my speech.

I have a simple ask. It is about the power that we give, but it is also about funding. I recognise that sometimes the reason the answer is no is that decisions have to be taken, and I have two thoughts on that. First, could we look at ways to make the decision-making process less expensive? One way of doing so would simply be to trust local knowledge more than we do. If necessary, could we not also mandate that councils put aside more funding for this area? As we have heard from interventions, this is clearly and evidently one of the top issues that our constituents raise with us. Residents have a right to know that when they speak with a collective voice, that voice gets heard and respected at all levels of government, from this place down to their parish councils.

Councils are democratically elected, accountable and rooted in their communities. Residents' lived experience offers better long-term insight than one-off traffic monitoring snapshots. The current system prioritises administrative thresholds over genuine local need. The Government's commitment to localism and community empowerment should apply to road safety too, and I genuinely welcome their commitment to giving back control to the British people over many parts of their lives; this is another area where people are asking to have more control.

Before I finish, it would be remiss of me not to put one more road safety issue on record, having unsuccessfully bobbed through two lots of Transport questions and the spending review. That issue is the future of the A66—an important piece of national infrastructure—and that future is decided not by parish councils, but by the Treasury. I would be grateful to know the timeframe for getting a response on that, because the dualling of the A66 is uncertain. It is an important piece of national infrastructure for the north of England—for people crossing the Pennines from east to west. Dualling would reduce the time it takes to get to the Lake district and would mean far fewer road closures, which really impact on people's lives. There have also been far too many fatalities in the area. I wanted to steal those last few seconds to put that on the record. I thank Members for their time this evening.

8.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lilian Greenwood):** I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth) on securing this debate and on making such incredibly good use of the extra time we have had. I thank him for speaking so passionately about road safety. He is clearly a powerful advocate for his constituents. We really had a tour across the many villages and communities that he represents, and I enjoyed his efforts to namecheck them—every single one of them, I think.

I am pleased to be back here for the second Adjournment debate about road safety in less than a week. I am happy to be discussing this important issue again, not just because I am Minister for the future of roads—which should, of course, be a safer future—but because this issue matters to all of us. We, our families, our friends and our colleagues all use our roads, whether as drivers, riders, pedestrians, cyclists, or passengers in buses or taxis, and we all deserve the right to go on our journeys knowing that we will get home safely.

Unusually in an Adjournment debate, we heard from, I think, 19 Members this evening—not only from my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland but from my hon. Friends the Members for Harlow (Chris Vince), for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy) and for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and my hon. Friends the Members for Northampton South (Mike Reader), for Amber Valley (Linsey Farnsworth), for Edinburgh South West (Dr Arthur), for South Derbyshire (Samantha Niblett), for Reading Central (Matt Rodda), for Stafford (Leigh Ingham), for North Northumberland (David Smith), for St Austell and Newquay (Noah Law), for Bracknell (Peter Swallow), for North West Leicestershire (Amanda Hack), for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), for Scarborough and Whitby (Alison Hume), for Cannock Chase (Josh Newbury), and for Leeds South West and Morley (Mark Sowards). I hope very much that I have not missed anyone out.

We clearly all agree that no one should be killed or injured on our roads, and improving road safety is one of my Department's highest priorities. In 2023 there were 1,624 fatalities in reported road collisions in Great Britain, and more than 28,000 people were seriously injured. I have not worked out the numbers, but I suspect that means that in the time we have been debating this issue, someone will have been seriously injured somewhere on Great Britain's roads. Fatalities and injuries resulting from road collisions are simply unacceptable, and this Government are working hard to prevent such tragedies for all road users. Road safety is fundamental to everything that the Government stand for. Safer roads underpin our national missions: driving economic growth, enabling greener journeys through active travel, easing pressure on the national health service, and ensuring that everyone can travel safely. That is why my Department is developing our road safety strategy, the first in over a decade. We will set out more details in due course.

Members referred to the implementation of road safety at a local level. Local government is the main delivery body for road safety. Local authorities have a statutory duty under section 39 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to take steps both to reduce and to prevent collisions. It is for them to determine what measures are appropriate in individual cases, because they have the local knowledge—many Members mentioned the importance of that this evening—and it is right that they focus on the areas of highest risk, which may be places where tragic collisions have occurred. However, there is nothing to prevent them from implementing road safety measures elsewhere. Indeed, it is entirely right to consider what action can be taken to prevent collisions in the first place.

**Dr Arthur:** Although she lives in Edinburgh South West, my constituent Amanda wrote to me about a power that English councils do not have when it comes to road safety, namely the power to deal with pavement parking. Is that something that the Minister has considered?

**Lilian Greenwood:** I thank my hon. Friend for, once again, raising the issue of pavement parking. As I hope he knows, I am very keen for us to address that issue. It has been far too long since the 2020 consultation on the options, and I look forward to the opportunity to publish that consultation and set out the next steps in due course.



[Lilian Greenwood]

I hope that no local authority would claim that road measures can be considered only at locations where there have been fatalities, because that is simply not the case. I understand the importance of using resources effectively, where they are most needed, but the use of such measures should never be arbitrary. This Government are committed to the devolution of powers to local level, as we have shown through the publication of the English devolution White Paper, but it is important that the right powers be held at the right level. Responsibility for highways and traffic sits at county council or unitary level; that enables local authorities to deliver services in an efficient and consistent way across their areas.

We have no plans to devolve those powers further to parish councils, but it is nevertheless crucial that local highway authorities engage with local partners, including parish and town councils, when deciding on the measures to take, as they can play an absolutely critical role in identifying road safety issues in their area. They are often the first to hear about near misses or dangerous incidents, and act as a vital link with local residents' day-to-day experiences. As we have heard time and again this evening, local parish and town councils—as well as residents' associations, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central said, and indeed schoolchildren, parents and a wide range of community groups—have incredibly valuable local knowledge, and they need to be listened to and engaged with.

Numerous hon. Members have talked about the need for action to reduce speed, including by lowering speed limits, and the need to enforce speed limits through police action and the introduction of speed cameras. Hon. Members will know that the enforcement of road traffic law, and decisions on how available police resources are deployed, are the responsibility of chief constables and police and crime commissioners, taking into account the local problems and demands that they face. Local highway authorities have the power to set speed limits on their roads, and it is important that this is done in partnership with town and parish councils, and in consultation with the residents affected.

I was really sorry to hear that in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland, Durham county council has not responded to local calls for lower speed limits on the stretches of road that he mentioned. I urge him, the town and parish councils, and Durham county council to discuss this matter as a priority, and to try to find a way forward. As my hon. Friend described so vividly, dangerous roads have very real impacts on the lives of his constituents, especially children, older people and disabled people. This debate will send a clear message to Durham county council, and perhaps to other highway authorities, about the strength of feeling not only among his constituents, but in his local communities, about road safety issues, and about the need for highway authorities to be accountable to local residents for decisions that they take in fulfilling their duties.

Local authorities have a range of traffic management measures available to them to help improve safety in residential areas and outside schools, including pedestrian crossings, traffic-calming measures, school crossing patrols, and the introduction of a school street, where appropriate. Good street design can help improve road safety, and the

“Manual for Streets” is our key piece of street design guidance. It advocates for streets to be designed to support appropriate vehicle speeds from the outset. Let us build the right roads to encourage appropriate speeds, rather than having to deal with problems when they arise later. That will reduce the risk of collisions, and reduce the severity of collisions that do happen.

We expect local authorities to adopt the “Manual for Streets” when setting their own design standards, but that is ultimately a choice for them. We are working to update the manual to ensure that it is still relevant and enables those designing streets to do so in a way that contributes to sustainable, healthy and active communities. It is for local authorities to determine what measures are appropriate in individual cases, because they have local knowledge of their roads, but any authorities that wish to install schemes to improve safety have my Department's full backing. Obviously, they will want to make those decisions in consultation with local communities and the local police. I welcome the support expressed by so many hon. Members this evening, and agree that sharing local knowledge and working in partnership can be very helpful.

My Department gave councils updated guidance on setting 20 mph speed limits in March 2024, and reminded them to reserve the lower limits for appropriate locations, such as outside schools, with safety and local support at the heart of such decisions. I want to emphasise that we support 20 mph speed limits in the right places. As well as improving safety, they can enhance quality of life, the environment and the local economy, but 20 mph zones and limits are best considered on a road-by-road basis, based on the safety case, to ensure local consent, rather than as blanket measures. As I say, local councils will want to make decisions about local implementation in consultation with local communities and the local police. They know their roads best, and I simply cannot and should not dictate to them from Westminster.

While local authorities are free to make their own decisions about the speed limits on the roads in their care, provided they take account of the relevant legislation and guidance, they are rightly accountable to local people for those decisions. My hon. Friend and his constituents will rightly expect the county council not only to listen to their concerns, but to be accountable for the decisions it makes, whether it decides to install traffic measures or declines to do so, and I think that applies to all hon. Members who have made the powerful case for lower speed limits. The “safe system” approach to road safety acknowledges that even careful drivers can make mistakes, but no one should be killed or seriously injured as a result of a mistake, and we know that collisions at high speeds are much more likely to have tragic outcomes, which is why the argument holds for reducing speed limits in particular circumstances.

The Department will look at what we can do to support local authorities, and we stand ready to work with all those looking to improve road safety locally. My Department recognises the excellent work that parish and town councils do to improve the safety of local roads, including through their involvement with community speedwatch schemes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Amber Valley for highlighting that valuable volunteering. Police-run community speedwatch schemes enable local volunteers to work with the police and other agencies to address identified road policing

issues in their localities. Drivers who are detected speeding are sent letters, and the police may take further action if a driver is detected multiple times. Decisions on when to adopt community speedwatch schemes are operational matters for police and crime commissioners and chief constables, working in conjunction with their local policing plans.

The responsibility for keeping for our roads safe cannot fall solely to central or local government; all road users have a part to play, and they must all comply with road traffic law in the interests of their own safety and that of other road users. As set out in the highway code, the hierarchy of road users places those road users most at risk in the event of a collision right at the top of the hierarchy. The objective of the hierarchy of road users is not to give priority to pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders in every situation, but rather to ensure a more mutually respectful and considerate culture of safe and effective road use that benefits all users. This does not detract from the requirements for everyone to behave responsibly. There is both a legal and a moral duty for all road users to obey the law, both for safety and to create a culture of respect and consideration for

all road users. There are laws in place to ensure that unsafe and dangerous behaviour has no place on our roads and is dealt with appropriately, using the most effective sanctions, including educational interventions. Enforcement of the law is a matter for the police, who will decide on the evidence of each case whether an offence has been committed and the appropriate action to take.

I conclude by again thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland for securing this timely and important debate. As I said at the start, the Government treat road safety with the utmost seriousness, and we are committed to reducing the number of those killed and injured on our roads. My Department is developing our road safety strategy, which is vital. For too long, we have tolerated a lack of progress, and this Government are determined to act. I look forward to setting out more details in due course, as indeed we will on my hon. Friend's ambitions for the A66.

*Question put and agreed to.*

9.3 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

Monday 30 June 2025

[CAROLYN HARRIS *in the Chair*]

## Driven Grouse Shooting

4.30 pm

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 700036 relating to driven grouse shooting.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. As a member of the Petitions Committee, I have been asked to open this debate, and it is my duty to present the petition reasonably and fairly. After doing so, I will share other views on the issue of driven grouse shooting, particularly those from the rural communities where grouse shooting occurs.

I begin by thanking the various organisations and individuals I met ahead of the debate, including petitioner Chris Packham, Wild Justice, the British Association for Conservation and Shooting, the Countryside Alliance, the League Against Cruel Sports and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds—I see many of them in the Public Gallery. I should also mention the many people who spoke to me about shooting and this debate during my recent visit to the Royal Highland Show. I also thank the amazing team at the Petitions Committee for setting up many of my meetings and discussions.

I know this issue generates strong opinions on both sides of the debate. The petition states that,

“driven grouse shooting is bad for people, the environment and wildlife...grouse shooting is economically insignificant when contrasted with other real and potential uses of the UK’s extensive uplands.”

The petition seeks to ban driven grouse shooting. I note that it is the third petition by the creators, who are concerned about wildlife persecution, environmental impact and ethical issues. I question their position and will probe the validity of many of their conclusions, but I thank them for bringing the issue forward for debate.

The petition received 104,000 signatures, which reflects the strength of feeling that some people have on this issue. However, I must present alternative views and a fuller picture of the reality of grouse shooting. Although the petition is welcome, its proponents unfortunately do not seem to have a real grasp of the activity or a clear understanding of the benefits it brings to communities up and down Scotland, and indeed the whole United Kingdom. I do not doubt the petitioners’ sincere and good intentions, but I note that, regrettably, there is often a great deal of misinformation surrounding grouse shooting.

Having spoken to many organisations that hold different views, and having canvassed a wide range of opinions, I am pleased to have the opportunity to set the record straight by sharing the realities of grouse shooting. I do so as the Member of Parliament for the Scottish Borders. Mine is one of the country’s more rural and remote constituencies, and grouse shooting occurs there and provides great benefit to our economy, environment and communities, as it does in many other areas the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

Let us consider the economic realities of grouse shooting. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation has conducted research showing that grouse shooting contributes £23 million in gross value added to the Scottish economy. The wider shooting sector is worth £3.3 billion to the UK economy every year. The economic benefits of grouse shooting are crystal clear. All that funding contributes to local economies, particularly in rural and remote areas where jobs are already scarcer.

Activists in favour of a ban claim that the industry has small economic value. They should tell that to those managing the land who have a job because of the industry. They should tell that to those running the hotels and bed and breakfasts that are sustained by it. They should tell that to those who run the small shops and stores that get by because of it. They should tell that to those working in the tourism industry that grouse shooting supports. They should tell that to the extended network of restaurants and bars that survive because of it. And they should tell that to the United Kingdom Treasury, which receives the tax revenues generated by the workers who pay income tax and by the businesses that pay myriad taxes because of the industry.

The economic reality of grouse shooting is clear: it provides jobs, supports small business and sustains the rural economy. Let us look at the facts: grouse moors in England and Scotland alone support around 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs. That figure focuses on people directly employed in the industry, not the vast numbers of jobs that rely on it in some other way.

In my discussions with various groups, including the League Against Cruel Sports, it is accepted that a ban would mean job losses, but how would those jobs be replaced? Activists seeking a ban must answer that question, and not with fantasy and fanciful wishes of jobs that will likely never come to fruition. They must outline clearly what happens to those workers. How many would lose their jobs if a ban went ahead? What happens to those small businesses, and how many would shut up shop? What happens to rural economies? How many people would be forced to leave rural areas in search of a better livelihood if a ban occurred, and what would that mean for rural areas already suffering from depopulation?

