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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Thursday 26 October 2017

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Salisbury.

NHS: Winter Staffing Levels Question

11.06 am

Asked by **Lord Clark of Windermere**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to increase staffing levels in the National Health Service to meet anticipated demand during the forthcoming winter period.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Lord O'Shaughnessy) (Con): My Lords, providing appropriate staffing over winter is essential. NHS England and NHS Improvement have worked together to make sure that every major consultant-led emergency department has a robust plan to meet demand. This includes necessary staffing levels. In addition, the department has provided £100 million to relieve pressure on urgent and emergency care specifically to allow primary care streaming and improve patient flow in A&E departments.

Lord Clark of Windermere (Lab): I thank the Minister for his reply. Those are soothing words, but I am afraid not really matched by the reality on the ground. It is clear that we face a dire prospect this winter on account of the Government's poor labour planning over the years they have been in power. We know that we are 40,000 nurses short, GP numbers are tumbling and adult social care staff numbers have fallen from 70,000 to 48,000 in four years. Last year, 45% of the consultant posts advertised were not able to be filled. We really are in a very difficult position.

I ask the Minister a very specific question: is it true that the Government have given the go-ahead for vulnerable patients who are not fit to be discharged to their home to be discharged to third parties? They will be allocated to homes where the hosts have no medical expertise and for which they will get paid £1,000 a month.

Noble Lords: Too long!

Lord Clark of Windermere: This is my final question. Will the Government not listen to medical opinion and drop this preposterous scheme?

Lord O'Shaughnessy: The noble Lord knows that winter is always a more difficult time for the NHS. I hope he also knows that there are 11,000 more nurses on wards than there were in 2010. Indeed, I was looking at the data on doctors. There has been a 30% uplift in emergency doctors in that time as well. So there are more staff in the NHS—but, of course, there is much more need for winter preparedness. The NHS feels that it is better prepared than ever for winter.

On the issue that the noble Lord refers to—I assume he is talking about the story in the press today—that is, I stress, a local pilot that is being explored. I do not think it is even under way. It is being proposed by a local doctor—indeed, an emergency registrar. For it to go ahead, it is clear that any such pilot would have to abide by the very strict rules that exist on safety, safeguarding quality and so on for any care setting. The head of Age UK said that any new innovation—I think we want to encourage innovation—needs to pass the mum or grandma test. I think that is a very reasonable test to apply to something such as this.

Lord Ribeiro (Con): My Lords, the only way in which to increase staffing levels in anticipation of the flu epidemic is through agency staff, which is going to cost a huge amount of money. Surely, the better thing to do would be to ensure that all health staff are vaccinated so they are at least healthy when the epidemic hits us—if it does.

Lord O'Shaughnessy: My noble friend talks with great authority on this issue and he is quite right. The NHS is offering all front-line health staff free vaccinations. NHS England has confirmed that it will also be paying for care workers in social care settings to get free jabs. Furthermore, we are now, for the first time, inoculating in school children aged between two and eight, who are sometimes known as “superspreaders”. This is to ensure that, if such an epidemic were to happen, we would be as well prepared as ever.

Baroness Watkins of Tavistock (CB): My Lords, will the Minister join me in acknowledging the stance being taken by the NMC in seriously considering changes to the English language test to make it more relevant to nursing practice, while maintaining patient safety? This has the potential to increase significantly the recruitment of overseas nurses in the UK. I also seek assurance that the Government will not cut investment in district nurse training.

Lord O'Shaughnessy: I am grateful to the noble Baroness for raising this. We have discussed a number of times the impact of the test on recruitment from countries other than the UK. It is entirely sensible for the NMC to look at this. On nurse training, I hope she will have been reassured by the announcement from my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Health at the Conservative Party conference that we will deliver a 25% increase in nurse training places from 2018-19 onwards.

Lord Rennard (LD): My Lords, is not part of the problem for the NHS, and for hospitals in particular, during the winter that so many people have difficulty in accessing their GP? The number of GPs has fallen by 3% over the last two years. Is it not, therefore, counterproductive that the Government have been cutting funding for community pharmacies when many more people should be seeing their pharmacist and not seeking to see their GP or even turning up at A&E units?

Lord O'Shaughnessy: We recently debated community pharmacies. Reforms have ensured that most people—more than 80%—are within a 20-minute walk of a community pharmacy. As a consequence of these reforms, there has been no decrease in the number of community pharmacies in England.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab): My Lords, the case raised by my noble friend relating to Essex goes to the heart of the problem of discharging patients from NHS hospitals because of the lack of support in the community from social care and the reduction in nursing home places during the last four years. Is the Minister as surprised as I am that, despite this, up and down the country the NHS, through its sustainability and transformation plans, is putting forward proposals to cut out community hospitals and community hospital beds? Will Ministers issue an instruction to the NHS so that this will not be allowed to happen?

Lord O'Shaughnessy: We have discussed the issue of nursing home beds. We also know that there has been an increase in the provision of domiciliary care packages which reflects people's changing care needs. Figures published yesterday show that social care spending has risen by £500 million during 2016-17. I am sure this will be warmly welcomed across the House. On community beds, noble Lords should know that, in addition to the usual four tests for reconfigurations, last year Simon Stevens, the head of NHS England, said that there is now a fifth test—the bed test. There must be robust evidence that any proposed reduction in beds is because of a reduction in demand and not the other way round.

UN Security Council: Information Sharing Question

11.14 am

Asked by **Lord Triesman**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of the recent meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, what assessment they have made of how the United Kingdom and fellow permanent members of the Security Council can improve the sharing of analysis and co-ordination with allies to ensure enhanced security.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, the United Kingdom is committed to working through the UN Security Council to address threats to international peace and security. We will continue to share analysis with fellow members of the council through informal consultations. During this year's UN General Assembly high-level week, our efforts were instrumental in ensuring that the international community united to adopt unanimously UNSCR 2379 to help ensure that Daesh is held accountable for the crimes it has committed.

Lord Triesman (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for his response. The United States is a vital ally and a close historic friend but it is hard to share values with its commander-in-chief. During his UNGA speech, he threatened to obliterate at least one, and possibly two, other nations by nuclear means, denounced the Paris climate accords, and has on other occasions expressed

his belief that torture is a normal course of events. Given the number of experienced diplomats and internationalists in your Lordships' House, can the Government share with them how they intend to make a relationship with those at the top of the American Administration to improve our peace and security?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, the noble Lord raises an important point about international relations, and in that regard I assure him that we have a very deep and long historic relationship with the United States. It is a strong relationship because we share objectives on many fronts. Equally, the strength of that relationship determines that when we disagree on important issues, as the noble Lord has highlighted, we also make that position quite clear; climate change was one issue, as was the recent issue of the Iran nuclear deal. In both those instances, we made it clear that we believe it was regrettable that the US took the stance that it did. That position has been made clear to President Trump by our Prime Minister. However, the strength of our relationship allows us to have those very candid conversations with the US and, indeed, others, when we do disagree.

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, we are the only permanent member of the Security Council that is reducing the size of its armed forces; indeed, we have reduced it by a third since 2010. Does the Minister not think this must make the other members of the Security Council wonder about our eligibility to be there; and, indeed, make other members of the UN consider how important we believe maintaining security and peace around the world actually is?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The noble Lord knows that our Armed Forces remain very strong and that we are at the forefront of relations with regard to peacekeeping. Indeed, I will talk about this very subject at the UN Security Council next week. Contrary to what the noble Lord has expressed, our partners not just in the Security Council but across the General Assembly welcome the United Kingdom's leadership on a raft of different issues, most recently the Prime Minister's personal initiative in leading the charge to combat modern slavery.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, building security requires more than co-operation on military and intelligence issues; it obviously involves co-operating with a range of countries. Of course, Brexit will be a crucial issue in maintaining that co-operation. The noble Lord is right to point out that we have led in Europe. If we are not there in Europe, how will we build security? What will be the mechanisms to ensure that we build security and lead on it globally?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: When I saw that this Question had been tabled, I said to officials that it might go quite wide—and, indeed, we have a Brexit-related question. First and foremost, I assure the noble Lord that of course, we continue to have constructive and productive discussions with our European partners. I am confident, as are all members of the Government, that we will reach a progressive and productive end to those discussions in terms of a new relationship with

our partners in the European Union. Let me give the noble Lord a practical example. Most recently, the Prime Minister herself led on the important issue of security and countering terrorism, particularly on the internet. She chaired that meeting at the UN, together with the President of France and the Prime Minister of Italy. That underlines the co-operation we have in important areas such as security and countering terrorism. That is continuing, and will continue.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (LD): My Lords, I wonder whether the answer to the question posed by the noble Lord, Lord Triesman, is that we should pay more attention to the generals in the White House, who appear to have achieved something approaching a military coup, albeit with civilian purpose. It is quite right to point to the difficulties of the relationship, but one area that has not been discussed so far is cyberwarfare. Cyberwarfare between permanent members of the Security Council is hardly likely to increase confidence. If analysis were to be of any effect, it would necessarily involve the exchange of intelligence. Intelligence exchanged among the five would inevitably be intelligence available to the 190-odd members of the United Nations. Finally, although it makes a small contribution to security, should not the United Kingdom—and, indeed, the Security Council—be concentrating on drug and people trafficking, counterterrorism, as has been mentioned, and crimes against humanity?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Perhaps I may take the final point first. Of course we are looking at crimes against humanity. That is why the United Kingdom led the resolution to counter Daesh, and I was delighted to report back that not just the permanent members but all members of the Security Council supported that resolution unanimously. On cyberwarfare and security, of course we continue to co-operate internationally. We continue to work constructively with groups such as Five Eyes and other European partners, sharing intelligence to ensure that we counter the narrative of the extremists and any evil intent not just in the interests of our security, but of Europe and globally.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Con): My Lords, the United States is of course a good friend, but is it not nowadays merely one part of the much larger new pattern of networks that are emerging across the world, including Asia and the developing world, in which we have to integrate very closely on security and other matters? One of those networks is the Commonwealth, although there are many others. Does he agree that we have to work much more closely with all of them than we have in the past?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My noble friend is correct. Brexit provides a huge opportunity not only to form a new relationship with the European Union but to strengthen our global relationships. The noble Lord shakes his head. I think that the Commonwealth is important: 52 nations coming together on the common pillars of language and history, and with a common future, to tackle important issues such as modern slavery and cybersecurity. That is what the global Britain aspect is all about—strengthening our relationships not just in Europe but around the world.