I put some of those questions directly to the activists in several meetings with them prior to this debate. The responses were, to put it mildly, not encouraging. Vague and hazy ideas that there should be a more sustainable economic model, without any proposals for what should be done, have no merit. Some activists, although not all, have a brazen disregard for these jobs and businesses, and for the economic damage a ban would cause. Some even brazenly state that the money should be spent on other rural activities, as if the state could or should direct exactly how to use private land, or how citizens should spend their own money. Those are not serious suggestions, and we should not treat them as such.

As the Countryside Alliance and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation have made clear, grouse shooting underpins rural economies, jobs and land management—without it, investment and employment would decline sharply. I know that a small number of people argue that the economic benefits should be ignored because of grouse shooting’s supposed cost to the environment. I value jobs, businesses, livelihoods, economic growth and tax revenue too highly to agree

[John Lamont]

with that argument. But for a moment, I will play along and set aside those important considerations. Even doing so, ignoring all of the industry's economic benefits, the position of activists in favour of a ban is fundamentally flawed.

It is the contention of activists that grouse shooting somehow harms the environment, the countryside and biodiversity. They are fundamentally and conclusively wrong. This sector does not harm the environment; it protects it. It does not damage the countryside; it maintains it. It does not risk biodiversity; it enhances it. Studies have shown that grouse shooting scores highly not just on the economics but on environmental sustainability grounds too.

Before I return to the positives for wildlife and biodiversity, let us look at the benefits for the land itself—for maintaining the countryside's beauty. The Country Land and Business Association has shown that grouse moor owners in England spend £52.5 million every year on moorland management. Grouse moors account for up to 1.8 million hectares of the uplands. All of that land is preserved only by the hard work of land managers, and they do so for the benefit of not only themselves but the country—for the benefit of our environment and countryside.

BASC cites research that shows that grouse moors have restored 27,000 hectares of bare peat in the last 20 years. Those moors store between 11% and 35% of England's total peatland carbon, but emit only between 1% and 5% of total peatland carbon emissions. The evidence shows that grouse shooting lowers carbon emissions and helps to tackle climate change.

As I heard in many discussions, grouse shooting happens on UK uplands, which are home to 75% of the world's remaining heather moorland. Heather is an emblem of Scotland and Britain. It is a great symbol of our country's natural beauty. These heather moorlands have been described as Britain's rainforest. They are a natural feature that we should cherish and celebrate, but they are not maintained by some stroke of luck. They are protected only by the efforts of land managers and the practice of grouse shooting.

Organisations told me that grouse mainly eat the young shoots, seeds and flowers of heather, so moors must be managed properly or they could be eroded. The Country Land and Business Association says that the managing of moors for grouse maintains heather-dominated habitat better than other uses of the land. As it rightly pointed out, if gamekeepers were not present to preserve the land, it would have to be protected at significant cost to taxpayers.

As I have mentioned, grouse shooting is important not only for the maintenance of the land itself, but for the wildlife that inhabits it. It is estimated that two thirds of shooting activity controls pests and predators to protect wildlife, and around half manages woodlands, covers crops and puts out feed for songbirds over the winter months. The CLA has also demonstrated that in areas where grouse moor management has ceased, such as Dartmoor, populations of ground-nesting birds have reduced.

A study of upland breeding birds in parts of England and Scotland found that densities of golden plover and lapwing were up to five times greater on managed

grouse moors compared with unmanaged moorland. Curlew doubled in number on managed moorland, with redshank also found to be more abundant. Hen harrier numbers increased seven years in a row, hitting a record high in 2023. The BASC also says that predator control of foxes, corvids and mustelids protects many threatened nesting species, such as curlew and lapwing. These birds are five times more common on managed grouse moors than elsewhere in the uplands. Where predator control is stopped, their numbers crash.

Our countryside would not only be less beautiful without grouse shooting; it would be much quieter and less biodiverse. We would lose the idyllic sounds that captivate so many birdwatchers and bring enjoyment to everyone who spends time in the British countryside. Despite claims to the contrary, grouse shooting protects a wide range of biodiversity and wildlife, in part because the industry is regulated effectively and because crimes are prosecuted.

I know that some groups, including the RSPB, would like to see tougher punishments for offenders. That is worth exploring for people who break the law, but that does not apply to the overwhelming majority of gamekeepers and land managers. Shooting organisations have a zero-tolerance policy on unlawful acts, and anyone convicted will face a large fine or potentially jail time. The issue is devolved, meaning it is the responsibility of the Scottish Government in Scotland. They have introduced a licensing system for the shooting of red grouse, which has its flaws but works adequately in other respects.

I conclude by reiterating what the consequences would be if the grouse shooting industry were banned: jobs and businesses at risk, rural economies ruined, lower tax revenue for public services, increased land management costs for taxpayers, more wildlife at risk and less biodiversity, the environment harmed and the countryside damaged. That is why, despite what a small number of activists would like to do, I oppose a ban on this crucial sector.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Carolyn Harris (in the Chair):** Order. I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to speak.

4.43 pm

**Rishi Sunak** (Richmond and Northallerton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont). I last spoke on this subject in this very place back in 2016. A lot has changed in the last nine years—notably, 10 Chief Secretaries to the Treasury, seven Chancellors and, indeed, five Prime Ministers—but one thing that has not changed is my view on grouse shooting.

For full disclosure, I should say that I have never shot grouse, pheasant or any other type of bird. That is not a request for invitations, but the fact that I do not shoot grouse has not changed my absolute commitment to grouse shooting. Why? Because grouse shooting is fundamental to hard-working people in constituencies such as mine. It is a part of our local social fabric, and it is one of the world's great conservation success stories.

Advocates of a ban often think that the only people who will suffer are rich men in plus fours with port-faced complexions, but as I said back in 2016, nothing could

be further from the truth. The real victims of any ban would not be caricatures, but ordinary working people: the farmer's wife who goes beating at the weekend so that her family can make ends meet; the young man able to earn a living, in the community that he loves, as an apprentice to a gamekeeper; or the local publican welcoming shooting parties with cold ales and warm pies. Let us be absolutely clear that those who support a ban on grouse shooting should only do so if they are prepared to look those people in the eye and explain to them why their livelihoods are worth sacrificing.

Some question shooting's contribution to the rural economy. As we heard, the petition itself uses the words "economically insignificant", but there is nothing economically insignificant about 2,500 direct jobs and tens of millions of pounds paid out in wages. If anything, those numbers are an underestimate. From the Yorkshire B&B welcoming ramblers drawn to our area by the moors' summer blossom, to the workshops of Westley Richards in Birmingham or Purdey in London, whose handmade shotguns are the finest in the world, the ripples of employment that grouse shooting creates reach every corner of our country.

Grouse shooting makes an invaluable contribution not only to the rural economy, but to our rural landscape. A tendency among some conservationists is to act as though farmers and gamekeepers are somehow trespassing on Britain's landscape, but without their hands repairing our dry stone walls or their dairy cows keeping the fields lush, the rural beauty of our countryside would soon fade. Heather moorland, as we heard, is rarer than rainforest, and 75% of it is found right here in Britain. It is a national treasure.

From Heathcliff to Holmes, the moors have become a proud part of our cultural heritage, and no one has set out a viable, privately funded alternative vision for those uplands. Without the million pounds of private income spent by moor owners on land management every single week, that proud heritage would come to an end. Overgrazed by sheep, used to grow pine timber, or abandoned to bracken, the moors as we know and love them would be lost. That would be a disaster for British wildlife.

Academic study after academic study shows that endangered wading birds such as curlew and lapwing are much more likely to breed successfully on managed grouse moors. The vast majority of rare merlin, the UK's smallest bird of prey, are found on grouse moors. A recent study by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust in Northumberland reveals the devastating ecological impact on plover, snipe, lapwing and curlew populations of the withdrawal of predator control carried out by moor owners.

There has been some discussion about the state of the hen harrier population, and although numbers reached a record high in 2023, more can and must be done, but we must be clear: a Britain without grouse shooting is not a Britain where the hen harrier would thrive. Research carried out on the Scottish grouse moor of Langholm and published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology* found that when gamekeeping ceased, the hen harrier population plummeted. Without gamekeepers to control the predators, they multiply and hen harriers pay the price. That is why the participation of 1 million acres of grouse moor in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs hen harrier brood management scheme is the

right approach, and why gamekeepers supporting diversionary feeding is the right approach. Conservation will succeed only through partnership with the grouse-shooting industry and not through its destruction.

**Joe Morris** (Hexham) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is making an interesting speech. I was drawn to his comments about Scotland where, as this matter is devolved, there is a degree of responsibility—vicarious liability—on landowners. To crack down on wildlife crime, does he share my desire to see the Minister explore the potential of introducing more vicarious responsibility for landowners across the UK, so that if wildlife crime is taking place on managed estates, it can be properly prosecuted and the landowners ultimately held responsible?

**Rishi Sunak:** As I said, conservation will succeed only if it is done in partnership with the grouse-shooting industry. Let me be clear: I have zero tolerance for raptor persecution. It is rightly condemned by all shooting organisations and is, as the hon. Gentleman says, a crime. Those suspected of illegal activities should face the full consequences of their actions. There is absolutely no place for them in this sector.

I turn next to the petition's comments on the environment. The tightly controlled rotational burning used to manage heather moorland may seem odd to some, but without it, our moors would not regenerate as well or support the rich wildlife and biodiversity that they do; the risk of wildfires would also increase. I have found no clear scientific consensus to support a blanket ban. In addition, contrary to some claims, there is no specific evidence that links burning to flooding. Far from seeking to create drier moors, managers appreciate that wetter is better, and have blocked thousands of grips in order to ensure that peat on their landscapes is rewetted.

As for the myth that grouse shooting is somehow unregulated, I would be amused to hear what the gamekeepers in my constituency think of that. There are scores of regulations, codes and licences, and even Acts of Parliament, to comply with, covering every aspect of the sector, including the possession and use of firearms, the use of lead ammunition, the length of the season, the methods of predator control, heather burning, the use of medicated grit, and the protection of wild birds.

Banning grouse shooting would undermine the balanced ecosystem of our countryside. It would leave not only many families but our landscape and wildlife poorer. A ban on grouse shooting would be a policy with no winners. It would be a case of a small section of urban Britain imposing its views on rural Britain, and that is not right. The failure to appreciate other people's views and interests will not bring our country together. I urge the Government to stand firm and reject these ill thought-through calls for a ban. Instead, we should all work together to build on this quintessentially British success story.

4.51 pm

**Sam Rushworth** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I have supported animal welfare since I was a teenager, when I first visited the Redwings horse sanctuary in Norfolk, where I learned about battery farming. At college, I set up an animal welfare group, and I used to work for an animal welfare charity. I care about the welfare of all animals and birds, including grouse.



[*Sam Rushworth*]

I have no interest in shooting grouse. I believe—although some may challenge me on this—that I represent England's largest grouse moors, in Teesdale and Weardale. I have never shot an animal in my life. I have shot a gun—during a short period in Canada, I greatly enjoyed target shooting—but I am not interested in grouse shooting. That does not mean we should ban it.

I am here as a Labour MP to represent my constituents. My first priority will always be the jobs and livelihoods of the people I represent. At a conservative estimate, 500 jobs in the Bishop Auckland constituency—in Teesdale and Weardale—rely on revenues from grouse shooting, including the gamekeepers, those who run gun shops, provide hospitality during shoots, maintain dry stone walls, look after the lodges and train dogs, and the young people for whom being a beater is a great way to earn a seasonal wage. I am here to speak for them. As the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), noted earlier, I really find it insulting when these people's wages are talked about as “economically insignificant”. Others may consider it economically insignificant in the context of the national economy, but if someone is doing a job that their dad did before them and their grandfather did before him, if they grew up on that land and that is the job they want to do, their livelihood is not economically insignificant; it is what puts food on their table.

To talk about conservation, I recently had the pleasure of attending an event called Let's Learn Moor with primary school children from my constituency. It was a wonderful day out, and I really enjoyed it. The children learned about the conservation of peat bogs, as well as all the various fantastic birds and wildlife that we have. Anyone can come to Teesdale and Weardale and see it for themselves; they will find no other place in the country where they can stand and within an hour observe curlews, lapwings and oystercatchers flying past. Those birds are there because they are preserved by predator control.

While I do not shoot grouse and never would, I have got up with friends at 4 am and gone out to the most remarkable and spectacular lek to see the black grouse that come together to the same spot every year to find their mate. We should be doing more to encourage eco-tourism in my part of the world, so that more people can enjoy the wonderful wildlife that we have because we live in a managed landscape.

At Let's Learn Moor, the children met the Bishop Auckland fire brigade, who had come up to the top of the moor to demonstrate how they put out a moorland fire. They had a pump down in the river, and the children had a wonderful time spraying a firehose, which nearly hit us. I asked the firefighters about the method for managing and putting out moorland fires, and they said, “Well, the first thing we do is call the gamekeepers. They're the experts at managing the fires, and they are normally first on the scene.” A local gamekeeper talked to me about his responsibility to manage not only predators but the land around him. He talked about his experiences moving on campers, including one occasion when he discovered people who had created a circle of stones and lit a fire; he moved them on to camp in a local pub's garden.

To echo the point made by the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton about regulation, the gamekeepers also talked about how carefully they must tread when they come across foolish tourists who did not learn the countryside code in school. They told me, “If there is one allegation against us that we have been in any way aggressive, they will whip our guns away straightaway, because it is so tightly regulated.” They did not deny that there is occasional bad practice, and they were as disgusted as me by the criminality that sometimes occurs on the moorland, but the point is that it is criminality; we already have laws against such practices. Perhaps we need to look at how we enforce those laws; we do not necessarily need to create a whole new set.

Of course there are questions about how we manage the environment, and how we stop criminality and animal cruelty, but simply banning a sport that people have engaged in for generations will not solve those problems. It is vital that we keep the money flowing into our community. If we lost that revenue, we would lose jobs, and we would even lose primary schools, which would have to close. We are already seeing far too many families leaving the tops of the dales because of the lack of work. We would also lose the wildlife; it is not there by chance. With respect to those who signed the petition, and with a heartfelt understanding of their motives, I have to oppose it today.

4.58 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): As instructed by you, Mrs Harris, I will restrict my comments only to the impacts of grouse shooting on Thirsk and Malton, due to my role on the Front Bench. I am very keen to speak in this debate, as I have lived in the area my whole life, and grouse shooting is hugely important there. I also declare an interest in that I have been grouse shooting once, although not very successfully.

My biggest concern right now for Thirsk and Malton is that it is a tinderbox, as its geography and landscape pose a risk of wildfire. Clearly, that is largely because of the exceptionally dry weather that we have had over recent weeks and months. I am also concerned that the policies pursued by Natural England are exacerbating the problem.