Police: Funding Question

11.22 am

Asked by **Lord Harris of Haringey**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the sustainability of the current level of funding available for police forces in England and Wales.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, the Government have protected police spending since 2015. We know that crime is changing, and Ministers are sensitive to current pressures on policing. The Policing Minister is therefore undertaking a programme of engagement with the police to understand the impact of changing demands.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab): That is a very complacent response. Does the noble Baroness understand the concerns expressed by Chief Superintendent Gavin Thomas, president of the Police Superintendents' Association, when he says that a "perfect storm" is developing in policing, with staff cuts, new threats and a rise in crime, and with half of senior officers showing signs of mental ill-health as a result? Does she recognise the concerns expressed by her Conservative colleagues who are police and crime commissioners? For example, the PCC in Avon and Somerset says that that force is pushed to its limits, and in Bedfordshire the position is considered to be unsustainable. When crime figures were falling, the Prime Minister's view was that police numbers could fall too. Does the Minister now accept that the logic of that view is that, now that the latest figures show a 13% increase in crime, the Chancellor should make substantial resources available for policing in next month's Budget?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, first, there has been an overall fall in total crime. PCC funding, which the noble Lord mentioned, is now over £11 billion—up £150 million from 2015-16. Total police funding, excluding counterterrorism funding, is up to £8.5 billion from £8.4 billion. Therefore, as I said in my first Answer, resourcing has remained flat. Of course, if the police maximise the precept, most police forces will have a slight increase in funding.

Lord Blair of Boughton (CB): My Lords, does the Minister think that it is a sensible policy to agree and announce an increase in police pay per officer but to have no increase in the overall budget? That does not seem to me to provide a sustainable funding programme.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, for the past couple of years, I have listened to calls for increases in police pay, particularly in light of the attacks in Westminster and across the country and the pressures on police staff. The increase in police pay is counterbalanced by the huge amount of reserves that the police hold—some £1.7 billion at the moment. The police do have a decision to make about where they deploy their resources and how they use reserves.

Baroness Doocey (LD): My Lords, the HMIC report published this week found that police forces are having difficulty finding the resources to investigate human trafficking and modern slavery. That goes against everything that was promised in this House during the passage of the Modern Slavery Act. Will the Government commit to providing the additional funding, specifically to allow police forces thoroughly to investigate these appalling crimes, which are often highly complex and very resource intensive?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The noble Baroness is absolutely right that these sorts of crimes are incredibly complex. I pay tribute to the police for dealing with them, because the Modern Slavery Act 2015 is now having a real impact. We are seeing the first convictions for the new offences prosecuted under that Act, and at least 56 slavery and trafficking prevention and risk orders to restrict offender activity are now in place.

Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate (Con): My Lords, in view of the fact that funding is very important so far as the police are concerned, many people are becoming increasingly concerned about the way in which the resources are spent. Apart from detection of crime and the work at the sharp end of that matter, police are often involved in community projects of one kind or another where many people feel they should not be involved, or at least not to the extent that they now appear to be. Can we please have a further emphasis on the need to concentrate those important resources on the detection of crime?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: My Lords, the police will deploy their resources in the area that they think is most important in their communities. The police have always been operationally independent of government and it is vital that that continues. They are best placed to make those decisions. We understand the pressures that the police and PCCs are under. That is why my right honourable friend in the other place, the Minister for Policing, is engaging with local forces to make sure that they have the resources and the capability that they need.

Lord Reid of Cardowan (Lab): Will the Minister confirm not only the operational independence of the police but the fact that community relationships with the police are an essential component of crime detection?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I totally agree with the noble Lord—clearly, he has vast experience in this area. That trust between police and local communities is absolutely vital.

Lord Laming (CB): My Lords, the Minister will recall that in the police evidence to the Victoria Climbié inquiry, reference was made to the fact that, once pressure is on the police, there is a tendency to reduce the resources in the police child protection teams. Can the Minister assure the House that child protection and the well-being of children, and in particular good partnership with children's services and local government, will remain a priority for the Government?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: Well, it is certainly a priority for the noble Lord, and it is too for the Government. That work in partnership is incredibly important. In funding for this area, because we know that it remains a great concern, we have provided more than £20 million over three years to help combat the online grooming of children for sexual exploitation, and we have awarded £1.9 million to the College of Policing to transform the police's approach to vulnerability.

Social Rented Housing: Construction

Question

11.29 am

Asked by **Lord Greaves**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of the comments by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 22 October about investment in housing, whether they intend to finance an increase in house building by councils and housing associations through increased borrowing; and if so, how many additional houses they intend should be built within the next five years.

Lord Greaves (LD): My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper, and remind the House of my interest as a district councillor.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government and Northern Ireland Office (Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth) (Con): My Lords, we are keen for local authorities and other social landlords to build more homes. That is why we have recently announced an additional £2 billion increase in the affordable homes programme to more than £9 billion for affordable housing, including social rents. We have also provided rental certainty for social housing from 2020, which will enable social landlords to plan their homebuilding programmes more effectively. Nevertheless, we continue to be open to dialogue with our local authority partners about any constraints holding them back.

Lord Greaves: My Lords, at the weekend the Communities Secretary said that the Government should borrow a lot more money in order to build between 275,000 and 300,000 houses a year in England alone. Since then, the Chancellor said in reply to my right honourable friend Vince Cable in the House of Commons that this was not government policy. Do we still have collective Cabinet responsibility in this country, or do we have a system in which Cabinet Ministers simply debate with one another in public?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, I remind the House of the commitment of the Government to build 1 million more new homes by 2020 and an additional half a million by 2022. In pursuance of that, we look at the borrowing capacity of local authorities. They currently have £3.6 billion of housing revenue account headroom available. We increased the borrowing capacity by £300 million in 2013, of which only £144 million has been taken up. As I have said, we remain open to discussing this matter and indeed do so with our local authority partners.

Lord Deben (Con): Will my noble friend accept that we are building almost all our houses to a standard which means that they will have to be retrofitted because the energy efficiency is so low? Will he give a commitment that those 1 million houses will be built to a standard which enables people to afford to heat them, because we have started off in the right way instead of having to do it afterwards?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, my noble friend is very well versed in these matters—few people in the House have more experience than him—and I know that we worked closely together when I was in another department in relation to climate change. It is true that retrofitting is a large part of what is happening at the moment; it is also true that we must seek to minimise the need for retrofitting based on present experience and knowledge. Nevertheless, there is a massive backlog of retrofitting that will keep us very busy for a long time in order that we meet those important climate change targets which the Government are determined we hit.

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab): My Lords, I refer the House to my interests in the register, particularly as a councillor in the London Borough of Lewisham and as a vice-president of the LGA. Yesterday, the Minister's noble friend Lord Young of Cookham, replying to a question from my noble friend Lord Beecham, said that,

“there are circumstances in which we would consider lifting the local authority borrowing restrictions”.—[*Official Report*, 25/10/17; col. 935.]

What are those circumstances?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, my noble friend Lord Young is absolutely right: of course there are circumstances. As I have indicated on two occasions this morning, we are discussing with local authorities the headroom available. Obviously, that depends on circumstances; they differ very much from area to area. We have reached a good agreement with the London mayor and the GLA, but there may be such circumstances and we will react to them. It is a pragmatic approach and not an ideological one.

Lord Scriven (LD): My Lords, I refer to my interests in the register, particularly as a member of Sheffield City Council and a vice-president of the LGA. The £2 billion that the Minister referred to will on average build 11 new council homes in each local authority area each year. As it is estimated that 85,000 council houses per year will need to be built by local authorities, this will not solve the housing crisis. What new powers and borrowing powers will the Government give to local authorities to deal with the housing crisis?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, in relation to the £2 billion the noble Lord mentioned, obviously we will come forward with additional information on how that money is to be deployed; much of it will be for social rent, but it is an additional amount, as he rightly says, on the affordable housing budget. Nobody is suggesting that there is a single silver bullet here. There is much ground to be made up, as my right honourable friend the Secretary of State has made

absolutely clear. However, we have considerable powers, as shown in the White Paper, which we will be exercising through, in many cases, secondary legislation. We have infrastructure money that we have invested. We have money releasing funding for separate pieces of land. We are doing bespoke deals with local authorities, such as Leeds, Manchester and the West Midlands. We are using many different weapons in the armoury, but I agree with the noble Lord that there is no single silver bullet. That is certainly the case.

Baroness Eaton (Con): My Lords, can the Minister tell me what evidence there is to show that Her Majesty's Government are making affordable housing a priority?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, my noble friend will be very much aware, because she takes a great interest in these things, that there is considerable evidence of that, as I have just demonstrated in relation to the White Paper: a £2.3 billion housing infrastructure fund; a £45 million land release fund; money going to build to rent, which will be announced in the new year; bespoke housing deals with Leeds, Manchester and the West Midlands, which are well progressed, and others; garden cities and towns that will be coming forward shortly and are very much instrumental; as I have indicated, additional money is going into the affordable housing budget; and a planning fees increase will be brought in by the end of the year that will give more money to planning departments, which will help local authorities. So, there is no shortage of energy and successful action in tackling this deep-seated problem.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, will the Minister tell the House what part low-cost homes for sale, self-builds, housing co-operatives and housing renewal of dilapidated properties—that can be maintained and kept for the future if properly renovated—are playing in the Government's strategy?