I am keen to speak because, having read the petition and its claims, I think the 400 people in my constituency who signed it have been misled. The petition describes driven grouse shooting as

“bad for people, the environment and wildlife”,

and bad for the economy—I want to talk about that in the context of Thirsk and Malton. The petition states that “grouse shooting is economically insignificant when contrasted with other...uses”,

but it does not set out what those other uses are. The only ones I could find to replace the industry of grouse shooting were perhaps wind farms, forestation or sheep farming. My dad was a sheep farmer, and there is plenty of sheep farming in Thirsk and Malton. It is not particularly prosperous and I cannot imagine that the revenue attached to it would make up for the revenue loss if grouse shooting ended. With wind farms and forestation, a completely different cohort of people would potentially get employment from those uses, but it would be nothing like the extent to which my constituency benefits from grouse shooting today.

Hundreds of people in my constituency are directly employed in the grouse shooting industry and the jobs and businesses connected to it. Others have mentioned the same. I will mention one or two of my highest profile hostelrys: the Star at Harome, somewhere very close to my heart; the Black Swan at Helmsley; the Talbot at Malton; the Owl at Hawnby; and the Feversham Arms at Church Houses. Those beautiful hostelrys in a beautiful landscape very much contribute to the attractions of tourism in Thirsk and Malton. Many people in this House and people I meet all around the country have visited.

There are also the connected shops, such as Carters in Helmsley, and the caterers, the beaters—which my constituency neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), mentioned—the loaders and the picker-uppers. Not only do all these people get an income from grouse shooting, but the industry builds a community in our location and in communities around it. That is hugely important, and a mixture of people are present in the sector. I have beautiful moorland, including in Hawnby, Bransdale, Farndale, Snilesworth and Bilsdale—I am very proud of those areas and have visited a number of times.

So I do not believe that grouse shooting is bad for those people in my constituency—far from it. I also do not believe that it is “bad...for the environment”. What would be bad for the environment is a serious wildfire. We saw a very serious wildfire at Saddleworth in 2018. It was unmanaged locations that led to that wildfire, which affected 5 million people who were breathing in things like lead and cadmium that were released in it. Dozens of people passed away early because of that wildfire and its effect on air quality. The peat in those locations has been irreparably damaged.

Let me read a comment from a parliamentary briefing last year on wildfires. It explained that

“older heather burns with greater intensity”,

and that to prevent wildfires

“vegetation management must be conducted continuously”.

That is why Saddleworth ran out of control, and that is why there was a serious fire on the edge of my constituency at Fylingdales in 2003. That was the only area of moorland that was not being managed, and a fire happened in that location.

Peat is so important in carbon sequestration, but much of the carbon was released because of the wildfires. We saw on our TV screens recently the horrific wildfires in Los Angeles that destroyed properties and businesses and, of course, caused deaths. That was a result of negligence by the local authorities. I believe the policies being pursued by Natural England are a deliberate attempt to close down things like grouse shooting in my constituency and those of others.

There are potential risks for the Peak district. A report stated that there was

“the frightening potential of fire... reaching extremes both in the rate of spread and flame lengths far beyond the capacity of control”

of the fire and rescue service. The report continued:

“Little can be done to control the topography of the area or the increasingly fire-supportive weather, but fuel loading can be addressed.”

But that is not being addressed and it will get worse—that is my point. I think that this is an ideological position being taken by our regulator.

In terms of the benefits to wildlife, again, the petition states that grouse shooting is “bad...for wildlife”. Not at all: after grouse shooting ended in the Berwyn special protected area, the population of curlews dropped by 79% and the population of golden plovers dropped by 90%, but the population of corvids, such as crows and the like—which can, of course, be very destructive to wildlife—increased by 600%.

I am very concerned about the position that Natural England has taken. It is very important that the Government make sure that Natural England does the right thing, because there are many other measures that Natural England are considering that would further undermine grouse shooting in Thirsk and Malton. For example, Natural England is consulting on changing the definition of deep peat. Currently, if deep peat is 40 cm or more, burning cannot be used to control the fuel load. Natural England is considering a consultation on reducing that figure to 30 cm. That would mean that the vast majority of the fuel load on the North York moors would not be able to be controlled by burning.

Natural England's solution is mowing, of course. Could mowing be a potential solution? The Scottish Parliament hearing on this issue with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service warned that mowing excess vegetation can

“leave a dry layer that actually encourages the spread of fire”.

However, winter burning

“is by far the most effective because it removes a fuel in its entirety”.

But Natural England has banned winter burning, which is causing the increased fuel load.

We can add that to other issues, such as the withdrawal of general licenses for vermin control and the withdrawal of general licenses for the release of game birds in special protection areas, in terms of that burning. There is also a consultation now on raising the bar for getting a shotgun licence. That would mean that many people would not be able to get a shotgun licence, which would reduce the number of people participating in grouse shooting in areas such as Thirsk and Malton. If we add all these different things up, there is a clear picture: in my view, it is a back-door attempt to end grouse shooting across the country, not least in Thirsk and Malton.

5.7 pm

**Olivia Blake** (Sheffield Hallam) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship today, Mrs Harris, and I thank all the Members who have spoken in the debate so far. It is fair to say that I will take a slightly different approach on this issue.

I am very proud to have a very active community when it comes to people contacting me, particularly about nature. Six hundred and thirty-five of my constituents signed this petition, which is the highest number of signatories for any constituency in the country. That stems from a deep concern about management practices that affect our community, where we have several grouse moors that are managed.

Grouse shooting has a profound environmental and ecological significance. It is a pastime rooted in privilege and exclusion, which inflicts immense harms on our

[*Olivia Blake*]

uplands, our wildlife and our communities. It is hard to imagine that it has any place in a modern, fair and environmentally responsible Britain. I saw on one website that £7,000 a day is how much some estates charge for this excursion.

I have been out and about with gamekeepers in my constituency. They have put to me all these arguments and after many hours of debate, we agreed to disagree. I understand some of the points that colleagues have been making, but I will set out exactly why I think grouse shooting is harmful and requires more regulation.

I am really concerned that grouse shooting is seen as a harmless countryside tradition or a nostalgic relic of rural life. It is a highly commercialised industry in which vast tracts of our uplands are intensively managed not for biodiversity or for the public good, but to produce unnaturally large numbers of one bird species, the red grouse, for the gun. In Scotland, there are vicarious responsibilities and a licensing scheme, and I wonder whether the Minister has a view on those.

To achieve such an unnatural level of grouse, landowners routinely undertake practices that are environmentally destructive and ecologically reckless. They include the widespread burning of heather in moorlands, as we have heard; the draining of some peatlands; and—I am sure no responsible landowner or land manager allows it—the illegal persecution of birds of prey, including many protected species, such as the hen harrier, for which I am the species champion, the golden eagle, the buzzard and the peregrine falcon.

According to the RSPB, the majority of confirmed illegal killings of birds of prey in the past 10 years were linked to land managed for pheasant, partridge or grouse shooting, and RSPB figures show that at least one bird of prey is illegally killed or injured every four days in the UK. Given how precious these species are to our biodiversity, that is a shocking statistic.

The petition was signed by 635 of my constituents. The Moorland Association's website states that just 700 people are directly employed in grouse moor management. I recognise that, as others have said, there are spin-out commercial opportunities. However, given how vast the contribution is—I think somebody mentioned £52 million earlier—if I were a beater, I might be unionising to take more of that profit home to my family.

The environmental consequences are well documented and grave. Burning heather damages fragile peat bogs, which are among the most vital carbon stores in the country. This degradation means that, instead of being locked away, carbon cannot be stored effectively, which accelerates climate change. The poor condition of our peat was recognised by the last Government. They brought in the peatlands strategy, which I welcomed but felt did not go far enough.

Burning heather heightens flood risks for downstream communities by stripping the land of its natural ability to hold water. I invite anyone to go to a moorland, pick up some sphagnum moss and give it good old squeeze—the water drips out of it, showing how much of a sponge it is. It stores water in our uplands, which is so important. I am very privileged to represent a city with so many hills and rivers, and downstream flooding in our region

is very important. We want our peatlands to be restored so that that water is held upland, and this practice is holding that back.

We also want to ensure that our landscapes are not impoverished, stripped of biodiversity and managed for a single commercial interest.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I congratulate the hon. Lady on being a hen harrier parliamentary champion; I am the puffin parliamentary champion, so we have something in common. She talks about somebody other than landowners managing biodiversity rather in these landscapes. Who would that be, who would pay for it and how much would it cost?

**Olivia Blake:** Those are very good questions, and there are a number of private resources that we could attend to. The Environmental Audit Committee did work on nature capital in the last Parliament, and I think it will this year be publishing a report on it, which am excited to see. For restoration practices, carbon credits are another option. There are also some great landowners who are doing the right thing, whether we are talking about water companies that lease land to grouse moors, which is the case in some places; our national trusts and similar bodies; or the RSPB itself. Smaller-scale land parcels are now even being bought up by organisations such as the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust, which are trying to put nature at their heart.

The Government have been open and quick to the game on heather burning, and I welcome their recent consultation on the current ban on deep peat burning, which I get a lot of correspondence about. When the burning is happening, because of the direction of the wind, it comes down the valleys into my constituency. There are moorlands in my constituency, but the majority of people live downwind. It is causing real discomfort for my constituents who have health problems, whether asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or lung cancer. All those people have contacted me about the challenges they face with their breathing.

**Mr Angus MacDonald** (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD): As we speak, there is a massive fire south of Inverness. All around that fire are the gamekeepers in that area. It is they who are controlling that fire, but they do not own that land. The heather has been allowed to grow long, lank and uncontrolled. Does the hon. Lady agree that gamekeepers play an important role in stopping fires on moorlands?

**Olivia Blake:** It is interesting, because what we get depends on who we speak to, which shows there is space for more research. I have spoken to ecologists and specialists who say there is no further risk with the leggy kind of heather than without it, and that the damage done by so-called cold burns is significant, so that is a complicated issue. We have to think about it in the round. We need to communicate to people not to use barbecues or throw away cigarettes when they go on walks—all those simple things. We will face more wildfires as a result of climate change, so we cannot see this issue separately.

It is not only nature that suffers. The economic case made by those who defend grouse shooting simply does not stand up to scrutiny. While a handful of large estates and private shooting syndicates profit, rural communities would benefit far more from land uses that serve not just



a privileged few but the wider community, such as nature-based tourism, habitat restoration, sustainable farming and community-led projects. Our uplands belong to us and should work in the public interest.

At the heart of this debate is the question of land, power and inequality. Just 1% of the population owns over half the land in England, and nowhere is that feudal pattern more evident than in our uplands, where vast moorlands remain in the hands of a privileged minority, often propped up by many taxpayer subsidies. That is why I want to see the House back a new community right to buy when it comes to nature. In Sheffield, a large campaign—which includes the great Bob Berzins, an expert in this area—has sprung up to tackle these issues. Giving local people and communities the power to take poorly managed land into collective ownership would be a transformative step. It would restore landscapes for nature, climate and people while creating jobs and opportunities rooted in sustainability and fairness. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 legislated for a community right to buy, setting an example that this House can follow, or at least consider.

I have been involved in community-led rewilding projects to plant sphagnum moss. I see the transformation they have made and, compared with other such projects I have seen, those communities are the real pioneers of getting the work done, seeing what works and learning from it. We could be doing much more to engage with the communities that are getting on with the work of restoring our moorlands.

The public appetite for reform is growing. Conservation charities, environmental scientists, rural communities and tens of thousands of campaigners are calling on this destructive, outdated industry to halt. Scotland has already taken decisive steps to regulate grouse moor management; England cannot afford to fall behind. We have before us a rare opportunity to reimagine our uplands as thriving, biodiverse landscapes; to restore carbon-rich peatlands, reduce flood risks and create rural jobs rooted in sustainability and nature recovery, not ecological harm; and to make these places not private playgrounds but shared natural treasures for the benefit of all.

Driven grouse shooting is a relic of a bygone age. Its environmental damage, ethical failures and economic myths are indefensible in the 21st century. It is time for the House to show leadership, listen to the evidence and empower communities to put our climate, our wildlife and our rural economies first, and consign this practice to history.

5.19 pm

**Mr Angus MacDonald** (Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire) (LD): Rural Britain, and particularly remote Scotland, is in crisis. The young are moving to the cities, the schools are closing, healthcare is being centralised and the cost of living is far higher than in the conurbations. Soon, our glens will be populated only by incoming retirees.

I took my townie friend, a senior politician, along the beautiful 30-mile single-track road along the south side of Loch Ness. The road winds through a patchwork quilt of well-managed heather moorland. It is lined with well-kept cottages, pubs and village halls. As we drove, I pointed out where I had stayed as a teenager, grouse beating one glorious August. I explained to my companion the extraordinary social role that shooting plays there.

There were 50 folk from three generations together, many the descendants of those who have gathered there for the same purpose for two centuries. Back then, as no doubt today, the chat was great. We set off in a convoy of locally bought Land Rovers, ready to walk a dozen miles across the hill, with the beaters' spaniels dashing back and forth in front of us. Interspersed along the long line were the gamekeepers: men and women from various estates nearby. Fit and strong, they are the pillars of the local community. They serve in the volunteer fire service, they run the village hall, and their spouses and partners staff the medical centre and pub. Without their children, the local primary school would close.

The keepers are not in well-paid jobs. They earn a tenth of the income of a certain celebrity TV presenter who spends his time vilifying them. They do it for the love of the countryside, the wildlife, and the traditions of the land from which they hail. They know where the curlews nest, can identify a golden plover from 500 yards, and know how to restore a collapsed wall or lay a hedge. They keep the mink, rats, crows and other vermin under control. If they did not, our precious wildlife population would collapse. The founder of Curlew Action says that conservationists must choose between gamekeepers with curlew, or no gamekeepers with no curlew.

Yes, there are a few unscrupulous keepers who, egged on by grouse-greedy lairds, kill raptors, but raptor deaths are at an all-time low, and there are bad eggs in every profession, as we MPs know only too well. The owners of the moors could take their money elsewhere, and buy yachts, or chalets in the Alps. Instead, they choose to pour money into our area for the love of grouse. Their passion results in good jobs in remote areas, and lots of spin-off economic benefits for caterers, fencers, diggers, drivers, gamekeepers and so on. Grouse moor activities also play an important role in reducing loneliness and mental health in rural areas.

In the last 15 years, the big buyers of moors have been those wanting to conduct carbon offsetting by rewilding the land: conservation charities, corporates and wealthy individuals, almost invariably receiving massive Government rewilding grants, paid for by the unknowing taxpayer. Invariably, this involves the issuing of P45s and the loss of housing for the gamekeepers, some of whose fathers and grandfathers lived and worked on that same property.

If we love our moorland, if we want to see our wildlife thrive, and if we strive for the economic viability of remote areas and good local jobs, we must keep grouse shooting going. Do not let urban MPs once more hammer us rural people without knowing the awful consequences. I conclude with a little ditty:

"No more the keeper tracks the hill,  
His shotgun cold, his bothy still.  
The ghillie's rod, the shepherd's dog,  
Lie idle in the creeping fog.

The red deer fall in bloody ranks,  
Not for food, nor sport, nor thanks,  
But culled like vermin, cast away,  
So saplings might have room to sway.

No flight of grouse along the scree,  
Just silence now, for every tree.  
There is no healing of the glen,  
When land forgets the touch of men.

[*Mr Angus MacDonald*]

The crofter's roof caves in with rain;  
The keeper's track turns wild again.  
The pub is shut, the school is bare—  
What future grows when none live there?

So mark this truth in storm and soil:  
This land must live by native toil.  
Let birch and beaver find their place—  
But not at the cost of the Highland race.”

5.24 pm

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I follow the tradition set by a number of Members by declaring that I am a resolutely suburban Member of Parliament. There are no grouse moors in Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner, although there is a significant number of members of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak) made reference to the work of Purdey in manufacturing traditional British weapons; Holland & Holland has a base in my constituency and also makes a significant contribution, as both an employer and a creator of opportunities for young people locally. I place on the record my thanks to the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Countryside Alliance for their work to ensure that the Members who spoke in the debate were widely briefed on all the issues raised by the e-petition.

Like the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Northallerton, I have never shot a grouse. I have never shot a game bird of any kind, although I have enjoyed the opportunity in my constituency and elsewhere to shoot clay pigeons—I have always felt that the degree of harm involved is fairly minimal—but like many of my constituents I have a great interest in nature and biodiversity. My constituency is home to a number of significant reserves on the edge of London, including important locations for migratory species, such as the lakes at Harefield, and other significant habitats that, like grouse moors, were created largely by the influence of human beings but are incredibly important for the conservation of nature and biodiversity.

Habitats such as chalk streams throw up a similar set of issues. Environments that have been created by human hand for leisure and the enjoyment of the natural environment are also incredibly significant for the maintenance of the environment, for the preservation of species, some of which are at significant risk, and for the work we are doing as a country to tackle climate change, which a number of Members mentioned. This debate is about not simply the narrow point of what happens on our grouse moors, but the bigger picture of how we, as humankind, exercise our responsibility to be effective stewards of nature.

The comparison between heather moorland and chalk streams was made in one of the briefings, and I want to draw that comparison again, simply because of the striking fact that 75% of all heather moorland is here in the United Kingdom and 85% of all the world's chalk streams are here in England as well. People's hobbies

help to maintain both of those habitats: grouse shooting provides the economic infrastructure that maintains heather moorland and allows it to continue to act as a carbon sink, which makes such an enormous contribution to the UK's efforts to tackle climate change, and fishing contributes economically to the maintenance of chalk streams, which are a vital environmental asset.

In the debates on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which is now in the other place for consideration, a great deal of time and effort was devoted by the Government—I applaud them for considering the issue to be a high priority—as well as by Opposition parties and some Government Back Benchers, to the use of planning gain to enhance the environment, to ensure that the impact of planning legislation on natural habitats is minimised—at least one Member mentioned that—and to ensure that, where possible, it makes a contribution to maintaining them.

We also spent a good deal of time in our consideration of the Renters' Rights Bill on issues such as people's ability to access accommodation that is supported by not just grouse shooting but other kinds of game shooting, fishing and various types of countryside activities. The many BASC members in my constituency—most of whom are probably more on the side of the ratcatchers than the grouse shooters—see those activities as being an important part of the infrastructure of our country.

In the debate on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, with the proposal for swift bricks, we considered the impact that human measures can have on species such as swifts, and the impact of building and development on bird species' ability to access food that is critical to maintaining successful breeding populations. For all Members—even for those of us who are in the suburbs, much as we cherish our green spaces—it emphasised the need to recognise that one of the characteristics of our country that people value is its beautiful countryside. It is not there by accident. Much of it depends on the effective management by human beings of habitats such as grouse moors. None of that would be taking place were it not for the fact that there is a sporting and shooting infrastructure behind it, which brings the resource forward and means that this environment is conserved for the benefit of us all.

Whether it is the biodiversity net gain from our grouse moors, the effective management that reduces the harm caused by wildfires, or the wider contribution that the species supported by that environment make to all kinds of other birds that are not part of the grouse-shooting fraternity, but are none the less incredibly important to the wider biodiversity of our country, it is clear that grouse shooting makes a valuable contribution and is worth our time and attention. Given that the Government clearly hint in their statement that they have no interest in banning grouse shooting, they must recognise that we should make appropriate policies that support our economy in supporting our environment, and vice versa.

Members from across the country, from my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), to the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth), to myself, speaking on behalf of the suburbs, recognise the value that grouse shooting contributes to our country and environment. We want to ensure that the Government get the clear message that what is outlined in this petition is not a helpful way to proceed if we want to conserve our environment, our bird species, and our biodiversity for future generations.

5.32 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I thank the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) for setting the scene so well. He set out the landscape and introduced all the issues, and all Members who have contributed have, by and large, comprehended the importance of grouse shooting.

I declare an interest as I am a member of BASC, the Countryside Alliance Ireland, Sport Ireland and the Ulster Farmers Union. All four of those, along with the NFU, support grouse shooting. It was important to put that on record, in case anyone thought I was being biased. The reason I joined those organisations is because they represent my views. All those bodies have a clearly-stated opinion on grouse shooting; it is an opinion that I hold to as well.

I enjoy country sports, although, to be truthful, because of an incredibly busy schedule, I only attend shoots twice a year—maybe once a year. Every bird or rabbit I shoot—the number of animals goes down as my age goes up—finds its way to the table as dinner, and that is a fact. There is no wastage, as far as I am concerned. I see the bird or rabbit to table, and that is something I can endorse. I recall that when she was First Minister, my party colleague who is now Baroness Foster of the other place informed me one day that she enjoyed pheasant, so after some of my endeavours at pheasant shooting I would leave them hanging from her door at the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont. She would take them home and serve her family—farm to table was never as quick.

Many people contribute to and input into grouse shooting—I will enlarge on that later in my speech—and that is its importance. For the record, we own a small farm, but my mum and dad had nothing when they started off. I think my dad had the wheel of a cart when he started out in life. He did of course manage to buy a farm, but it was not given to him. He was not one of the landed gentry or one of the privileged; he worked hard for every pound that he had, along with my mum. Through their endeavour, they got the farm that we have today. On that farm, our contribution is 3,500 trees that we planted and that have now reached maturity. There are two duck ponds, the hedgerows have been retained and the raptors—the birds of prey—have a place. All those things were done because we understand the balance of nature and how we can contribute, making sure it is done right. I walked across the fields after silage cutting about four weeks ago, and I have never seen as many songbirds in my life on our land as I saw this time. Is that a contribution from someone who loves the land, or from someone who does not know about it? I shall let Members make their own decision.

I want to mention the Glenwherry shoot, which is the only grouse shoot in Northern Ireland. It is sponsored by BASC and the landowner. It is a success, but why is that? To start with, Glenwherry had no more than about 10 grouse, but it built that up. As others have said, the magpies, the crows, the greybacks, the foxes and the rats—all the predators—were controlled. It was gamekeepered, and the heath and moorland was burnt in a controlled burning, so that it could regenerate and produce the heather for the young birds and the grouse. Today, that is a successful grouse shoot. Why is it successful? Because grouse shooters know how to do it. They know how to

deliver a successful grouse shoot. The lapwings and curlews also gathered momentum as a result. They have a place to breed every year because of the efforts of the gamekeeper and the landowner—the efforts of those who put money into the grouse shooting to make it a success.

I have never shot a grouse—never in my life—but I know that the principles of countryside management are in place and therefore sustainability is key. The shooting season begins on 12 August, which is referred to as the glorious 12th. I will celebrate a much more glorious 12th in two weeks' time in Northern Ireland—we will not be shooting any grouse, but doing something slightly different. The season finishes on 30 November in Northern Ireland and on 10 December on the GB mainland.

Grouse are prized by chefs and those who eat game. The first birds of the season are rushed to restaurants here in London and elsewhere across the United Kingdom. Nearly 100% of grouse shot will be food for the table. There is no wastage—no shooting for the sake of a number. The birds are used to feed people throughout the United Kingdom. We need to have an honest discussion about what grouse shooting entails. I mean not the skill of shooting straight—though I probably need a lot of lessons in that—but the year-long hard slog that it takes to manage the environment to protect the habitat of the grouse.

Seventy-five per cent of the world's heather moorland is found in Britain, and we have a custodial responsibility to look after it. Who looks after it? The gamekeepers, the grouse shooters and those who own the land. Many have described heather moorland as our rainforests here in the United Kingdom. Up to 1.8 million hectares of uplands are managed as grouse moors, and a study of upland breeding birds in parts of England and Scotland found that the densities of golden plover and lapwing were five times greater on managed grouse moors compared with unmanaged moorland, as has been mentioned. Curlew have doubled on managed moorland and redshank are also more abundant, because of grouse shooting, predator control and management.

This will be of interest to you, Mrs Harris, as a Member who represents a constituency in Wales, and hopefully to everyone. In the Berwyn range, an upland area of Wales that lost management for grouse shooting, surveys showed a dramatic decline in upland breeding of waders between 1983 to 1985 and 2002. Overall, the abundance of all breeding waders declined by 80%. There is the evidential base—it is all about evidence, is it not? The evidence points to the fact that grouse moor management, alongside shooting organisations, landowners and predator control, leads to more grouse and more waders. Surely, that has to be good.

The equivalent of more than 33,000 cars' worth of carbon emissions is being removed from the atmosphere each year because of the environmental work of grouse moor estates in the north of England, and grouse moor management has restored some 27,000 hectares of bare peat in the last 20 years. Again, why are people doing this? Because they want to retain the land. Our grouse moors are our rainforests here in the United Kingdom—they are what we are trying to retain. Let us give credit to those who do that, rather than having those who do not understand it, or who do not respect those people, pass silly comments.



[Jim Shannon]

Time prevents me from continuing to outline the vast array of benefits, but I want to outline the financial benefits of shooting. Grouse moor owners in England spend more than £52.5 million on moor management, whereas other land uses in the uplands, such as farming and forestry, depend on Government subsidy. Indeed, businesses associated with grouse shooting benefit by some £15.2 million every year. We cannot ignore the contribution, the jobs and the money that goes into the economy. Grouse moors in England and Scotland support around 3,000 full-time jobs. Country sports tourism, including grouse shooting, generates £155 million annually for the economy in Scotland—the very place that the hon. Member for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire represents; he understands the commitment, as others do. With around 970,000 bed-nights purchased each year by domestic and international tourists, the benefits of this carefully curated aspect of country sports are clear.

I conclude by returning to my first point. Grouse are eaten and used, not wasted. No benefit to the environment or economy from grouse shooting is wasted. That is why I could not agree to a ban on this vital part of our countryside management. I hope that the House recognises—I believe it does—the good that comes from grouse shooting. Hopefully it will be portrayed as such in all the magazines and perhaps even on TV.

5.43 pm

**Greg Smith** (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. Like the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), I draw the House's attention to the fact that I, like many hundreds of my constituents, am a member of both the Countryside Alliance and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, and I have been for many years, pre-dating my election in 2019. Likewise, I draw attention to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, largely from the previous Parliament.

It is a huge pleasure to speak in this debate. Mid Buckinghamshire does not have grouse moors, but shooting is important to us locally. From conversations with many of my constituents who shoot, I know that they travel to shoot grouse in Scotland, North Yorkshire and other moors around the country. Equipment—ammunition, cartridges and so on—will be purchased in our superb gun shops, such as the Oxford Gun Company, which, despite its name, is actually in the village of Oakley in Buckinghamshire, and that directly supports our local economy, too. I want to place on the record my firm support for grouse shooting in principle, not only as a traditional sporting pursuit, but as an activity that delivers measurable environmental, social and economic value to our countryside.

I will address the heart of the matter: the moorlands themselves. Over 75% of the world's heather moorland is found in Britain. As the hon. Member for Strangford said, this unique landscape is our equivalent of a rainforest: fragile, irreplaceable and internationally important. These are not wild, untouched places; they are shaped and safeguarded by generations of active management, much of which is centred around grouse shooting.

Opponents of grouse shooting often speak of the uplands as if they are best left alone, but the science and the lived experience of those who work this land tell a

different story. Controlled heather burning, rotational grazing and predator control are not just practices for the benefit of grouse but the very tools with which we maintain habitat for countless other species. Ground-nesting birds such as curlew, lapwing and golden plover, all of which are red listed for conservation concern, are between three and five times more abundant on managed grouse moors than on unmanaged land.

Moreover, grouse moor management is vital in the fight against wildfires. Controlled cool burns remove the tinder-dry heather that fuels devastating wildfires, which in recent years have destroyed vast swathes of peatland and released hundreds of thousands of tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere. The Government's own figures show a sharp rise in wildfire incidents in 2025, with 48 reported by spring alone. Managed moors act as fire breaks. Unmanaged ones become kindling.

Some have raised concerns about moor burning and peatland drainage, but again the evidence shows that modern grouse moor managers are leading the charge in peat restoration. In the last decade, they have blocked nearly 3,000km of outdated agricultural drains and restored over 27,000 hectares of bare peat. Those actions actively sequester carbon, improve water quality and reduce downstream flood risk.

Let us not forget the human element. Grouse shooting underpins fragile rural economies. Across England and Scotland, it supports around 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs and injects over £52 million into moorland management annually. Hospitality businesses, equipment suppliers, game dealers and transport firms all benefit, often in communities where few other industries operate outside the tourist season. Socially, the benefits are also clear. Thousands of people participate in grouse shooting each year. It brings communities together, sustains rural traditions and keeps local schools, pubs and shops viable in areas that might otherwise face depopulation and decline.

What of the hen harrier, the emblem of those who seek to see grouse shooting banned? In 2023, a record number of hen harrier chicks fledged, the majority on managed grouse moors. That is not an accident, but the product of targeted conservation partnerships, predator control and habitat stewardship. BASC and others are funding brood management, habitat creation and even southern reintroduction efforts. Gamekeepers are not the enemy of the hen harrier; they are its strongest ally in the uplands.

Let me be clear: wildlife crime, including raptor persecution, is abhorrent and must be stamped out. We enjoy the red kites above Buckinghamshire, and I have yet to meet anyone who would even think of trying to harm one of those beautiful birds. Anyone who seeks to do so should be brought to justice.

**Olivia Blake:** I just feel that the hon. Gentleman is putting his head in the sand. Yes, there are more fledglings, but does he know what happened to them?