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: My Lords, the noble Lord is right that those are instrumental. If I could take one to tell him about: on self and custom builds, local authorities are very much being encouraged to progress that. They are being obliged to; they have to keep a register in relation to right to build, which we are very keen on. He is right to signal those as important. In order to give him a fuller answer, I will write to him on all of those points, if I may, and put a copy in the Library.

Business of the House

Timing of Debates

11.37 am

Moved by **Baroness Evans of Bowes Park**

That the debate on the Motion in the name of Baroness Smith of Newnham set down for today shall be limited to 3 hours and that in the name of Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer to 2 hours.

Motion agreed.

European Union: Final Withdrawal Agreement

Statement

11.37 am

The Minister of State, Department for Exiting the European Union (Baroness Anelay of St Johns) (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House, I will repeat the Answer to an Urgent Question taken a short while ago in another place.

“We have been very clear, right from the start of this process, that there will be a vote in both Houses of Parliament on the final deal that we agree with the European Union. I will reiterate the commitment that my Minister gave at this Dispatch Box during the Article 50 Bill. He said:

‘I can confirm that the Government will bring forward a motion on the final agreement, to be approved by both Houses of Parliament before it is concluded. We expect and intend that this will happen before the European Parliament debates and votes on the final agreement’.

Furthermore, he added that,

‘we intend that the vote will cover not only the withdrawal arrangements but also the future relationship with the European Union’.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 7/2/17; col. 264.]

These remain our commitments.

The terms of that vote were also clear. Again, as my Minister said at the time:

‘The choice will be meaningful: whether to accept that deal or to move ahead without a deal’.—[*Official Report*, Commons, 7/2/17; col. 275.]

Of course, that vote cannot happen until there is a deal to vote on, but we are working to reach an agreement on the final deal in good time before we leave the European Union in March 2019. Clearly, we cannot say for certain at this stage when that will be agreed, but Michel Barnier has said he hopes to get a draft deal agreed by October 2018 and that is our aim as well.

We fully expect that there will be a vote in the UK Parliament on this agreement before the vote in the European Parliament and before we leave the EU. As we have said, this vote will be over and above the requirements of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act. We have also said many times that we want to move to talking about the future relationship as soon as possible. The EU has been clear that any future partnership cannot legally conclude until the UK becomes a third country, as the Prime Minister herself explained in her Florence speech.

As I set out in the committee yesterday, our aim is to have the terms of our future relationship agreed by the time we leave in March 2019. However, we recognise that the ratification of that agreement will take time and that that could run into the implementation period that we seek. There can be no doubt that Parliament will be fully involved throughout this process”.

11.40 am

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab): I thank the noble Baroness for repeating the Statement. However, just as it took legislation to start the Article 50 process, so the outcome of two years’ negotiation must also be authorised by legislation, as Dominic Grieve and others have stressed, not by a vote in Parliament being mere motion. In the Commons a few minutes ago the Secretary

of State referred to “in the event that we do not do the deal”. Let us be clear: should that happen and our Government walk away, that must also be subject to a vote, because no deal is actually a decision. It is a decision that our future trade will be on WTO terms, that we will be outside the customs union and that there will be no transition period. Will the Minister very gently advise her colleagues that in due course your Lordships’ House is likely to be of the view that legislative authority will be needed, deal or no deal?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, I always listen carefully to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayter. I know she reflects carefully on the views of Her Majesty’s loyal Opposition. I make it clear that commitments given at the Dispatch Box by a member of the Government are binding. Therefore, the commitment to ensure that this House and another place have a meaningful vote, not only on the terms of the withdrawal agreement but on the implementation period agreement and the future relationship, is binding on the Government and will remain so.

Lord Pannick (CB): My Lords, does the noble Baroness recall that, during the passage of the notification Bill in March, this House approved an amendment that I moved to impose a statutory requirement on the Government to ensure there is a meaningful vote and parliamentary consideration of any withdrawal agreement? This House backed down because of undertakings given by the Government. In the light of the uncertainty caused by the comments of the Secretary of State yesterday, would it not be better for there to be a binding statutory obligation to remove all doubt about this? Is it not right that there is an appropriate parliamentary vehicle for such a binding statutory obligation: the withdrawal Bill currently before Parliament?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, I very much remember the contributions of the noble Lord, Lord Pannick, to our debates on the Article 50 Act. As I just explained, a commitment given by a Minister at the Dispatch Box is and remains binding. The noble Lord refers to legislation that is currently in another place and will proceed here. Clearly it is a matter for discussions in that House to proceed, as they may do in Committee and beyond, but the position is clear: there is no confusion about the meaningful votes being offered. When my right honourable friend the Secretary of State answered questions on hypothetical issues of what happens in negotiations in the European Union, he gave an accurate answer. He made it clear that we expect to have an agreement by October next year, because that is what the European Union wants. It is what all of us need, so that not only we but other members of the European Union can properly consider their views on that agreement.

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords, we are discovering that the assertion of taking back control of parliamentary sovereignty at Westminster was a myth in the mouth of the Brexiteers, but is it not right that the final say must surely rest with the voters? As the real facts about Brexit emerge, the public should have the right to reflect and think again about whether Brexit suits them. That would truly be respecting the will of the people. A refusal

to give the voters a final say would be deeply undemocratic. Will the Government now pledge that they will respect the voters and give the final say to the people?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We respect entirely that the democratic process means that in a referendum people express their view. More than 1 million more people voted to leave than to remain. We gave the undertaking that we would respect the result of that referendum and, as I gently reminded the noble Baroness the other week, the fact is that the only major party to stand at the last election on the basis of having a second referendum suffered the penalty of almost total loss.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, nobody can doubt the good intentions of my noble friend. She has the respect of all parts of the House, but will she accept that intentions and expectations are not guarantees? We need a legislative guarantee that Parliament will indeed take back control.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, our undertaking is indeed to give a guarantee that Parliament will have a vote on the agreement that is reached; not only on the withdrawal agreement but also, as I have stressed, on any implementation phase and on our future relationship. That is a very broad discussion for Parliament to have and a very definitive decision that they can make.

Lord Grocott (Lab): My Lords, will the Minister clear up something which seems baffling, to me at any rate, from these exchanges, drawing on her experiences as a former Chief Whip? If Parliament, either this House or the other House, wants to have a vote, it is within Parliament's power to have a vote, whether the Government want it to have one or not. It is very nice to have government reassurances on these matters but as a matter of parliamentary procedure, Governments might love the idea of not having votes, particularly if Governments are not secure in their majority, but the practical truth is that, whatever these exchanges are, if the House of Commons wants to vote on a major issue of constitutional importance, the House of Commons is well within its power and capacity in procedure to be able to do so.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, when I became Opposition Chief Whip I had the pleasure of working with the noble Lord, who was then the Government Chief Whip. He knew his procedure and rules then and he is right now.

Lord Bridges of Headley (Con): My Lords, will my noble friend please clarify something? In the event of no deal, were Parliament to reject that outcome, what power would Parliament have to force the European Union back to the negotiating table and/or to force the Government to revoke the notice to leave the European Union?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, we are negotiating to stay in a relationship with the European Union while leaving the institution. The European Union is engaged with us in having very constructive and very technical discussions behind the scenes. Both sides

are confident that we will reach a successful agreement and therefore hypothecation and hypothesis are beyond my remit today.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab): My Lords, will the noble Baroness please answer the question that was put to her by her noble friend concerning the outcome of a vote in Parliament not to accept the terms of any deal negotiated by the Government to withdraw from the European Union? It is a very simple question. She may not have the answer, but if she does not have it, will she please say so?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, the question has been asked before of Ministers in both Houses, and the answer remains the same. We have committed to give both Houses a meaningful vote on the withdrawal agreement and we have now extended that to cover an implementation period and our future relationship. That is the undertaking: it has been made clear to the public as well that we will honour the decision in the referendum but seek the best agreement we can. That means that as we reach March 2019, we and, I hope, all those in this House will have done our best to reach the right agreement and therefore any discussion about how we then proceed will become irrelevant. The vital thing as we prepare to leave is that if there is no agreement, this Government will have made all due preparation to be able to cope with that. That is what we have been doing, as I have been explaining, over the last two months.

Lord Dykes (CB): My Lords, does the Minister agree that her answers are a bit too long and do not allow enough people to get in on these occasions, which are very important? Was she impressed two days ago with the interesting comments of Mayor Bloomberg—a very successful international businessman and ex-mayor of New York—that the decision of the Government to leave the European Union was as stupid as Donald Trump, the President of the United States?

Noble Lords: Too long!

Lord Dykes: Will she now ask her colleagues to think again about these matters, as the Government become more and more of a laughing stock, and decide what to do in the real interests of this country?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, Governments always listen to views. I am known for never having called anybody's views stupid. Even if I disagree with them, I listen and reflect. That is what I have always done and I shall always continue to do so.

Intergenerational Fairness in Government Policy

Motion to Take Note

11.50 am

Moved by **Baroness Smith of Newnham**

That this House takes note of the case for intergenerational fairness to form a core part of government policy across all departments.

Baroness Smith of Newnham (LD): My Lords, unusually, this is not a topic that I dreamed up for myself; it is rather a Liberal Democrat-led debate. The Motion is

[BARONESS SMITH OF NEWNHAM]

extremely complex and multifaceted and I am not expecting all the answers to come today; nor am I even going to raise all the questions. I can already see a smile coming across the face of the noble Lord, Lord Young of Cookham, who is going to respond to this debate. I had put in my notes that I was not expecting all the answers and thought that he might be relieved about this, particularly as at Questions yesterday it seemed that every Question on the Order Paper was addressed to him.