**Greg Smith:** The evidence is very clear that populations are up. I think all those who oppose grouse shooting, and who wish to see this petition as the gold standard, really should look at the evidence of the overall numbers in this country, which are up.

To return to the point about raptor persecution, this crime is not systemic; it is the work of a lawbreaking minority, and shooting organisations have rightly adopted a zero-tolerance approach. Anyone convicted should face the full force of the law.

**Edward Morello** (West Dorset) (LD): The hon. Gentleman has red kites in his constituency, but we have sea eagles on the south coast. They have recently been reintroduced but sadly there have been cases of them being poisoned. Given its rural nature, I was somewhat surprised that my constituency of West Dorset had one of the highest numbers of signatories to the petition. I know the point has already been made about the need for legislation to protect the environment, but if people had more confidence in rural police prosecuting criminals who attack sea eagles, red kites or other wildlife, might not the PR battle for grouse shooting be a little easier to win?

**Greg Smith:** There are different pictures in different parts of the country when it comes to prosecution. I am very lucky in Buckinghamshire to have Thames Valley police, which takes this incredibly seriously—particularly its rural crime taskforce, which does a lot of good work in this area. However, I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that the picture across the country is mixed, as in any walk of life, and that some forces need to do much better.

To ban grouse shooting would be to impoverish our uplands environmentally, economically and socially. This debate is not simply about sport, but about the stewardship of some of the most iconic landscapes in Britain. Grouse shooting is not the problem. It is a key part of the solution. As this debate has shown this afternoon, with voices not just from the official Opposition, but from the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and the DUP quite clearly setting out the case for grouse shooting on all of those fronts, I think it is pretty clear where we stand.

5.51 pm

**Sarah Dyke** (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mrs Harris. I thank the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) for leading this important debate. I also thank the 348 petitioners in my constituency.

The red grouse is a unique wild bird, native to the moorland areas of the UK, but it is under threat. Challenges such as habitat loss, disease, predation and climate change act together to suppress population recovery. Driven and walked grouse shooting have been a tradition in the UK for over 100 years, and it is important to recognise the benefits that well managed, sustainable shooting and moor management bring. It is an important part of the rural economy, providing both direct and indirect employment opportunities.

In England, grouse moor management creates 42,500 working days a year and is responsible for 1,500 full-time posts, particularly in remote areas where employment opportunities are limited. It generates at least £23.3 million annually for the rural economy. Grouse shooting also represents an important cultural pastime and is part of upland heritage. It supports land and habitat management and benefits biodiversity. However, that does not mean the practice is immune from illegal activity, as we have

heard—particularly the persecution of birds of prey such as hen harriers, golden eagles and other raptors. That is why today's debate is so important. It enables us to discuss the benefits and the actions that can be taken to ensure grouse shooting can continue, how it can benefit nature and continue to play a vital role in supporting the rural economy, and, alongside all this, how a robust framework can be put in place to deter illegal practices and increase accountability.

Historically, red grouse lived in the moorlands of south-west England, but their population suffered and they are now considered extinct in the region, with the last bird sighted around 2005. It is imperative that we ensure the red grouse does not disappear from our uplands as well. It must be recognised that land managers have a huge responsibility in managing grouse populations. We must also be cognisant of the worrying reports of serious crimes against birds of prey.

We know it is illegal to kill, injure or take a wild bird of prey in the UK, but between 2009 and 2023, the RSPB recorded 1,529 confirmed incidents of persecution—the equivalent of one bird every four days. Rare species such as goshawks, peregrine falcons and hen harriers are frequently killed and their populations impacted, yet a worrying lack of prosecutions for such crimes means that the number of confirmed and suspected hen harrier persecution incidents has increased, with 102 recorded between 2020 and 2024. This has some stakeholders, including the RSPB, to call for the introduction of a licensing system for driven grouse moors like that introduced in Scotland in 2024.

The Liberal Democrats are clear that grouse shooting should be carried out with the necessary code of practice in place to prevent crimes against birds of prey, and we are clear that land managers and upland farmers play a significant role in protecting nature and preserving biodiversity by providing habitats for diverse wildlife such as curlew, lapwings and golden plovers. The UK is responsible for 75% of the world's heather moorland, and evidence suggests that the reason why the UK has largely retained its heather moorland is the presence of management for grouse shooting. More than 60% of England's upland sites of special scientific interest are in managed grouse moors.

Moorlands are also home to one of our most important natural habitats—peatland. Right hon. and hon. Members will know that I am very passionate about protection of our peatlands. In fact, later this week, my Horticultural Peat (Prohibition of Sale) Bill is due to have its Second Reading. Our peatlands are globally rare ecosystems, making up less than 3% of the Earth's surface. They are also natural resource assets for climate mitigation and adaption, so preserving peatlands is crucial if the Government are to hit net zero and environmental targets. Degraded and damaged peatlands have the opposite effect: they become a net source of emissions and their ability to act as a natural defence to climate change is hampered.

Somerset is the last place in England where active peat extraction still takes place; indeed, some extraction licences will be in place until 2042. That undermines the fantastic peat restoration work undertaken by organisations such as the Somerset Wildlife Trust. Shockingly, 10% of Somerset's carbon emissions now come from degraded peat. It is estimated that, across uplands and lowlands,

[Sarah Dyke]

an enormous 3,200 million tonnes of carbon are stored in peatlands, representing England's largest terrestrial carbon stores.

There is no doubt that protecting and restoring nature is an important tool in achieving net zero. If we continue to work against nature, our hopes of achieving our targets will just end up being warm words. Studies have shown that burning peatland contributes to the current poor condition of many upland SSSIs, special areas of conservation and special protection areas. That is why we must ensure that parties work together to ensure that grouse shooting is carried out sustainably, with the best-practice models being in place to prevent destruction of unique habitats.

The Government have taken some action, such as the 2021 prohibition on burning vegetation on peat more than 40 cm deep inside protected sites. It was recently announced that that ban will be extended, and defining deep peat as anything deeper than 30 cm will ensure that an extra 146,000 hectares are protected. It is vital that the regulations are firmly in place, as they create a best-practice framework, they must be upheld and enforced. There have been 632 records of burnings reported to the RSPB, which believes that a quarter may be in breach of the regulations, but there have been only two prosecutions under the Heather and Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2021, with small fines handed out. That is clearly not enough of a deterrent to protect our precious peatlands.

Land managers and upland farmers know that they must work together to balance and enhance our precious environment, but these areas also provide grazing space for sheep, as they have done for hundreds of years, and they are central to the viability of upland farming. That is why the Liberal Democrats are concerned about the Government's lack of support for upland farmers, who manage land and produce quality food in some of the toughest conditions. Under the previous Conservative Government, hill farmers' incomes dropped by 41% in just five years, and last year upland farmers received only 8% of sustainable farming incentive funding, despite uplands occupying 15% of England's area.

The Liberal Democrats want to see a greater commitment from the Government to supporting sustainable farming practices and our upland farmers and communities. The family farm tax, the decision to abruptly close the SFI scheme and the reduction of the farming budget in the recent spending review are all terribly short-sighted and will make it harder to achieve both environmental and food security goals. They will also force many farmers out of business. As we have heard, farmers are the guardians of our beautiful countryside. That is why the Liberal Democrats want to support them with a £1 billion boost to the farming budget.

It is important that we provide farmers and landowners with the support they need to fulfil their role as guardians of the countryside. Grouse shooting should be carried out sustainably. It plays an important role in preventing the destruction of unique species and habitats such as peatlands, and it prevents the illegal persecution of birds of prey. Stakeholders must work together to ensure a balanced and long-term future on the moorlands of which we can be proud. To achieve that, appropriate regulations must be enforced, and our rural communities must be empowered.

6.1 pm

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) for introducing this important debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee, and I thank the more than 104,000 signatories to the petition.

Let me be absolutely clear with the many petitioners and other interested parties watching this debate: it is not my view that grouse shooting should be banned. I hope that over the course of my remarks it will become clear why that is my view and, indeed, the view of the Conservative party.

We must begin by recognising that grouse moorland is not a natural habitat. Just as the charm of the British countryside is managed by farmers, grouse moorland is managed by gamekeepers, farmers, estates and shooting syndicates that use it. If grouse shooting were banned, the moorland would not be as it is today. I worked as a rural practice surveyor before entering this place, and I advised and was involved in many moorland restoration projects—as well as spending many a Saturday when I was a young lad beating on grouse moors to earn a small wage—so I know the economic, social, environmental and ecological importance of grouse shooting to our uplands.

Banning grouse shooting would have significant ramifications. Across the UK, 1.8 million hectares of moorland are specifically used for grouse shooting, and they account for about 75% of the world's supply of this remarkable habitat. Moorland is, in effect, unique to these islands, and we should be proud and protective of it. Red grouse, the species most commonly used in shooting, is also unique to these islands.

It is worth pausing to note that grouse shooting does not involve the specific rearing and release of birds. Grouse shoots use wild populations of birds that are carefully managed to create the numbers needed to prevent endangerment. The fact that grouse management straddles the line between true animal husbandry and wild hunting is precisely why the industry has such ecological and environmental benefits. The activity drives economic incentives to invest in the upkeep of grouse populations, manage their habitat for other species and provide significant environmental benefits.

Just as the careful management of heather benefits grouse, so it benefits other species, such as lapwing, curlew, golden plover and the rare merlin, as many hon. and right hon. Members have pointed out. Such protected species rely on good, healthy heather for food and shelter, and without proper management, their numbers would decline.

Much of our moorland is also peatland, and grouse moor management schemes have restored approximately 27,000 hectares of bare peat in the past 20 years. Colleagues may know that I have been a big champion of peatland to store and sequester carbon, so efforts to restore it are very welcome. Peat in the UK stores 26 times as much carbon as UK forests, yet it regenerates naturally by only 1 mm a year in depth, making its protection and proper management vital to reducing carbon emissions. Through its management of grouse moors, grouse shooting can only contribute towards the success of that, including its economic benefits.



It is right that I pause here to discuss the burning of heather, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and other Members. The concerns of proponents of a ban on burning may be understandable, but they fail to consider the full picture and, dare I say it, are sometimes completely ill-informed. Their surface-level analysis ignores the fact that moorland is a managed landscape and must continue to be managed if we want it to remain in the enhanced habitat state that we see it in today.

**Olivia Blake:** Can the hon. Member remind me which Government brought in a partial ban on peatland burning?

**Robbie Moore:** Clearly, the reason why our moorlands are in the state they are in today is the collective management that is taking place, whether by mechanical means or through the moorland management burning plans that exist. If we were to end the burning of heather altogether, we would allow the woody stock to generate that has led to the very fires that were rightly referred to by the hon. Member for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire (Mr MacDonald). Right now, gamekeepers are the people on the ground trying to cope with those fires and help our fire services out.

No burning would mean a build-up of vegetation and woody stock, which is itself a negative influence on the sustainability of heather for bird species of all kinds, but what is perhaps worse is that eventually, in the natural cycle, such overgrown heather is much more prone to catching fire. When it does, it will lead to huge and far more damaging wildfires, which are costly to communities and hugely damaging to the environment.

I have seen this for myself in my West Yorkshire constituency on Ilkley moor—another moor that is not managed, exactly the same as Fylingdales moor in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton. A series of smaller and cooler man-made fires, agreed and signed off via an approved moorland management burning plan, is vital for enhancing the ecological status of moorland, helps to improve the complex and desirable mosaic of the moorland, and significantly reduces the risk of dangerous unplanned fires. Once we understand that burning is the management of a natural process, and not destruction for destruction's sake, it is far harder to justify banning it.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Is he also concerned, as I am, about the proposed change in the definition of deep peat? Currently, it is defined as peat deeper than 40 cm, but there is a proposal to reduce that figure to 30 cm, which would mean that much of our moorlands cannot be managed through burning, leading to a much greater fire risk.

**Robbie Moore:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and I was just going to come to that. Natural England is engaged in that consultation right now. It is not just me who is concerned about the consultation process and the direction that Natural England is going in; the concern is shared by my hon. Friend and by Members across the House who have moorland in their constituencies where it is necessary to be able to burn in order to control the woody stock of heather, so that we can create a mosaic that benefits not just the peatland that sits below it but the many species that want to eat

the new shoots of heather that come through. That would benefit not only red grouse but the many other bird species I have already spoken about. Therefore, I urge the Government and the Minister to look carefully at the steps that Natural England is taking, because its current direction is not sustainable for our rural economies.

The benefits of grouse shooting are not limited to environmental improvements. Grouse shooting and the management of our moorland provide an invaluable and highly successful land use for our upland areas that, crucially, relies on not just public money, but private investment. Directly within the industry, 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs are supported, contributing nearly £47 million to the UK economy. Those numbers may seem small compared with other industries, but the importance of grouse shooting is where that economic stimulus is felt.

Upland rural communities are some of the most remote and deprived in the country. It is a huge challenge to promote inward investment or deliver efficient and effective public services in those communities. Alongside activities like farming, grouse shooting provides a vital economic pillar to keep our communities alive. My right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak), like other Members, picked up on that very point. He rightly identified the complex social fabric in the hard-working communities up in Wensleydale, Hawes and beyond. Upland communities are some of the most remote. Banning grouse shooting would cause community centres such as pubs and hotels—like the Star near Thirsk, which I am familiar with—to shut, and those communities would be unable to rely on the positive benefits for employment, for families and for the viability of public services.

The benefits of grouse shooting extend well into our urban areas, as rightly mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), who talked about Holland & Holland. That demonstrates the wider economic impacts of grouse shooting. We know how important access to green spaces is, and the public obviously agree: 3 million people visit the North York moors, the Yorkshire dales and the Peak district annually. Why? Because they love the landscape.

The wider public health benefits of how grouse moors are managed are there for us all to see. Research shows that the perennial leaf coverage of heather helps to reduce air pollution, but that coverage is sustained only by the moorland being predominantly funded and managed for the purpose of grouse shooting. Managed grouse moorland also provides a defence against tick-borne diseases. The management of ticks is in the interest of our groundkeepers and of our farmers, as it protects their livestock, but another benefit is fewer ticks to spread human-borne diseases, some of which can be fatal. If we take away the economic incentives to carry out that work by banning grouse shooting, we lose those additional benefits.

I have covered many of the positive consequences of grouse shooting, but I would like to talk about the petition itself. Campaigners for banning grouse shooting have raised flooding as a concern, yet many of the organisations I have spoken to that advocate for shooting to continue say that the exact opposite is true. In the words that I have heard continuously, the wetter, the better. Indeed, many groundkeepers have spent the better

[Robbie Moore]

part of the last few decades filling in and removing drains put in in the 1960s and 1970s, specifically to improve the outcomes for grouse shooting and to the benefit of flood mitigation downstream. I have seen that for myself on Keighley moor in my constituency. Without grouse shooting, those ditches and drains would still be in place today.

Another concern that has been raised, not just in this debate but in others that have preceded it, is predator control. We must strike a balance here. Many predatory species, such as foxes, are not endangered, yet many of their prey animals are. While grouse themselves are not endangered, other bird species that benefit from this predator control are. Where the control of predators has been relaxed, numbers of other bird species, such as the lapwing, golden plover and rare merlin, have dropped significantly. We must make a choice about what we wish to prioritise: an unendangered predator species or the endangered prey themselves. Taking no action is not a neutral action. It is heartening to hear that, thanks in part to moorland managed for grouse shooting, hen harrier numbers reached record levels in 2023, demonstrating the positive effect that moorland management can have on our bird of prey species.

We should also be absolutely clear that the harming of birds of prey is a crime, and I have yet to meet a grouse shooting organisation that believes that should change. Once again, the rising populations of our birds of prey demonstrate that grouse shooting works for our environment and not against it.

I am pleased that the Government's written response to the petition was that there are no plans at present to ban grouse shooting, so I hope the Minister will be able to confirm that this remains the case and, further, that no Labour Government will ban grouse shooting. I would also be grateful if the Minister could say what he will do with his ministerial colleagues to hold Natural England to account, to make sure that it does not run away with the narrative of wanting to reduce the definition of deep peat from 40 cm to 30 cm, as that would have catastrophic consequences for how moorland is managed.

Grouse moorland management is a real success story of balancing economic, social and environmental activities. Those who wish to ban it because they feel that an unmanaged, natural approach would be better should be careful what they wish for. Without the financial incentive of the shoot, none of these environmental benefits for our moorland, our bird species or our climate would happen. I am certain that they would not happen without an agenda driven by private investment.

I thank all those in the sector who work enormously hard around the clock to enhance our moorland—our gamekeepers, our groundskeepers, our farmers, our rural estates, our land managers and our stakeholders such as the Moorland Association, BASC, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and the Countryside Alliance. I thank them for their continued work.

We all know that almost every acre of the UK is managed in one way or another, and has been for hundreds if not thousands of years. There is no Siberian tundra in the UK, no Australian outback, no Amazon rainforest or American wild west. We should not pretend that the land we love is the product of a random choice of nature, but instead we should recognise that it is a

collective accomplishment of generation after generation of our ancestors and their stewardship of the land. Britain's natural landscape is, ironically, a product of unnatural human management. Grouse moorland management might only be a part of that wider story, but it is an illustrative and successful one that I hope will continue long into the future.

6.17 pm

**The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs (Daniel Zeichner):** It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mrs Harris. I start by thanking the Petitions Committee and the more than 100,000 people who signed the petition for giving us the opportunity to discuss this important subject today. I also acknowledge the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont), who opened the debate. I thought he was going to have a shot at making the case for the petition, but he fessed up very early. It was good to see him at the Royal Highland Show the other day.

It is clear from the petition and the discussion today that Parliament and the wider country care dearly about the issue of driven grouse shooting and managing our uplands in a sustainable way that protects wildlife, the environment and, very importantly, the people who live there.

I can confirm at the outset to the hon. Member for Keighley and Ilkley (Robbie Moore) that, although the Government have no plans to ban grouse shooting, I appreciate it is a topic that understandably evokes strong opinions on both sides of the debate, and we keep options under close review.

I also listened closely to the powerful economic arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth) and the right hon. Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak). I fully appreciate the economic benefits that come from that part of the rural economy, but valid concerns have been raised on the issue of wildlife, most notably the birds of prey that live in those areas and that, sadly, have been all too frequently persecuted. It is disturbing to hear the statistics from the RSPB's recent publication, "Hen Harriers in the firing line".

I heard the statistics cited by the hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, but I also note the statistics and comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Hallam (Olivia Blake). There were 102 confirmed hen harrier persecution incidents in the last five years, with 89% taking place in northern England. In 2023 alone, 34 hen harriers were confirmed to have been killed or disappeared under suspicious circumstances. As the RSPB argues, it is a concern that only two people have been prosecuted for offences relating to the persecution of a hen harrier, and those incidents took place in Scotland.

While birds of prey are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is vital that the law is respected by those involved in the grouse shooting industry. I absolutely hear the comments made by Conservative Members, and we all agree that there is no place for raptor persecution.

**Sam Rushworth:** I thank the Minister for his balanced approach to this subject and for protecting the livelihoods of my constituents. I agree with him that we need to look after animal welfare. I do not think the economic

arguments we have been making today apply to trail hunting. Will he confirm today that it is still the will of this Government to set out a timetable for banning trail hunting?

**Daniel Zeichner:** That is a manifesto commitment, and this Government keep their commitments.

Bird of prey crime is a national wildlife crime priority, and the Government take wildlife crime extremely seriously. There are strong penalties in place for offences committed against birds of prey and other wildlife, and anyone found guilty of such offences should feel the full force of the law. Penalties can include an unlimited fine and/or a six-month custodial sentence.

My Department is providing £424,000 in 2025-26 to the National Wildlife Crime Unit, which does valuable work to prevent and detect wildlife crime by obtaining and disseminating intelligence, undertaking analysis and directly assisting law enforcers. In 2024, the National Wildlife Crime Unit launched the hen harrier taskforce, which is using technology such as drones and strategic partnerships to detect, deter and disrupt offenders and is targeting hotspot areas and suspected hen harrier persecution. Early signs suggest that it is having a positive impact. I congratulate the National Wildlife Crime Unit and its partners on their valuable work in tackling the persecution of those iconic birds of prey.

Grouse shooting takes place in upland areas, which are of huge national and international importance, as we have heard, and when healthy, they provide numerous environmental benefits. Blanket bog provides a rich habitat for many species, sequesters carbon, filters our drinking water and helps with flood control. That is why, over the spending review period, we will be investing £85 million in our peatlands, as well as seeing increased funding through landscape recovery and countryside stewardship.

However, 80% of England's peatlands are degraded, as we heard so powerfully from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Hallam. I know there are different views, but many argue that rotational burning is a contributory factor in the degradation of upland areas. It is commonplace in moorlands that are managed for grouse, where vegetation is burned to improve conditions for raising grouse.

Continual burning damages peatlands, as it affects their hydrology by drying them out. Those degraded peatlands then emit the carbon they once stored. That is why DEFRA recently held a public consultation on proposals to extend the Heather and Grass etc. Burning (England) Regulations 2021, to which the hon. Member for Keighley and Ilkley and others have referred. The proposed amendments would increase the area of moorland protected from the negative impacts of burning and extend the existing licensing scheme to allow burning to be used in certain limited circumstances.

The ritualistic denunciation of Natural England is disappointing, as it is made up of civil servants who are doing their best to provide sound advice to Government. As the Government's adviser on the natural environment in England, Natural England provides statutory advice to Ministers, but the final decision on whether to grant a licence under the regulations lies with the Secretary of State.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I question how the Minister defines sound advice, because the advice that I have seen, from people who manage the moorland, is that if Natural England gets its way and changes the definition of deep peat from 40 cm to 30 cm there will be half—

**Carolyn Harris (in the Chair):** Order.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** In Thirsk and Malton—

**Carolyn Harris (in the Chair):** Order. Mr Hollinrake, you were asked to raise only issues connected to your own constituency.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I apologise, Mrs Harris, but this is about my constituency. In half of my constituency, the moorland will not be able to be managed. The fuel load will increase, wildfires will occur, and it will make my constituency completely unviable for grouse shooting. Is the Minister not concerned that Natural England has a hidden agenda that will affect constituencies such as mine?

**Daniel Zeichner:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. Natural England provides statutory guidance and advice to Ministers, but Ministers decide. We are looking at its advice, but no decision has yet been taken.

I now turn to the economic benefits that shooting sports can provide to rural communities. We recognise that shooting can be an important part of a local economy, and as we have heard, it provides direct and indirect employment opportunities. The Government recognise the cultural value that shooting sports can provide to rural communities, in addition to their economic contribution.

I listened with some joy to my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland talking about the wonders of the lek, but he also went on to talk about the potential benefits of eco-tourism, which may well be the way forward in the future. We must appreciate those things, because the Government are committed to improving the quality of life of people living and working in rural areas, so that we can realise the full potential of rural businesses and communities. To achieve that, we are ensuring that the needs of people and businesses in rural areas are at the heart of policymaking. Our priority is to achieve a sustainable outcome for landscapes that works to recover our environment and wildlife, as well as protecting the interests of people and the rural economy.

**Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD):** My humblest apologies for turning up late, Mrs Harris. I was coming from a very faraway part of the UK. I think the Minister would find it interesting to come to the graduation ceremony of the University of the Highlands and Islands, which happens every year, to see the number of young trainee gamekeepers going into the profession. They are going into local, rural jobs in some of the remotest areas, and they are highly trained in conservation and land management.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I sympathise with his travelling a long way. It is not easy when some of the transport systems are not working. I acknowledge his point. I too have met gamekeepers and young people who see an important future for themselves. I applaud that university. Close work between land managers and stakeholders will be paramount to achieving the kind of future we want to see.



[Daniel Zeichner]

Today's debate has been extensive, underlined by the wide range of opinions involved. I understand the concerns of the petitioners, Wild Justice and hon. Members who have spoken in this debate. They are passionate, and rightly so, about our precious native wildlife and the environment. I assure the House that I have listened with great attention to all the points made. To reiterate, although the Government have no plans to ban driven grouse shooting, it is vital that wildlife and habitats are protected, and that the law is respected by everyone.

6.28 pm

**John Lamont:** Mrs Harris, you will be relieved to hear that I will not take the remaining hour to conclude the debate. I thank the petitioners; I thank the Petitions Committee for facilitating the debate; and I thank the 104,000 people who signed the petition. I suspect those people will be a little surprised by the lack of balance in this debate. I will come on to that shortly, but I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who contributed: my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Northallerton (Rishi Sunak); my hon. Friends the Members for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) and for Mid Buckinghamshire (Greg Smith); the hon. Members for Bishop Auckland (Sam Rushworth), for Sheffield Hallam (Olivia Blake), for Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire (Mr MacDonald) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon); the Lib Dem spokesman, the hon. Member for Glastonbury and Somerton (Sarah Dyke); the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley and Ilkley (Robbie Moore); and the Minister. I thank them all for their remarks.

I think we all agree that any illegal behaviour should be dealt with very severely, including any killing of birds that is against the law. Part of the challenge is about police resourcing. Whether it is in my constituency, which is very rural and remote, or in other parts of the United Kingdom, ensuring that the police have sufficient resources to take action against those who act illegally is a real challenge, and that is a point of agreement on both sides of this debate.

I was struck by the personal experiences of the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland, who spoke powerfully in favour of grouse shooting, and I pay tribute to him for sharing that with us. The reality is that those of us who represent rural constituencies—as many of us do—understand the importance of grouse shooting to our communities. Whether it is for jobs, wildlife, the environment, biodiversity, shops and businesses or the sustainability of our rural communities, grouse shooting plays a key part.

With the greatest respect to the hon. Member for Sheffield Hallam, her constituency presents a unique challenge in its proximity to the moors. The reality is that, for those of us living and working in those communities, it is an essential part of our life and of maintaining our environment and biodiversity. I am therefore pleased to hear that the Labour Government have no plans to ban grouse shooting, which is a policy that I wholeheartedly endorse.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 700036 relating to driven grouse shooting.

6.31 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Monday 30 June 2025

## BUSINESS AND TRADE

### UK Steel Safeguard

**The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds):** On 28 February 2025, the UK's Trade Remedies Authority initiated a review of the steel safeguard measure. The review assessed whether exemptions afforded to developing countries should be updated to reflect recent trade flows and whether the allocation of the tariff-free quotas across all 14 product categories were appropriate to ensure the overall effectiveness of the measure.

During the review, the TRA considered evidence from both domestic and international industry and organisations. After careful consideration of the facts, it recommended to me on 9 June 2025 that developing country exemptions should be updated and that certain changes should be made to the allocation of the tariff-rate quotas.

I have considered the evidence contained within the recommendation made by the TRA and wider matters in the public interest, including the UK's obligations under the relevant World Trade Organisation agreement. As a result of these deliberations, I have decided to reject the TRA's recommendation and take a different decision. The reason is to ensure the overall effectiveness of the UK's steel safeguard measure for domestic producers while balancing the need for security of supply for the UK market.

I have decided to:

Increase the overall volume of each category's tariff-rate quota by 0.1% from 1 July 2025.

Apply a 15% cap in the residual quota of category four and a 20% cap in the residual quotas of categories seven and 13 to ensure that UK imports from exporting countries are more closely aligned with traditional trade flows, effective from 1 July 2025.

I have also decided to amend the allocation of the tariff-rate quotas as below, in line with the TRA's recommendation:

Prevent any unused quarterly quotas from being made available in the following quarter.

Prevent WTO members with a country-specific quota from being able to access the residual quota in the final quarter.

Update developing country exemptions based on UK import data for the period 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024 and in line with the WTO agreement on safeguards.

This Government are unapologetic in our support for the steel sector. It is fundamental to Britain's industrial strength, our security and our identity as a primary global power. We will not allow UK interests to suffer. Through these measures we are supporting not only our producers but also the thousands of families that depend on them and the supply chains reliant on high-quality UK-made steel.

We are determined to reverse the years of decline and neglect in the steel industry, caused in a large part by global excess capacity and market distortions. We will continue to take effective action, and we will publish our "Steel Strategy" later in the year. The strategy will bring everything together to set an ambitious vision for the sector and a more competitive business landscape.

The decision on the steel safeguard will come into effect from 1 July 2025. The Government will publish a public notice on 30 June 2025 to give effect to these decisions to enter into force on 1 July.

[HCWS752]

### UK Automotive Sector: DRIVE35

**The Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (Sarah Jones):** As part of their industrial strategy, the Government have announced a new £2 billion programme to unlock investment in our automotive industry, DRIVE35—driving research and investment in vehicle electrification.

Building on the successes of the automotive transformation fund and Advanced Propulsion Centre R&D programmes, this programme will support the latest research and development, accelerate commercial scale-up, and unlock capital investment in zero emission vehicles, batteries and the wider supply chain. It will ensure continuity in Government support while transitioning to a new funding offer for investors that is much simpler, clearer and faster. The new programme will work alongside the national wealth fund, as part of a comprehensive offer to attract strategic investments.

DRIVE35 will provide long-term certainty to investors, with capital funding over five years and R&D funding for 10 years, to 2035. This long-term commitment is a vote of confidence in the sector, supporting its transformation to unlock growth and enable competitiveness.

We will release further detail in the coming weeks, and will continue to engage with industry as we take forward our plans.