I propose today to look at some very broad issues, and I am aware that the Motion is one that taxed even your Lordships' Library. As ever, it provided an excellent briefing, but the author was quick to point out that he was looking at particularly prominent aspects of the debate: unemployment and earnings; pensions and pensioner benefits; and housing, including supply and tenure. The Library did not in any way try to cover every conceivable aspect of intergenerational fairness. The examination question that we set ourselves was based on the idea that intergenerational fairness should form a core part of government policy across all departments, going far beyond the current debate that we have had about young versus old and millennials versus baby boomers. I intend, in the first few minutes of my speech, to talk about some of the international aspects of intergenerational fairness, because this is not only a domestic matter: the international consequences are also important.

I want to challenge Her Majesty's Government and your Lordships as well—if your Lordships are willing—to be more ambitious and comprehensive in exploring questions of intergenerational fairness. It is all too easy to look at the immediate question of how today's young people are faring against today's pensioners or against the baby boomers. We perhaps saw it put most explicitly in a recent piece in the *Daily Mail* by the noble Lord, Lord Lamont, who is not in his place. He said that giving tax increases to the old in order to woo the young would be political suicide. That is one of the problems that we face when we think about questions of intergenerational fairness. In a democracy, elected politicians—or those who seek to be elected—inevitably look toward the short-term horizon of the next election. We normally expect that horizon to be four or five years. If we are moving to an electoral horizon that is only two years, then perhaps it will be even more difficult to engage in long-term planning. I am assuming that an election in 2017—so soon after 2015—was an aberration, but nevertheless the fact remains that, if you are seeking election, you are looking to the short term rather than the longer term.

Intergenerational fairness is hugely important; it needs to be thought about and planned for. It can be measured objectively yet it is not. Clearly, this applies only up to a point, as there may be future issues that we cannot predict. In my Cambridge college, however, the finance committee looks at the balance between current expenditure on current students and the endowment along with the prospects for future students. Her Majesty's Government might like to think about that in their long-term cross-departmental planning. Intergenerational fairness is about not just current generations—our children and grandchildren—but generations as yet

unborn. It applies to global matters as much as domestic ones. I plan to talk quite a lot about the global because I am very aware that my noble friends and other Members of your Lordships' House will talk about a range of domestic issues.

The international is hugely important—oh! I apologise. I normally never have a written speech to read but I thought that as I am moving this Motion, I had better have one; that was clearly not the best thing to do. In terms of the international, one key issue that needs to be addressed is climate change. For those climate sceptics in the Chamber or elsewhere, this is not to suggest that we need to look again at the causes of climate change. That can become a sterile debate because whether you believe that its causes are manmade or not, its implications and long-term consequences are absolutely clear. The policies that need to be undertaken are needed regardless of what the causes of climate change are. Long-term thinking and an understanding of the science is required; equally, it is crucial to understand the potential consequences in environmental issues and the possible loss of whole territories. There are countries that may be simply submerged by water. I am sure that my noble friend Lady Featherstone will talk about climate change issues in her contribution.

Mitigation may be possible and adaptation may be necessary, but if we ignore the global picture we will be ignoring the consequences that impact not just in far-flung parts of the globe but here in the United Kingdom. Issues of human security are to the fore elsewhere. They may not be at the forefront of policymakers' minds in the United Kingdom, but perhaps they should be. "Climate refugees" may not yet be a term recognised in international law but the reality is of millions of people who may be displaced by floods and other climate factors—perhaps not in the UK but further afield. That movement of people, with its mass migration, stands to create significant problems with resources in some of the poorest parts of the world. It will potentially create conflict and certainly create challenges to resources, with the potential for resource depletion and destabilised states.

All that is surely a matter of consequence to the United Kingdom, particularly one that believes in going global in the context of Brexit. Surely DfID should think about this matter. If it is looking at some of the intergenerational consequences in the parts of the world where it has an interest, it might also look at the fact that older women tend to be those left behind when there is mass migration, as they are not economically active. Is DfID looking at that and, if not, why not? The UK prides itself on spending 0.7% of GDP on development aid yet critics will say, "It's a waste of money. Why aren't we spending that money at home?". It is done partly out of self-interest. Yes, there is a degree of moral obligation but there is also a reason to say that we should invest globally to ensure that we alleviate problems before they have knock-on effects for our security, as well as the security of other parts of the world.

There is a link between climate issues, forced migration, development and, inevitably, the roles of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. After all, the response to Hurricane Irma could be

financially through DfID, but the reality on the ground was delivered by our Armed Forces. The MoD needed to play a role and our ships and planes were required. There are international issues that go beyond traditional military conflict that need to be thought about and planned for.

By now your Lordships may be thinking, “This is all about the international. Has she forgotten the intergenerational aspects of fairness at home?”. No, I am going to move swiftly from the international to the domestic via the Department for Exiting the European Union, which I think is meant to be time-limited. In that sense, perhaps it does not need to think about the long term. I believe it should end in 2019 or in 2021 after a transitional period or at some date as yet undefined. The prospect of exiting the European Union is presumably meant to have an end-point, but the consequences of the negotiations to leave, the transitional arrangements and, in particular, the arrangements for a future relationship with the European Union will fundamentally affect the life chances of our young people, and in particular their children and their grandchildren. So what work is the right honourable David Davis, the Secretary of State for the Department for Exiting the European Union, doing about the future, about long-term planning? What sort of questions is he thinking about and raising about Erasmus, Horizon 2020 and other policies that will affect the long-term future of our country? I refer to my interests as an academic at Cambridge University.

By way of an aside, I understand that one of the Government Whips was asking who teaches European politics in universities, what they teach about Brexit and whether he could see their syllabi. I pointed out to my students last week that my views about Brexit are on the record but as an academic I understand fundamentally that it is my duty to educate and inform. My views are personal, but my job is to inspire people to think and criticise, and that applies in all areas of policy. I am very happy to send Mr Heaton-Harris a copy of my book.

Educating young people, whether through higher education or schools, is clearly part of the question of intergenerational fairness. Social mobility has gone down in this country. We have lost the ability to think long term and to plan for the long term. If we look back to Beveridge, we see insight and inspiration. If we look at housing, we look back to Macmillan and see policies that affected the life chances of millions of people. Where is that vision in the 21st century? We do not get it from politicians who are simply looking to the next election, who are simply asking “How do I buy votes today?”—obviously, that is metaphorically buying—and “How do I woo voters today?” and are not thinking about the long-term future. It is profoundly short-sighted simply to listen to focus groups or to look at opinion polls and think that something will secure a majority among the old or the young. That is not leadership. It is not worthy of leaders of this country. It is also ultimately self-defeating. It is clearly important that politicians listen to what the public want, but there is surely a degree to which they also need to set an agenda, take responsibility about the long term and stand up and say, on a whole set of

issues, that we need to go beyond two years or three years to 20 years or 30 years. Of course, in countries that are not democratic—Saudi Arabia or China—it is a little easier. You can have Saudi 2030. You can have multiannual plans in China knowing that you are not going to have to face the electorate. Clearly we do not want to move away from our democratic ideals, but we need to make sure that democratically elected politicians think through the consequences of their actions not just for today, not just for the next five years or the next 10 years but for future generations.

There are a whole set of areas where this country has engaged in short-termism and where we need to think about the long term. Education is one of them, and I am sure my noble friend Lord Storey will talk about young people and children. The pupil premium went some way in the direction of helping to deal with the issues of the left-behind and intragenerational issues, but we could go so much further. We need to deal with the issues not just of intergenerational fairness but of intragenerational fairness.

Education is part of that, but so is how we deal with the health service and social care. We are all part of an intergenerational community, and the issues of ageing and social care affect all of us, whether we are carers or old and expecting to be looked after. So much of the caring profession, like so much of the National Health Service, depends on immigrants, whether from the EU or beyond, so there is a role and a question for the Home Office. Has the Home Secretary thought about the implications of demographic change in terms of intergenerational fairness and the need to respond now to questions of long-term planning? Immigration will matter and it is something we do not necessarily link back to domestic policy sufficiently often.

I have touched on some of the departments that might wish to take a view of intergenerational fairness in the long term. My colleagues and other Members of your Lordships’ House will undoubtedly talk about pensions, housing, education and the myriad other issues at stake, but the time has surely come when we look beyond the short term to the far horizon and think about a vision for the United Kingdom that enables us to have fairness within generations and for future generations. I beg to move.

12.07 pm

Lord Willetts (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, on bringing this debate to the House today. It is a very important subject. I should perhaps declare my interest as a baby boomer, but I should also declare my interest as the executive chair of the Resolution Foundation, which is doing a lot of research on this subject. Indeed, I am chairing an intergenerational commission on this very topic which is graced by, among others, the noble Lord, Lord Filkin, as one of my fellow commissioners.

At the heart of this debate is a fundamental part of the social contract that holds a society together. By six to one, British people expect younger generations to be better off than they are. It is supposed to be part of the promise of a modern, liberal, capitalist society that successive generations will be more prosperous. However, we have now reached the stage in which by two to one, citizens in this country fear that the future

[LORD WILLETTS]

generations will not be better off. Something that should be the promise of a modern, liberal society is not being delivered.

The noble Baroness took this as an international challenge, and she is right to look at it internationally. Indeed, I would say that the debate on climate change has led to some of the most sophisticated investigations of how we should properly value the future and value the interests of future generations, and perhaps even value the interests of generations as yet unborn. But I hope she will permit me to focus on the vivid evidence of what is going wrong in this country.