As with all financial assistance, Government will disburse DRIVE35 funding via specific spending powers. As part of the requirements for capital spending under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, the Government are today tabling a parliamentary motion seeking authorisation to disburse up to £1 billion of DRIVE35's total £2 billion via section 8. The motion is as follows and will be debated in due course:

"That this House authorises the Secretary of State to undertake, during the period beginning with the date of approval of this motion and ending on 31 July 2030, to pay, by way of financial assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, grants to businesses as part of His Majesty's Government's project to support zero-emission vehicle manufacturing in the UK and the UK's automotive supply chain, including to support the creation of jobs, private investment into the UK, the development of the automotive industry and emission reductions, up to an overall limit of £1 billion, and to pay during or after that period the grants that are undertaken to be paid."

[HCWS751]

### UK-Taiwan Enhanced Trade Partnership

**The Minister for Trade Policy and Economic Security (Mr Douglas Alexander):** I am pleased to announce that the three pillars under the UK-Taiwan enhanced trade partnership, on investment, digital trade, and energy and net zero, were signed on 30 June. The signing took place between the UK representative at the British Office Taipei, Ruth Bradley-Jones, and the Taipei representative to the UK, Vincent Chin-Hsiang Yao. I witnessed this

signing alongside Executive Yuan Minister without Portfolio Yang Jen-ni during my trip to Taipei where I also co-chaired the 27th UK-Taiwan trade talks.

The ETP pillars are non-legally binding arrangements which will create frameworks to further enhance trade, investment and economic co-operation between the UK and Taiwan. They build on commitments made under the existing UK-Taiwan ETP signed on 14 November 2023. The ETP pillars will support the unofficial relationship between the UK and Taiwan, delivering benefits to both economies. Their content has been informed by engagement with UK businesses, to ensure that they will deliver tangible results over time, supporting the already strong, long-standing trade relationship between the UK and Taiwan which was worth £9.3 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q4 2024.

The No. 1 priority of this Government is economic growth. “The UK’s Trade Strategy”, launched on 26 June, sets out our approach to maximise trade opportunities to support the UK’s growth mission. Utilising flexible trading arrangements and partnerships, like this ETP, demonstrates this Government’s agile and targeted approach to trade policy, which will be key in driving UK growth.

The digital trade, investment and energy and net zero pillars are available on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

[HCWS750]

### Steel Trade Measures: Call for Evidence

**The Minister for Industry (Sarah Jones):** Steel is essential for a modern and secure economy underpinning many sectors, from construction to advanced manufacturing. The UK steel industry provides high-quality jobs in local economies—circa 40,000 jobs across the country and circa 61,000 jobs in the upstream supply chain in 2024—and plays a vital role in infrastructure, manufacturing and defence supply chains, which are critical for economic growth. However, the UK steel industry faces a challenging global trading landscape due to significant steel overcapacity. This overcapacity introduces unfairly cheap imports into the market, artificially lowering prices, reducing profitability, and hindering investment.

The UK Government have taken steps to protect our steel industry from unfair trading practices through the use of trade remedies. This includes a safeguard measure on certain product categories of steel due to expire on 30 June 2026. Initially applied in 2018 by the EU on behalf of the EU28, the measure was transitioned to the UK’s independent trading system after leaving the EU.

It is within this context that we are launching a call for evidence on steel trade measures, inviting stakeholders across the steel supply chain, including manufacturers, distributors, and end-users of steel products, to provide input, as well as other industries that may be indirectly affected by tariff policy changes. The evidence gathered will support the development of future trade policy options for imported steel products, following the expiry of the steel safeguard. Our goal is to ensure a balanced approach that considers the needs of all interested parties.

The call for evidence will be open for six weeks and will be available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/steel-trade-measures>

We encourage all interested stakeholders to respond. The objectives of this call for evidence have been designed

to align with the UK’s trade strategy and industrial strategy, the resilience of steel supply chains, and other wider priorities within the steel strategy.

### Background

The UK steel industry faces a challenging global trading landscape due to significant steel overcapacity. The OECD estimates the gap between global steel production capacity and demand—“excess capacity”—was 551 million metric tonnes in 2023. Research from the OECD has shown the global steel excess capacity is expected to continue to worsen beyond 2026. Compounding this problem is trade deflection resulting from other countries’ responses to steel excess capacity and increased geopolitical trade tensions between major trading partners.

This overcapacity artificially and unfairly lowers prices, reducing profitability and hindering investments in modern and lower-carbon technologies. In this global context, increased dependency on steel imports then impacts the security and resilience of UK supply chains and exposes the UK to the risk of price fluctuations and disruption. The UK Government have taken steps to protect our steel industry from unfair trading practices through the use of trade remedies. This includes 15 anti-dumping and two anti-subsidy measures on imports from seven individual countries, and a global safeguard measure on steel imports. This safeguard is set to expire in June 2026 in line with World Trade Organisation rules.

The Government recognise the importance of the UK steel industry and the need to ensure the security and resilience of the UK’s steel supply chains and to explore long-term protection beyond the expiry of the steel safeguard. It is within this context that we propose to gather stakeholder views on evidence that will inform future trade policy options on imported steel products.

[HCWS753]

## DEFENCE

### Armed Forces Covenant: New Legal Duty

**The Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns):** As we mark Armed Forces Week, we celebrate the brave personnel that keep us safe every day and the families who sacrifice so much to support them. We also celebrate all that service life offers: the unique opportunities for skill development, social mobility and the highest apprenticeship numbers in the UK. While the rewards of service are extensive, it is also important to pause to reflect on the deep sacrifices made by our service personnel, veterans, the bereaved and their families—individuals who put country before self, who defend our freedoms with quiet courage and unwavering resolve.

This Government are proud to announce an important step forward in honouring that service. We are delivering on our commitment to put the covenant fully into law. This new armed forces covenant legal duty will apply to all Government Departments and devolved Governments in a broad range of policy areas affecting the armed forces community. This law will make sure that respect for our armed forces community is not just spoken but woven into the very fabric of our policy and service delivery decisions.

We have consulted with over 150 organisations, heard from communities across every region of our United Kingdom and taken into account the findings of the



House of Commons Defence Committee's inquiry into the armed forces covenant. And we understand that fairness must not depend on geography or circumstance. That is why we have chosen a bold, inclusive approach—embedding these principles into law so that wherever you live, whatever you have given in service, that service will be honoured.

This duty will expand from three policy areas at a local level to 14 broad and vital policy areas across central Government once legislation is enacted. These are as follows:

- Housing
- Education
- Healthcare
- Social care
- Childcare
- Employment and service in the armed forces
- Personal taxation
- Welfare benefits
- Criminal justice
- Immigration
- Citizenship
- Pensions
- Service-related compensation
- Transport

This Government remain steadfast in our commitment not only to those who wear the uniform, but to the families who support them, and the loved ones who carry on after their loss. By placing the covenant at the heart of Government decision-making, and through the introduction of VALOUR, we are building a system that will deliver on the promise we have made. It is our ambition to include these statutory changes in the next Armed Forces Bill, which is required every five years in order for us to continue to have armed forces.

Let us be clear: the new covenant legal duty is more than a policy shift—it is a moral commitment. It is about renewing the nation's contract with those who serve. And it is about building a future where no one in our armed forces community is left behind.

[HCWS747]

### **Nuclear Test Veteran Records Exercise and the Merlin Database**

**The Minister for Veterans and People (Al Carns):** Between 1952 and 1967, around 22,000 armed forces personnel, as well as scientists and civilians, took part in the UK's nuclear testing programme in Australia and the Pacific to develop our nuclear deterrent. This nation is deeply grateful for their contribution to the UK's security.

This Government have reset the relationship with veterans and organisations who represent them so that we can understand their positions and keep them updated on our work. In response to concerns raised with me about some nuclear test veterans' medical records, I commissioned Ministry of Defence officials to look comprehensively at what information the Department holds.

Today, I want to provide an update on the scope of this exercise. The records exercise is looking at three areas: the policy of blood and urine testing between

1952 and 1967; what information was captured about the blood and urine testing; and if the records did exist, determining what happened to them. The files in scope of the exercise are those in the Ministry of Defence's archives, as well as the Ministry of Defence's records now publicly available at the National Archives. If, during the course of this exercise, it is deemed appropriate to alter the scope, we will notify this House.

I understand that many are eager for an update on progress. I want to assure them that this work is being prioritised, and the team have reviewed over 43,000 files, including files from the Merlin database. However, given the vast scale and complexity of the work involved, we are not in a position to confirm when this exercise will conclude. Our focus has been to first review all surviving policy records and instructions related to blood and urine testing, as well as policies relating to the retention of these records. We have started with the policy files to ensure there is an understanding of the policy procedures and instructions given at the time, and officials have been thoroughly identifying and analysing these. Doing this first helps us understand whether policies and instructions were followed, as we then begin the process of looking at nuclear test veterans' service records. I will update the House when the Ministry of Defence is in a position to share the findings of this exercise.

I will also take this opportunity to provide an update on the release of the Merlin database, which contains over 28,000 records relating to historic technical and scientific documentation on the UK's nuclear testing programme. The contents of the Merlin database will be transferred to the National Archives as formal public records under the Public Records Act. Records will be held in perpetuity and made available via the public facing online catalogue at TNA called "Discovery". As the records are digital they will be free to download and there will be no limit on the number that can be downloaded. The records within the database will fall into three broad categories: those that do not hold sensitive data, which will be provided to TNA unredacted; those that are not classified but need to have sensitive personal data redacted under general data protection regulations prior to transfer; and those that will have the necessary GDPR and national security redactions undertaken prior to transfer. The first tranche of records are expected to be transferred to TNA later this summer, once the advisory council on national records and archives has been briefed on the publication.

[HCWS748]

## **ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO**

### **Solar Road Map**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Michael Shanks):** I am tabling this statement to inform Members of the publication of the solar road map.

The Government are committed to delivering a clean, affordable and secure energy system by 2030, and accelerating progress towards net zero. Solar is a mature and cheap source of power, which will play a crucial role in decarbonising our electricity and ensuring that Britain is insulated from volatile global gas prices.

Making Britain a clean energy superpower is one of the Government's five missions. The clean power action plan, published in December, set a target for 45 to 47 GW of solar power by 2030. This mission is about driving economic growth as well as clean power. By 2030, up to 35,000 UK jobs could be supported by the solar sector, up from around 17,000 today. The Government will work closely with industry to ramp up generation capacity. Today's publication fires the starting pistol on five years of rapid deployment.

The solar road map—<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/solar-roadmap>—begins with a statistical analysis of likely deployment scenarios. It projects that the clean power action plan ambition of 45 to 47 GW is achievable, but that significant action will be required to facilitate the necessary deployment. It estimates that ground mount solar alone could power around 9 million homes. It estimates that—even in these ambitious scenarios—solar would occupy up to only 0.4% of total UK land.

The following chapters deal with salient issues for the solar sector. The first of these is on rooftop solar. It sets out actions which will enable Government and industry to unleash a rooftop revolution. This includes information on the role of Great British Energy, the warm homes plan, the future homes and buildings standards, a call for evidence about solar car parks, and tackling contractual and financial barriers to rooftop solar installations.

The electricity networks chapter addresses the lengthy and complicated process of securing a grid connection for solar. It highlights the impact of the Government's radical connections reforms and Ofgem's end-to-end review of connections. It also includes a range of actions to remove barriers for new-build and domestic solar, and to standardise service levels across the sector.

The supply chain and innovation chapter focuses on making the solar supply chain resilient, diverse, and sustainable. It provides details of legislation and guidance to ensure businesses take action against modern slavery in the supply chain. It also explains our support for engagement with supply chain standards, such as the solar stewardship initiative. The chapter also details how the Government intend to encourage the development and commercialisation of innovative solar technologies.

The skills chapter sets out the action required to increase the number of solar jobs in the UK. These include recommendations on improving understanding of current training opportunities, launching regional careers fairs, and clarifying the routes to competency for solar installers.

The planning and support schemes chapter deals with actions to remove other barriers, including planning reform; reform of financial support mechanisms; and support for floating solar. The final chapter, on working together to deliver our ambition, identifies the different stakeholders who will contribute to delivering 45 to 47 GW of solar power. It discusses the Government's proposals to make it mandatory for developers to provide community benefit funds for the local areas hosting new infrastructure.

Finally, today we also announce that a Solar Council will be established to monitor delivery of the Roadmap's actions, and to provide a forum for industry representatives to engage directly with Ministers. Scaling up solar power will be critical to the success of the Government's clean

energy mission. We hope that today's publication gives a boost to industry as they help us reduce our dependence on volatile fossil fuels and improve our energy security.

[HCWS754]

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### Preventing Ill Health

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ashley Dalton):** Today I am updating the House on some of the steps the Government will take to prevent and delay the onset of ill health, thereby restoring the means for people to lead a healthy life in places where it has become most difficult, and in turn reducing pressure on the NHS.

#### *Healthy food standards*

Obesity is one of the leading causes of ill health, costing the NHS £11.4 billion per year. Obesity rates have doubled in the last 30 years, and one in five children now leave primary school with obesity. In the 2023-24 school year, the prevalence of obesity was more than twice as high among children living in the most deprived areas as among children living in the least deprived areas. We will only tackle this successfully by taking a whole-of-society approach in which Government partners with industry to drive innovation and give people the power to make healthy choices.

We are announcing plans to work with the food industry to combat rising childhood obesity. Under new proposals, all large food businesses will be mandated to report against standardised metrics on healthier food sales by the end of this Parliament. This will set full transparency and accountability around the food that businesses are selling and encourage healthier products. Publishing this data annually will also support business investors to invest in healthier companies, by seeing which are performing well, encouraging further reformulation and development of new healthy foods.

Using that reporting, we will set new mandatory targets to increase the healthiness of sales in all communities, and will work with the Food Strategy Advisory Board on how to sequence the introduction of this policy. We want to use smarter regulation that makes the most of industry's innovation and experience. Businesses will have the freedom to decide how they achieve the target—through improving products, introducing new healthier products, or changing loyalty schemes to make healthier products more available, and available to all. Public health experts believe small improvements to the average meal to reduce daily calorie intake by just 40-50 kcals could lead to 340,000 fewer children and two million fewer adults living with obesity.

We will engage with industry closely as we develop and consult on these proposals. We intend to work with all the devolved nations to ensure regulatory alignment for food businesses, and to achieve the maximum reduction of obesity we can across the UK.

#### *NHS weight management services*

We will be asking the NHS to do more to support our approach to prevention. To support people already living with obesity, we will double the number of patients referred to the NHS digital weight management programme, offering help proven to deliver results to 125,000 more people every year. Additionally, pioneering relationships

with the biggest pharmaceutical companies will be brokered to expand access to weight loss services and treatments across the NHS, ensuring fairer access to weight loss drugs for those who cannot afford private prescriptions.

#### *Vaccines*

Vaccinations are, after access to clean water, the most effective public health intervention in the world for saving lives and promoting good health. However, uptake, particularly for children, has been in gradual decline for over a decade. Improving uptake will protect our children from infectious disease, reduce the burden on the NHS, and help consign some diseases to history, such as cervical cancer. To improve access to vaccinations, we are enhancing access to general practices for vaccinations, testing models to deliver vaccinations to some families through health visits, and expanding the role of community pharmacy, including offering catch-up vaccinations to protect against human papillomavirus.

We are expanding the NHS app, so that everyone knows what vaccinations they have had, what they need, and where to get them, at a time and location that meets their needs. Patients will be able to book jabs on the NHS app. Parents will be able to access a new vaccination hub on the NHS app, on behalf of their child, during 2026-27. Finally, we will launch the world's first gonorrhoea immunisation programme to protect at-risk adults and help prevent the rise of antimicrobial resistance.

#### *Health store app marketplace*

We will build a health store app marketplace. We want to empower people to manage their own health and care, putting the ability to treat, manage and prevent conditions into the hands of our population. Successful adoption of digital health technologies across a range of clinical areas including mental health, cardiovascular health and musculoskeletal conditions may lead to improved patient outcomes, reduced waiting times and improved economic activity, by supporting people to stay in or return to work.

The health store will ensure that the products with the best evidence reach the hands of patients, irrespective of where you live across the country. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence will play a crucial role in evaluating technologies, guaranteeing clinical effectiveness for patients and cost-effectiveness for the NHS. We will explore central funding for those technologies with an effective evidence base, as determined by NICE, making the NHS an attractive market that centrally supports innovation.

#### *NHS points scheme*

We are announcing a new NHS points scheme, which will be developed to reward people for taking positive actions to improve their health. Based on loyalty schemes popular with supermarkets, coffee shops and mobile banking apps, people could receive gift vouchers or discounts at their favourite high-street stores by simply upping their step count or making healthier food choices. We will shortly launch a market engagement process to start the conversation with business about what behaviours could be incentivised.

#### *Musculoskeletal conditions*

To further improve how patients in England engage with the NHS, and where it is clinically appropriate for them to do so, patients will be able bypass GPs to directly access specialist treatment using the NHS app,

including treatment for MSK, mental health talking therapies, podiatry and audiology services. This will help deliver faster treatment for patients, while enabling GPs to focus on more complex cases by reducing pressure on them.

#### *Tobacco*

In addition to the measures set out, the Government are determined to put an end to the harms of tobacco. Smoking is still the biggest killer—it claims around 80,000 lives a year, causes one in four of all cancer deaths in England and kills up to two thirds of its long-term users. Our landmark Tobacco and Vapes Bill will help deliver our ambition for a smoke-free UK. It will create a smoke-free generation, gradually ending the sale of tobacco products across the country and breaking the cycle of addiction and disadvantage. The Bill will also strengthen the existing ban on smoking in public places. And while we know vapes are less harmful than smoking and can be an effective quit aid for smokers, we are doing more to protect children from the risks of harm and addiction. The Bill will stop vapes from being deliberately branded, promoted, and advertised to children to stop the next generation from becoming hooked on nicotine.

The full set of prevention measures, which will further set out how we deliver healthier, more prosperous lives for all, and help reduce health inequalities, build a stronger labour market and lower NHS demand, will be set out shortly in the Government's 10-year health plan for England.

[HCWS756]

## **HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

### **Building Safety Regulator**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris):** Today I am updating Parliament on changes to the Building Safety Regulator.

The Government's response to the Grenfell inquiry set out our commitment to take forward the recommendation for a "single construction regulator" for the building system, to tackle fragmentation and incoherence in the regulatory system.

As a sign of our commitment to move at pace on implementing the inquiry's recommendations, we are taking the initial steps towards a single construction regulator by supporting the BSR to move into a new phase of operations. We will publish a prospectus for reform in the autumn setting out further details on the single regulator.

Since its establishment, the BSR has overseen a fundamental change in the built environment, taking significant risk out of the system and ensuring residents are at the heart of house building. It is an important and non-negotiable part of the built environment system as we deliver 1.5 million new homes and increase the pace of remediation of unsafe buildings. I am grateful to the Health and Safety Executive for the invaluable leadership and experience it has brought to the establishment and early operations of the BSR. This was the biggest change to the building safety regime in decades, and its expertise provides the foundations for future reforms this Government will bring forward.



Everyone deserves a safe home—and the opportunity to access one. That is why we need a regulatory system that is not only robust, but also clear, consistent, and easy to navigate. Regulatory certainty and efficiency are essential to unlocking the investment needed to build the homes this country urgently needs.

The reforms introduced to date to ensure building safety are crucial, but this Government recognise the operational challenges the BSR and the wider sector are facing in their implementation.

That is why, together with industry, we have been working urgently to address operational challenges so that the BSR works effectively, enabling the safe homes this country needs to be built, and a system that balances proportionate regulation without compromising safety outcomes.

Today, my Department will announce that:

We are investing in strengthened and dedicated leadership in the BSR to lead the transition of its operations out of HSE in the future and to provide a dedicated focus to its operations. Andy Roe has been appointed as non-executive chair of a shadow board of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, pending its establishment as an executive agency to take on the functions of the BSR from the HSE. This is part of initial steps towards creating a single construction regulator. Andy Roe brings a wealth of experience to the role following a career of organisational transformation, industry experience, and strong relationships with the sector and has played an integral role within the building safety regime since its inception. We will also introduce a new chief executive officer to lead the BSR, Charlie Pugsley.

The BSR is implementing a new fast-track process. This will bring building inspector and engineer capacity directly into the BSR to enable a rapid acceleration to the processing of existing newbuild cases and remediation decisions. Alongside this, we are working hard to partner with industry to deliver results—and will shortly support the publication of industry guidance to improve the quality of applications—and so reduce processing times. To ensure transparency, the BSR will publish key performance related information quarterly, in the coming weeks. These changes will see no compromise in the standards expected of design and construction.

We are bolstering long-term investment in the capacity of the BSR and building capacity within industry. The BSR will recruit more than 100 members of staff by the end of the year to enhance operations.

These changes position the BSR for the coming years, demonstrating the commitment of Government to invest in safety and residents.

[HCWS749]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Welfare Reform

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Liz Kendall):** The Government have committed to making two changes to strengthen the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill: implementing the new eligibility requirements for PIP from November 2026 for new claims only, and adjusting universal credit rates to make sure all existing recipients of the universal credit health element—and any new claimant meeting the severe conditions criteria and those who qualify under special rules for end of life—have the combined rate of their universal credit standard allowance and universal credit health element protected in real terms.

Today, we have circulated policy explainers for the amendments that the Government will table ahead of Committee Stage to enact the proposed change to PIP and UC, demonstrating our commitment to strengthening the Bill.

These explainers have been circulated alongside a full draft of the amendment to the PIP clauses. This letter has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses for reference. We will formally table the amendments to both UC and PIP following the Bill's Second Reading.

We have also published the revised poverty impacts, "Spring statement social security changes—updated impact on poverty levels in Great Britain" based on the two changes we are making to strengthen the Bill. No one who is already receiving an award of universal credit or PIP will be pushed in to poverty as a result of the direct impact of the measures in this Bill.

We continue our wider drive to tackle the scar of poverty—including by extending free school meals, expanding the warm home discount to an extra 2.7 million households next winter, and supporting 700,000 of the poorest families through our fair repayment rate on Universal Credit deductions.

We committed in the Green Paper to introduce the "right to try", and I am pleased to announce that we have deposited in the House Library draft regulations alongside this Bill that establish in law the principle that work, in and of itself, will not lead to a reassessment. This will apply to all universal credit, new-style employment and support allowance and PIP customers. This is just the first step. As set out in the Pathways to Work Green Paper, we will also work with disabled people and stakeholders to explore ways to further strengthen this right to try guarantee.

Through measures within the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill, we are giving people who are already on PIP the certainty they need, while increasingly targeting funding at those who need it most, to make sure the system is sustainable to support generations to come.

In addition to bringing forward amendments to the Bill we will also commit to spending an additional £300 million in the next three years on our investment in Pathways to Work, health and skills support.

At the spring statement in March, we announced Pathways to Work funding of:

£200 million for 26-27

£300 million for 27-28

£400 million for 28-29

£1 billion in 29-30

This investment in Pathways to Work support towards employment will now increase to:

£200 million in 2026-27

£400 million in 2027-28—up from £300 million

£600 million in 2028-29—up from £400 million

£1 billion in 29-30

This is on top of funding and support we are now mobilising through Connect to Work, WorkWell, local inactivity trailblazers and 1,000 new Pathways to Work advisers to support disabled people. This already amounts to the biggest employment support package for disabled people and people with health conditions in more than a generation. The extra money we are announcing

today means that we will be able to go further and faster on our new planned investment in work, health and skills support offers, building on and learning from successes such as the Connect to Work programme, which is being rolled out over 2025 to provide disabled people and people with health conditions with one-to-one support at the point when they feel ready to work.

Alongside taking action to get welfare spending on a sustainable footing, so that help can be there for people who need it now and into the future, we are committed to a holistic programme of reform to make sure that PIP is fair and fit for the future. The PIP assessment review, which the Minister for Social Security and Disability is leading, is a significant part of this work.

In the Green Paper, we set out our intention to review the PIP assessment and make it fit for the future. We committed to bring together a range of experts, stakeholders and people with lived experience to consider how best to do this and to start the process of preparing for the

review. I announced to the House on Monday 21 May that this process had started and, since then, the Minister for Social Security and Disability (Sir Stephen Timms), who will lead the review, has listened to a wide range of views, including holding roundtables with disability charities.

Today, I am pleased to announce we are publishing the terms of reference for the PIP assessment review and we will engage widely and at pace to design the process for its work. Because of our commitment to co-produce, the precise timeline for the review will be determined over the summer, based on the design work with stakeholders to ensure the review can fulfil its aims. I expect it to conclude by autumn 2026.

Attachments can be viewed online at:  
[http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/  
written-questions-answers-statements/written-  
statement/Commons/2025-06-30/HCWS755/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2025-06-30/HCWS755/)

[HCWS755]





# Petition

Monday 30 June 2025

## OBSERVATIONS

### ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

#### Repairs to Marsh Lock Horsebridge

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that Marsh Lock Horsebridge should be repaired and reopened; notes that an online petition on the issue was started by Claudia Fennel; notes the online petition on this issue has received over 6,000 signatures; notes the petition is supported by the former Mayor and the Deputy Mayor of Henley; further notes that the bridge has been closed since May 2022; notes that the bridge is an important part of the constituency community and impacts the mental and physical health of residents; notes that residents are currently unable to access the Thames path to Shiplake and numerous swimming spots; and further notes that local businesses reliant on the footfall from walkers and river-goers have been badly affected.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take immediate action to encourage the Environment Agency to repair and reopen Marsh Lock Horsebridge.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

*[Presented by Freddie van Mierlo, Official Report, 14 May 2025; Vol. 767, c. 458.]*

[P003067]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy):*

The Government would like to thank the petitioners for raising the issue of repairs to Marsh Lock horse bridge.

The Government recognise that the inland waterways across England and Wales provide many public benefits, including leisure and recreation, health and wellbeing, green corridors for biodiversity to flourish, and contributing to the growth of local economies. However, the Government do not have responsibility for operational matters on the waterways, such as the maintenance and repair of assets, as this rests with individual navigation authorities who have a duty to manage and operate their waterways, or riparian landowners who own the banks or the bed of the river.

The Environment Agency grant-in-aid funding provided by DEFRA is used among other things for maintaining key assets such as navigation locks, weirs, and bridges. In the particular case of Marsh Lock horse bridge, due to the expected repair costs and other competing needs of the non-tidal River Thames navigation, progress on the necessary repairs has not been as quick as originally intended.

A new funding solution is now being developed by the Environment Agency, with the aim of accelerating this project. The Environment Agency will be seeking funding with partners, to be used alongside the grant funding received from DEFRA. The plan is for the Environment Agency to use £500,000 in 2025-26 to fund the initial stages of the Marsh Lock horse bridge repairs, along with repairs to another footbridge at Temple Lock. The funding from partners will then be used for the future stages. Once the project is developed to point where funding partners have been secured and the bridge refurbishment timescales are known, the Environment Agency will publish an update on the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website.

The Environment Agency Thames area director met with the hon. Member on 10 April at the bridge site to set out this proposed plan, and will continue to engage with the hon. Member on the matter as the work progresses.



## Written Corrections

*Monday 30 June 2025*

### Ministerial Corrections

#### CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

##### Pride Month

*The following extract is from the debate on Pride Month on 23 June 2025.*

**Chris Bryant:** ...The right hon. Gentleman is also absolutely right to refer to Terence. His report was an essential part of changing the landscape in this country and making sure that compensation was available to the individuals who were affected.

[*Official Report*, 23 June 2025; Vol. 769, c. 912.]

*Written correction submitted by the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism, the hon. Member for Rhondda and Ogmore (Chris Bryant):*

**Chris Bryant:** ...The right hon. Gentleman is also absolutely right to refer to Terence. His report was an essential part of changing the landscape in this country and making sure that **financial recognition** was available to the individuals who were affected.

#### TRANSPORT

##### Estimates Day

*The following extract is from the Estimates Day debate on 25 June 2025.*

**Mike Kane:** We have also announced £185 million through safer roads funds to invest in the 99 most risky A roads, and we have made clear commitments on rail cost base and subsidy.

[*Official Report*, 25 June 2025; Vol. 769, c. 1208.]

*Written correction submitted by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane):*

**Mike Kane:** We have also **invested £185.8 million** through the **safer roads fund** to **improve 99 high-risk A roads**, and we have made clear commitments on rail cost base and subsidy.

### Other Correction

#### DR SAVAGE

##### Geo-engineering and the Environment

*The following extract is from the Westminster Hall debate on Geo-engineering and the Environment on 23 June 2025.*

**Dr Savage:** ...The petition was started by Antoinette Taylor and opened on 23 December 2024. As of 12 June 2025, it had gathered more than 159,000 signatures. Just two of those signatures were from my South Cotswolds constituency, so I clearly did not step up to lead this debate in an effort to win votes.

[*Official Report*, 23 June 2025; Vol. 769, c. 197WH.]

*Written correction submitted by the hon. Member for South Cotswolds (Dr Savage):*

**Dr Savage:** ...The petition was started by Antoinette Taylor and opened on 23 December 2024. As of 12 June 2025, it had gathered more than 159,000 signatures. Just **235** of those signatures were from my South Cotswolds constituency, so I clearly did not step up to lead this debate in an effort to win votes.







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**not later than  
Monday 7 July 2025**

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Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

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