The most powerful evidence of all is on housing. The noble Baroness referred to the 300,000 homes a year that were built during the 1950s and 1960s, whereas now, under successive parties in government, we struggle to build half that—150,000 houses. Someone aged 30 is half as likely now to be a home owner as they were a generation ago. This is not because there has been a fundamental shift in popular attitudes away from home ownership—far from it: 60% of renters aged 18 to 40 say they would like to own a home. This is an aspiration that we on these Benches strongly support, and the fact that for so many young people it is an aspiration they are no longer able to fulfil must be something that we would wish to tackle. I hope we will hear from the Minister when he replies to this debate about what more can be done on that.

As well as helping people into home ownership, there is also the issue of housing costs, where rents which used to take 8% of the income of boomers, when we were younger, now take up 25% of the income of the younger generation today. That is one reason why they are consuming less than previous generations. Their discretionary income has fallen; many of them are renting, sometimes in scandalously poor-quality accommodation with very weak rights as tenants. It would be great to see more protection there as well.

I personally think that the worries about housing costs lie behind some of the anxieties around higher education and the fees and loan system which I myself as a Minister was involved in. A lot of people fear that somehow the so-called graduate debt is a barrier to getting started in the housing market, but fortunately it is not a real debt, like an overdraft or a credit card debt or a mortgage. In my conversations with the Council of Mortgage Lenders, it fully understood that this was not like a commercial loan; it was instead a fixed outgoing that would be taken into account as an expenditure item rather than as a liability.

If anything, the real challenge on education is that the rate of improvement in human capital—the rate of investment, and the rate at which we are raising our skills in this country—is, as a recent OECD report has shown, shockingly low. That is why I want us to continue to see more people going into higher education, and I want that higher education properly resourced. But, of course, it is also very important that we invest in vocational and technical routes outside higher education.

As well as housing and the need to invest in skills, there is also the challenge of jobs and wages—and again, the evidence is dispiriting. The wages of someone

in their late twenties today are lower than they were for someone in their late twenties 10 or 15 years ago. When we tried to understand why this is happening, we found that one reason is the decline in the rate of job mobility—people not moving jobs as frequently as they used to. That seems to be why younger generations are finding it hard to see their living standards rise.

This all feeds through into government policy, and it is very important that government policy properly take into account the challenge of intergenerational equity. I am afraid that when we look at tax and benefits, the picture is again very dispiriting. The freeze in working-age benefits, combined with other tax changes, means that, in the next few years, the combined effect of all these policy changes is to reduce the incomes of millennials born between 1980 and 2000 by about £475 a year; to reduce the incomes of people born in the 1970s by £390 a year; but to reduce the incomes of boomers by £10 a year.

I do not believe in generational warfare. I do believe that different generations care about each other. Grandparents want to see their children and grandchildren living well, and grandchildren expect their grandparents' pensions to be properly looked after. So I thought that a lot of what my noble friend Lord Lamont said in that very spirited article in the *Daily Mail* is correct. I do not want to see generational warfare. But, especially as a former Chancellor, he will recognise that when resources are limited, the question is: what is the equitable distribution of those resources? To have such sustained and continuing increases in state expenditure on pension benefits is a very striking contrast to the freeze in the value of all benefits for working-age families. There are other peculiarities of the system as well: national insurance contributions for employees not collected from people of pension age.

So I think there is not just an intergenerational contract—there is indeed genuine interest and concern by generations in each other. Successive Governments, represented by three political parties in this Chamber, just have not attached enough weight to this issue of different generations. We are aware of class differences. We are aware of people from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are aware of ethnic differences. We have not been so aware of the differences between the treatment of different generations, and the time has now come to put that principle of equity at the heart of government policy-making.

12.14 pm

Lord Storey (LD): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Smith for enabling this debate and—whether it was delivered with notes or not—for her excellent speech.

Here is a sobering thought: in the UK, 65 to 74 year-olds now hold more wealth than the entire population under 45 years old—a group, by the way, twice their size. All parents have hopes for their children's future: a successful education, perhaps a place at university or college, an apprenticeship, a good career, a home of their own, and for them to be reasonably financially secure and able to save for their retirement. It is clear that the so-called baby boomers—those aged 52 to 70 in 2016—have benefited from free education,

generous pensions and the housing boom, while the millennials, aged between 16 and 31, face greater challenges with home ownership and saving for retirement.

It may seem strange that we are debating intergenerational fairness in a Chamber that consists, with very few exceptions, of the generation now known as the baby boomers. Indeed, some of our number predate that generation.

I did not hear Harold Macmillan's speech telling us that we had never had it so good, partly because I was not an avid listener to the Home Service at the age of nine and partly because the Prime Minister was preaching to the Tory choir. However, with the benefit of hindsight, my generation, by and large, had it as good as it could be. When I went off to college to train as a teacher, I received a full grant and, to be honest, was better off than I had ever been. If I needed to stay at college during the long vacation, I could apply for a vacation grant which, at £10 a week, was enough to live on. As a "good honours" graduate, I was paid the princely sum of £30 a week, enough to get a mortgage on a £5,000 house.

Compare this with someone starting as a newly qualified teacher this September. An NQT will start at about £22,000, and will already have a massive debt burden of more than twice their annual salary. I disagree with the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, in that when I speak to young students thinking about going to university or at university, they really worry about this debt hanging over them. You say to them, "Well, it's not a debt, it's a bit like your credit card; don't worry about it, you will never have to pay it—or you might, but only in small amounts", but they really worry about it. It is of little comfort that they are unlikely ever to earn enough to pay off the debt. Of even less comfort is the fact that they will need close to 10 times their salary to be able to afford to buy a modest first home.

Of course, they are the lucky ones. Many of today's millennials, even some of those with a good degree, will be working as a barista in a coffee chain for not much more than the minimum wage. Others will be working in the so-called gig economy, with a portfolio of employers who may or may not ring them up and offer them a few hours' work. I was talking yesterday to a young graduate who had moved to London to take up a job. About 52% of her salary went on rent and utility bills, making a trip to a coffee chain something that required more than a little thought. Those young people who, for whatever reason, do not go into higher education may well be doing an apprenticeship for £3.50 an hour, or earning less than £6 an hour if they are employed in a full-time job.

Intergenerational fairness is not just about money. Young people today are growing up subject to pressures that futurologists such as Alvin Toffler or even Jules Verne could not have foreseen. Earlier generations, including mine, have failed to protect them from the internet. We—in particular, the business community—have let the genie grow so large that we are now told that we cannot put it back in the bottle. Yes, we can teach them about the dangers of the internet, but nearly every teenager will have made the necessary three clicks, and many primary school children will have seen videos that would make us all blush.

Social media, since it developed just 20 years ago, has turned out to be a curse as well as a blessing. Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram are now revealing some of their darker colours. With cyberbullying reaching epidemic proportions, our Government were pathetically grateful when Facebook put £1 million—significantly less than one hour's profit—into appointing cyberbullying ambassadors.

Of course, this week we have seen the comments that O'Mara posted. The attention and disgust has rightly been directed towards him—but think about how the women feel whom he has abused. And remember that this is going on all the time: millions of young people are being abused and feel totally and utterly devalued and threatened.

The pressures on young people are unimaginable. Advertising targets them, encouraging lifestyles which are not only unobtainable but unfair and unhealthy. Advertising glamorising gambling is pumped out—and then we wonder why we have a problem with gambling addiction among young people. We allow reality TV shows to glamorise smoking among young people—and then wonder why smoking among young girls has increased. Incidentally, when I asked the Minister a Question about this last week, it was treated with flippant disregard. He said, "Oh, there have only been 70 complaints to Ofcom—so what?"

Intergenerational unfairness seems to operate at every level. I guess all of us here have a bus pass. I never pay for bus travel, while in rural areas young people have to pay a fortune to travel to the nearest FE college or place of work. "I've worked all my life", the political narrative goes, "I deserve it". But what about young people in rural areas?

The winds of change are blowing, and young people have woken up to the power of the ballot box—and political parties are waking up to the problems faced by that age group and generation. Labour is promising to abolish student loans, which, incidentally, they introduced, and even promising to wipe out every student's debt. How fair that is to the 60% of young people who do not go to university and will have to pay for the policy, I am not sure. The Government are also responding to the changing political climate by looking at policies that will help young people. The noble Lord, Lord Willetts, said, that he would be interested to hear what the Minister says about policies that will help young people.

Finally, a taxi driver said to me today, "I don't know anything about politics—they're all the same". No they are not—but choosing not to know perpetuates inequality, unfairness, shortened life expectancy and poverty.

12.21 pm

Lord Best (CB): My Lords, as the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, has noted and as the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, explained so well, the obvious manifestation of intergenerational unfairness in the UK is found in this country's housing circumstances for young and old. Clearly, the UK needs to redress the imbalance between, on the one hand, the majority of those over 60 who are home owners with a substantial capital asset, security, and more than adequate space and, on the other hand, the majority of those under 40 who have the heavy burden of paying a disproportionate

[LORD BEST]

amount of their income for accommodation that seldom suits their needs. Yet the successive deep cuts in housing support to those on the lowest incomes are hitting the under-35s hardest of all. However, today, counterintuitively, I am going to suggest more support specifically targeting older people, rather than advocating brave but vote-losing measures that tax or penalise them.

Much of this country's housing comprises three and four-bedroom suburban houses with gardens, occupied by one or two elderly people. This accommodation will become increasingly problematic to manage and maintain and, with its steps and stairs, increasingly inaccessible. But where are the spacious, light and airy homes that are easy to heat and maintain, in convenient locations, and designed with older people in mind? Only when demand is stimulated and supply is generated will those of us in our extended middle age take the plunge and rightsize before a crisis forces us to move. Such a move would free up the family homes that the next generation so badly needs.

I strongly commend the measures devised by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People, which I co-chair with Peter Aldous MP. The APPG has set out a three-part help-to-move package to change attitudes and behaviours. We propose, first, stamp duty exemption for purpose-built, age-exclusive housing; secondly, equity mortgages to top up purchase costs for older people, as Help to Buy does for the young; and thirdly, good financial advice on housing from an extension to the Government's Pension Wise advisory service.

Helping and incentivising older people to rightsize to new accommodation could contribute massively to intergenerational fairness by releasing significant numbers of family houses on to the market, as happens in so many European countries, the USA and Australasia. Even sales of expensive homes have a knock-on impact that works its way down, releasing property for those on the lower rungs of the ladder. It would also inject some momentum into the stagnant wider housing market, with the economic stimulus of an average of three subsequent movements down the property chain. HM Treasury, although forfeiting stamp duty on the new homes bought by older people, would collect far more stamp duty from the three other movers. So the help-to-move package would cost the Government nothing.

In addition, there would be significant savings to health and social care budgets. Hospital admissions frequently follow accidents in the home; subsequent delayed discharge—bed-blocking, as it is horribly called—is often caused by people being unable to leave hospital or being readmitted because their home cannot take them back. Admission to expensive and unpopular residential care can be prevented or postponed when people move to accessible, care-ready new housing.

Rather than risking the wrath of the electorate with sensible but politically problematic measures, I ask the Minister to lead the charge in backing a help-to-move package which would lead to the redistribution of housing from old to young and free up resources for

the NHS and local authority care budgets. This could be the winning formula for some real intergenerational fairness.

12.27 pm

Lord Tugendhat (Con): My Lords, my noble friend Lord Willetts declared an interest as a member of the baby boomer generation. I am older than he is, and I gather that mine is the silent generation—perhaps because it is thought that we are no longer capable of speech.

I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, on bringing this matter to the attention of the House. It is one of the great issues of the present time. It has been given added topicality by the report of the FCA on young people's finances, published in the last week or ten days. I am also conscious that not only my noble friend Lord Willetts but my noble friend Lady Altmann and the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, have great expertise in this area, which I certainly do not.

The issue can be quite simply stated. We of the older generation have, in recent years, acquired a disproportionate share of the nation's wealth. Not only that but, because of the triple lock and various other devices, we enjoy greater protection against the vagaries of economic life than any other generation. This is the result of decisions taken in the past which were themselves designed to bring about intergenerational fairness. Previous generations of pensioners endured the hardships of the 1930s and the Second World War. When the rest of the country was getting richer, for a long time they lagged behind. Decisions were taken that enabled them to catch up and safeguard their position. At the time, those were correct decisions.

We ought now to be thinking in terms of the same generosity of spirit for the generations that come behind us. We are now in a situation where, except for the very oldest members of the silent generation, those who are drawing a pension have grown up during the years of prosperity and peace. As everybody in this House knows, we have reached a point where the typical pensioner household is now better off than the typical family of working age. That cannot be right, given the responsibilities that families of working age have and the position of people whose responsibilities have very largely been discharged. Of course, I agree very strongly with my noble friend Lord Willetts that we are not talking about intergenerational warfare but intergenerational mutual support. The older generation supports the younger generation in a variety of ways, depending on the prosperity of the families concerned, but they also look to the younger generation for other kinds of support. To achieve that support in the circumstances that now exist, some redistribution is necessary.

There has been talk recently of tax breaks for people in their 20s and 30s. I am not a fan of that device because, were there to be tax breaks for people in one decade or another, inevitably unfairness would arise. If you give tax breaks to those in their 20s and 30s, you could have people earning a great deal of money in their 20s paying less tax than people earning less money in their 50s, so I do not think that is the right way to go. However, there is scope for more

inducements for hypothecated savings—for example, to save for pensions and in ways that the saver is unable to get at in the short term. There is obviously scope for reducing stamp duty but I do not think there is any point doing that unless we combine it with a considerable increase in housebuilding: otherwise, it would merely have the effect of pushing up house prices. We need to reduce stamp duty for younger people, perhaps for first-time buyers, but do it in conjunction with a much more ambitious housebuilding programme.

The findings in the recent report of the Social Mobility Commission have a considerable role to play in resolving the issues that we face today, particularly what it said about apprenticeship policy and persuading universities to link courses more directly to employment opportunities and to provide better advice to students during their university careers and when they graduate on where their education can be put to best advantage. We also need to give a good deal more thought than we have done to the other possibilities offered by tertiary education, and to the balance between different forms of tertiary education in this country.

Anything that we do to resolve this issue will cost money. There is no escape from grasping the nettle and starting to cut back some of the privileges that we of the silent generation and the baby boomers enjoy. In particular, a start must be made on phasing out the triple lock, which next year will yield a particular bonanza because of the September inflation figure.

Finally, I urge the young to vote. The reason the older generation has so many privileges that are so difficult to tackle is because old people vote and young people do not. We saw the result of that in the referendum and in a different and, from my point of view, rather less fortunate, fashion at the last general election. However, if younger people would vote in the same numbers as older people, it would be a great deal less difficult for Governments to tackle the issues that need to be tackled if we are to secure a greater degree of intergenerational fairness.

12.34 pm

The Lord Bishop of Salisbury: My Lords, I too think this is one of the key issues facing our society, so I am grateful for this debate.

Like just about everybody else in this Chamber, I declare an interest as somebody who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, when not only had we never had it so good but things could only get better. Many youngsters are struggling with the burden of debt which can be managed only with either a higher-than-average income or parental help, but many have neither. I have been struck by the quality of contributions to this debate so far, particularly that of the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, but I too disagree: this burden of student debt is not just a technical debt but a real one—and it is not just a financial burden. The noble Lord said that it was dispiriting. That is my point. This generation is having its hope sapped because of the burden of debt and the ways in which we are not addressing its changing needs. This is a matter of hope and values, not just finance.

On Tuesday, I hosted a group of 20 young people who came to the UK from the Calais Jungle. It was the first anniversary of the clearance of the Jungle, but many

youngsters are still hiding there. It was one of the most moving encounters of my life. Fahred Barakzai left Helmand Province aged 15 because he was faced with a choice between fighting or being killed. He had lived in the Calais Jungle for six months and it was clearly hell. As an 18 year-old, he is now faced with the prospect of being sent home, after living for two years in the United Kingdom. That cannot be right.

Ishmael, now 18, who came from Syria, thanked the British Parliament and people for giving them a new home. He said, “It is our duty now in our new country to be part of the British community and help build it together. I believe my country is Britain now. Nothing in the world can change that. The country who kills their own sons is not a country”.

These youngsters presented Parliament with a plaque. It was given to the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, who came to this country in not dissimilar circumstances with the Kindertransport, and is similar to the one commemorating those who came then. The actress, Juliet Stevenson, read the plaque:

“We thank the British people and Parliament for giving us peace. We found a beautiful life in the UK, so different to the life we fled. We were suffering, but now we are safe”.

The MP for Brent North said at the meeting that these youngsters were among the most courageous people in the world. It was striking to see them face to face. The welcome and hospitality we show them reveal something about ourselves and the values of our society. My sense is that this country wishes to take in these unaccompanied children, and that it is therefore a scandal that 280 places offered for refugee children by local authorities remain unfilled. We could do so much better.

I tell that story partly to ensure that the thanks of the young refugees is a matter of record in this House, but also to raise the continuing plight of those who now fear being sent back as young adults, and of those who still wait in danger while we fail to determine their future. I tell it also because they show very clearly the best of British values, which they represent to us, and the failure of our values to address the changing needs of young people.

Much of this debate will focus, rightly, on our own national needs, but I am grateful to the noble Baroness for the way in which she focused on international matters in her introduction. We do not live in isolation, as the young refugees make very clear to us. Similarly, environmental issues do not know national boundaries. Much is happening to address these issues. We are in the early stages of what I am sure is an industrial revolution. The clean growth strategy is encouraging, if not sufficient.

The impact of human-fuelled global warming, the depletion of biodiversity, the degradation of the environment and the despoliation of our common home is one hell of a legacy to bequeath successor generations. As we prepare for the continuation of the Conference of the Parties in Bonn, it is worth reminding ourselves of the very powerful speech made by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, at the opening of the UN Paris summit on climate change. He talked about what we can say to our grandchildren if we fail to make commitments and live up to what we promise.

[THE LORD BISHOP OF SALISBURY]

This debate addresses issues which have been vividly exposed to us through the democratic processes of the referendum and the last election, when young people clearly voted differently from those who are older. Young people see their futures differently from their elders. We need to hear them and address their needs. It is our values that are being exposed and hope needs to be restored. I am grateful to the noble Baroness for bringing forward this debate.

12.41 pm

Baroness Featherstone (LD): My Lords, first, I congratulate my noble friend Lady Smith on bringing this important debate to the Floor of this House. It is a pleasure to follow the right reverend Prelate, and I too will speak on climate change in due course.

I first came to this House to stand at the Bar to listen to the debate on same-sex marriage, and I believe that, unlike some parts of our population, this House is considerate of the generations to come. In that debate I heard a number of your Lordships say that they were not necessarily totally convinced themselves but, following discussions with their children and grandchildren, who had said that they would never speak to them again if they voted the wrong way, they had changed their mind. It was that consideration for the generations to come and the sort of world that would be created that I noted.

Since coming to this House myself, I have not been able to help but notice that there seems more of an acceptance that remaining in the EU might not be such a bad thing because of the great act of self-harm that leaving may be for future generations, who, in the same way, may not forgive their parents and grandparents for what is to come. Therefore, I think that your Lordships consider intergenerational fairness in a way that the population in general does not.

The well-being of future generations depends on the actions that we take today. Each generation has a responsibility to pass on this earth in at least as good a condition as the one that we inherited from our forebears. There can be no more intergenerational harm than that which will be done by climate change. If we do not hold the rise in temperature to 1.5 degrees, or at the very least to under 2 degrees, future generations will suffer the consequences. It is our duty to hand on to our children their share of the planet's natural resources and to ensure that our profligate use does not damage their futures. If we do not, future generations will suffer the detrimental effects that they are left to survive, together with the higher costs that will be forced on them by having to adapt to a future where the extremes of weather which we have all seen to date will be as nothing compared to what will come.

Climate change raises serious issues of justice between the present generation and future generations. We will feel the effect in the United Kingdom, of course, but, while we will suffer here, it will be as nothing compared with the ravages that will take hold elsewhere, mostly in the parts of the world where the poorest and most vulnerable live.

When I was a Minister in DfID, I experienced the effects that climate change are already having. I felt the desertification under my feet in Darfur and I saw

for myself what too much water in Asia and too little water in Africa can do. It is no use thinking that we will be okay because we are not in the front line of climate change: there will be not only wars over water but, as my noble friend said, flows of migration escaping famine, drought and floods that will make the streams of refugees we have seen fleeing conflict as nothing.

Climate change will make the already stark inequalities in our world much worse than they already are. Not only are the societal impacts clear but the economic consequences of dislocation will be catastrophic. Our natural world will suffer horrendous loss—the loss of existing species, both flora and fauna, and the loss of diversity, which will consequentially mean that future generations do not have options: they will lose the range of options that we currently enjoy in addressing the needs of our own era. So we have a clear duty and responsibility to the future. It is clear that, if we do not take radical action, weather will become more extreme. Coastal areas, even in the United Kingdom, will flood and precipitation patterns will change.

However, we are not powerless in this. We, and the world, can take radical action. The Paris agreement, which has been referred to, saw the world come together and sign up to keeping the rise in temperature to 2 degrees or less. The signing of that agreement was a glorious moment in time: thinking of future generations, accepting responsibility for our own actions and the consequences thereof, and taking real action to turn the tide. But there has been no change of pace since we signed the agreement.

When I came into post as energy and climate change spokesperson, what struck me most was that there was no sense of urgency, but this is urgent. We need to have zero carbon by 2050 to meet our Paris agreement commitment. That is Liberal Democrat policy. We recently published a report, *A Vision for Britain: Clean, Green and Carbon Free*, in case noble Lords wish to read it. It is possible to get there but, to do so, we have to go further and faster than this country's current commitment to an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050. We have to aim to reduce greenhouse gases by 80% by 2040, if not earlier.

As I said, to get there, we have to go further and faster, forging ahead on every front. We have to have more investment in renewables and in innovative technology. We definitely have to have carbon capture and storage, otherwise we have no hope of making it. We need a major programme on energy efficiency, and there we should think of future generations, because currently we are just wasting energy, generally allowing it to exit through the roofs of our homes. We need to accelerate the deployment of renewables. We need a new governance structure, a rapid rollout of storage technologies and an integrated electricity systems operator. We have to reduce demand. We have to address aviation and shipping, optimise supply chains, tackle industry, ensure a circular economy, have support for low-carbon heat and low-carbon transport, and afforestation. We also need close co-operation with the EU—I wish.

And what about our peatlands? They are not even counted in our emissions. What about community energy, housing standards, as mentioned earlier today in Questions, and onshore wind? What about heat

pumps and tidal lagoons? For goodness' sake, let us give the go-ahead to Swansea Bay as the first of many tidal lagoons. What about biogas? And what about climate risk in terms of the financial exposure of our great corporations? All that has to be done—that is the scary thing. Every single bit of it has to be done to the max, and it can be done only with political will. If are to deliver on our pledge to future generations, we have a long way to go, but what we are proposing at the moment does not go far enough. However, we owe it to the future. We have been a profligate generation but we are also the generation that can save the future if we act now.

12.49 pm

Baroness Altmann (Con): My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, on securing this important debate. The issue of intergenerational fairness has been rising up the political agenda, and I find this trend deeply troubling. By pitting one generation against another, instead of generations working together and supporting each other, society is damaged.

First, like my noble friend Lord Willetts, I understand the concerns that young people express, particularly when it comes to housing, student debt and irresponsible credit card and loan practices. But those are issues related specifically to the housing market, the financial system and higher education. They are not really generational fairness factors.

The enormous rise in house prices across the UK has also driven up rents, which means that tenants of all ages have less disposable income for other expenditure. But that relates to the shortage of new homes and, to some extent at least, the Bank of England's policy of quantitative easing, which was deliberately designed to inflate asset prices as an indirect means of stimulating the economy. Problems of housing affordability for younger people will not be most effectively solved just by giving young people more money to buy a home. In fact, such policies may further increase upward pressure on house prices. Increasing supply would be more beneficial. We are probably at the top of the housing price cycle. The ratio of house prices to earnings is clearly unsustainable, but it may not last. We have seen house price cycles before. Indeed, just because house prices have risen and many older people own their own homes does not actually improve living standards for older generations. They live in their homes and their income is not normally improved when house prices rise. The noble Lord, Lord Best, however, is right to focus on the need to encourage older people to downsize and free up family homes for younger people.

Another significant problem for younger generations is the sharp increase in the cost of funding higher education. Once more, that is not the fault of older generations, most of whom never had a chance to go to university—less than 10% of today's retirees actually went to university. Older people are too often portrayed as undeservedly wealthy, having been lucky throughout their lives in ways that young people cannot hope for. But, quite frankly, I feel that such stereotypes are dangerous simplifications. There is an enormous range of income and wealth among pensioners. Lumping all those over pension age together and looking at their average wealth or income per person gives a misleading

picture. Also, lumping the entire age group together is highly misleading. Most over-75s and certainly over-80s are not well-off at all. They live on low incomes with half or so needing means-tested assistance.

UK state pensions are among the lowest in the developed world. Pensioners overall are no more likely than other groups to be in poverty, but that is success and marks real social progress. It is not a signal that somehow we have done something wrong. In fact, pensioner poverty is most pernicious, because once a pensioner is poor they cannot normally hope to improve their future financial position. Younger people have their future career and earnings to look forward to, whereas pensioner poverty is most often permanent. However, the triple lock has been another example of a political construct that has become totemic and has proved damaging. I agree with my noble friend Lord Tugendhat that it may have outlived its usefulness, but it is also important to remember that the triple lock is rather misleading because the poorest pensioners are not actually protected and the triple lock gives much more protection to the younger, better-off pensioners than to the oldest and poorest, which is clearly the wrong way round.

Another factor that is too often overlooked is that young people are starting their careers and their earning years much later than previous generations did. Comparing today's twentysomethings with those of prior cohorts is not quite comparing like with like. If young people today are starting work, say, five years later than was previously the norm, their income position should be compared with people five years older than them rather than of the same age. If the young also ultimately benefit from the extra qualifications, they should increase their earnings more as they progress through their careers and should not therefore stay behind previous generations. The best route out of poverty is employment, and we should congratulate the Government that employment rates for young people are around record levels with very low unemployment. Meanwhile, older generations are staying in work much longer than ever before. The numbers of older people in work are at record levels, as older generations keep contributing more to the economy.

I find it strange that there is so much concern about the so-called baby boomers having good pensions and owning more assets. Surely, in a societal sense, that is to be welcomed, partly because they are at the end of their careers rather than at the beginning or halfway through, but also because as more older people live longer, increasing numbers will need more money to support them through their expected extended later life. Extreme old age will increasingly become the norm rather than exception. More will need money to pay for social care, and if they have no money they will have to be supported by younger taxpayers.

We should perhaps be celebrating that today's older people are better off than previous generations, while also encouraging those who can to earmark some of their money in case they need later-life care. I urge my noble friend the Chancellor to introduce measures that will address that, such as incentives to keep some of their pensions or ISAs or allocate a share of the value of their home to a fund that would be set aside

[BARONESS ALTMANN]

for later-life care in case they need it. That would at last begin to bring in much-needed funding before the care crisis brings down the NHS and places ever more burdens on young taxpayers. It is also true that there is an intergenerational imbalance in pension coverage, but that is partly a function of the unrealistically expensive pension promises that were made by past employers, who did not anticipate the range of changes that have increased the costs of providing a final salary-type pension to around 50% of salary.

I caution strongly against pitting one generation against another. Older generations already do much to support the young. Society is a nation of generations, each of which needs to live together in harmony. The bank of mum and dad—and often the bank of grandma and grandad—is helping younger generations. Relationships between old and young people are so important, both in our communities and in the workplace. I urge noble Lords to be mindful of the need for intergenerational cohesion.

Baroness Goldie (Con): My Lords, we are tight for time, so I ask your Lordships to pay attention to the seven-minute timetable, please.

12.57 pm

Lord Turnbull (CB): My Lords, I very much welcome this debate, which brings intergenerational fairness—a subject previously confined to the higher realms of philosophy and welfare economics—to the forefront of current government policies. It seems that a new division in society is not class, around which the two main parties have been organised for nearly a century, but around age. We may deplore that fact, but I do not think that we can ignore it.

It may seem difficult to believe that younger generations will not be better off than their predecessors when they will enjoy the enormous benefits of science and technology—the genome, the internet and mobile phones. But getting an Uber in three minutes may be scant consolation when you cannot find a home that you can afford to buy or rent. There are many benefits that the young will almost certainly not see: such as free university education, although it was only available to a small fraction of the cohort; defined benefit pension schemes; retirement at 60 or 65; a foot on the housing ladder by their mid-20s and mortgage paid off by 55; and wages more or less guaranteed to rise faster than prices. So it is right to examine the current state of policies through the lens of intergenerational fairness.

Much of the Government's rhetoric has been spent on government borrowing and debt, but is that really the main problem? Fifteen years ago, the debt to GDP ratio was about 40%. Now it is close to 80%, although it is beginning to decline, and that has been described by successive Chancellors as impoverishing future generations. In my view, this argument is exaggerated. The debt to GDP ratio is a poor metric for fairness. It ignores the decline in the cost of servicing debt. While the ratio has doubled, debt servicing, which was 2.4% 20 years ago, is still 2.4%. Secondly and more importantly, the ratio ignores the asset side of the balance sheet. If government borrowing is reflected in productive investment—for example, housing—the net wealth of the nation may well be increased.

So I put higher up my list of issues a decade of quantitative easing. Its effect is to lower interest rates and boost asset prices, the benefit of which goes mostly to those who own assets, be it land, commercial property, houses or shares, and these are overwhelmingly older people. The other beneficiaries are company executives, who are paid—unlike most of us—partly in cash and partly in shares.

We also need to be precise about terms. Inequality of incomes has not widened in the past 25 years—post tax and benefits, it has stayed virtually the same. It is the widening inequality in wealth that I think is a greater worry, and it is that to which we should address remedies.

Next on my list is pensions. There are virtually no new entrants to DB schemes, some of which are being converted to direct contribution schemes, which then struggle to earn decent returns. Nevertheless, there is still a large number of DB liabilities to be met, and the lower returns are causing huge deficits in company pension schemes, which they have to plug by reducing investment, raising prices or increasing contributions, all to the detriment of younger generations. Meanwhile, free prescriptions are still available from age 60, and the triple lock on pensions has entrenched the position of the elderly.

I do not need to say much about housing, important as it is. We have had two good debates in this House, one only last week, so I have just two comments. The Government's White Paper confessed that, for those on the housing ladder, the average house “earned” in capital appreciation more than the average earnings of those living in it. While earnings are heavily taxed, those capital gains are not, and inheritance tax is being eased. We need action on all fronts and for all tenures, with less emphasis placed on Help to Buy and more on building affordable homes for rent, which is the epicentre of the housing crisis.

The funding of higher education also raises issues of who should pay. The system that we now have has some important principles at its heart: those who earn more as a result of acquiring a degree should make a contribution and not rely on the taxes of people many of whom will be poorer than they are; contributions should be assessed on future earnings and not on what parents were earning at the time; the funding framework should enable the Government to draw back from detailed control of numbers and courses; and, importantly, students from poorer backgrounds should have better access to higher education. What we have at the moment is a mess. It is misrepresented as a loans scheme, which makes it look more frightening than it really is. The interest rate is indefensible—it is funny how HMG always choose which of RPI or CPI suits them best for any particular circumstance. The scheme has become almost incomprehensible after many changes, and the freezing of the income threshold with retrospective effect was a disgrace. In short, a scheme that has some sound and justifiable principles behind it has been undermined by Treasury greed and opportunism in exploiting the way in which the Government's accounts are put together. There needs to be a review, but I hope that it will correct the injustices but not be panicked into throwing out what is sound.

Then there is the issue of long-term care. We were edging towards a sensible definition of care and a fair balance between what is paid by the family and what is paid by taxpayers generally. We were also looking at what level of assets should be protected and what assets should be taken into account. In my view, it is right that the family house should be included in wealth, particularly when there is a scheme to provide deferral of payment. The Conservative Party manifesto blew this consensus wide open by knocking out a crucial element; that is, the protection given to the small number of families who incur massive bills for care. This is an issue not of intergenerational fairness but of intragenerational fairness, but it nevertheless needs to be addressed. We need to go back to the drawing board and to take the courage to get past the taunts of “dementia tax”.

Finally, there is an issue right here in this House. Many people would welcome the opportunity to serve here, so my final question is: is it fair that, once appointed, some people can serve 20 years, 30 years or 40 years, thereby reducing the opportunity to generations behind them?

1.05 pm

Lord True (Con): My Lords, I, too, congratulate the noble Baroness on introducing the debate. It has been diverting to hear about intergenerational fairness from the Benches opposite who have just elected a new leader aged 75. Could they not find anyone younger?

I agree with so much that has been said by so many but, like my noble friend Lady Altmann, I must take a different tack, because I dislike this rhetoric of intergenerational fairness. Others may respond that it is not about division but all about fairness, but calling for fairness implies that some unprincipled people are in clover at the expense of others. What increasingly echoes back from the wall of social media are the cries “unfair”, “older people are to blame” and “let’s take it back”.

My noble friend Lord Willets, who spoke so brilliantly, as always, today, marred his important and thoughtful book with a deliberately provocative title. In it, he likened our generation, so-called baby boomers, to a “selfish giant” and said that we had, “taken our children’s future”, a phrase rehashed very swiftly by the *Guardian* as “stolen”.

We should be careful to avoid political rhetoric, as my noble friend lately said, that sets group against group. In particular, I deplore anything that, wittingly or unwittingly, provokes the old people of the future against the young people of the past. The excellent report of the Work and Pensions Committee in another place rightly ended with a strong warning on adversarial language. I know that is not my noble friend’s intention or that of anyone else who has spoken—quite the reverse: what an intelligent and interesting debate we have had—but what we need is not the sledgehammer of a potentially divisive soundbite or the stereotyping of groups but the scalpel of intelligent and targeted policy, at which my noble friend and so many others who have spoken excel.

“Fairness” can be measured in many varied ways and cannot be analysed in arid economic statistics alone. Young people today, and how good that is, have opportunities

and advantages that young baby boomers, or indeed the silent, never had. I give a small example. For some reason, my noble friend’s Intergenerational Commission’s latest interesting publication has guacamole on its cover, coming from a continent, South America, that none of us at school ever dreamed of being able to see. In fact, I find that avocados were first sold at Sainsbury’s in 1962 and at Marks & Spencer in 1968. It goes to illustrate that the cornucopia of food choices that we have today was simply not available.

Thank God that this generation has not—yet—had to contend with 9%, 10% and far higher mortgage rates that we selfish ones did. Today, too, we have all the benefits of an information and technological revolution unknown to those of us who waited months for our first landline from the kind of state monopoly that the party opposite wants to bring back. Frankly, how infuriating it has been for so many older people to watch on while Governments led by those who are now our juniors ravaged the pensions system, stoked a housing asset bubble—as the noble Lord, Lord Turnbull, said, through quantitative easing, pummelling savers along the way—and piled unimaginable quantities of debt on future generations. There are two recent Chancellors whom I will not name who bear a heavy responsibility for that.

Let us not fall for a lump of prosperity fallacy to be addressed by taxing Doris to pay Dan. High tax is part of the problem for us all. Most older people want to see what they have built going to help their children and grandchildren, but inheritance tax take is projected to rise by 30% in the next five years, with the state destroying £27.7 billion of potential family support by 2022.

Housing is an issue. I agree with many of the things said by the noble Lord, Lord Best. By the way, I would look at allowing councils to give themselves planning permission to build on unused public sector brown land where the owners are unwilling or require execution of planning permissions given. High stamp duty, as others have said, has been a disaster. In many areas, starter homes have disappeared as people have extended up and out rather than move out and pay the tax. Indeed, the small, two-bedroom house where I started a family with my wife is now a 4.5-bedroom house, inaccessible to a young family for this very reason. The take from this distorting tax is planned to rise by over 60% by 2022, with the Treasury grabbing £74 billion in the next five years from the aspiration to own a new home.

I would not have introduced or sustained the triple lock. I would have ended the extension of the welfare state to the well off through universal winter fuel payments, universal free school meals and so-called free 30 hours of childcare. I would look at a capital contribution to the cost of care at home. Parties opposite, as well as the incompetence of my own party, bear a heavy blame for the shameful role they had in stifling discussion on such options. There is much, as so many in the debate have wisely said, that we can and should do, but let it not be couched in the language of “we woz robbed”.

As I face sitting down again with an attack of sciatica, I recall the end of Compton Mackenzie’s *Sinister Street*, where the main character is overheard

[LORD TRUE]

musings on the tragedies of youth. A passer-by comments, “There is only one tragedy for youth”. “And that is”?” “Age”, said the stranger. Youth and age are concepts experienced by all who are fortunate enough to live long in the same mind and the same body. We are all one. Each generation and each age group faces its own varied and diverse challenges, measured against diverse attitudes and aspirations, as does each person. For all its indignities, even old age today is enriched and eased today by things we never had in the past. How bitter a gall it would be if, by provoking fear of so-called intergenerational unfairness, we set the youth of the present against the youth of the past. That would indeed be a tragedy, for youth and age alike.

1.12 pm

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, first I thank my noble friend Lady Smith for introducing the debate. It is a speech I do not think I would have cared to try. Next, I have to slightly rap my noble friend Lord Storey across the knuckles. Not everybody in this debate has got their bus pass yet. One or two of us still have a wee bit of time to go.

Having said that, I wish to talk about the student experience. The first time I spoke about that in a meaningful way was over a quarter of a century ago, when I was able to state that I was talking about it as the person who had the most recent experience of that situation. If it was not 1990, it was 1991, when we first started discussing the process that removed the grant system, then the personal maintenance loan. Since then, we have been moving away from a system that is now seen to be something of a golden age. That golden age has probably become slightly more golden with the glow of our looking back at it. I remember students complaining that they did not have enough grant to live on—another pretty steady experience back then. That was a well-worn path, even by the time I arrived in the early 1980s.

So, what have we got here? Students going through university today perceive that they are being unfairly treated. Noble Lords can argue about that perception until the cows come home, but the fact is that it is there. We have effectively “monetised”—I searched long and hard for the expression—the value of the university experience by having this great burden of debt. Whether that is the reality, whether students are expected to pay it off or do anything with it, it is still there. It has a monetary value, which means the experience of being at university has become a sort of money, cashback, return, value-for-investment process, which was not there a few years ago. A debt of £50,000 has been mentioned, but the figures change, along with the number of people currently taking higher education degrees compared with the past. I find it rather odd that people doing polytechnic degrees were not counted in half the statistics I looked at. Good old-fashioned educational snob value; there we are.

However, we have this idea of debt going through—and what do we get back from it? That means the entire education process is being looked at in a slightly different way. Anybody taking an arts course now says, “I don’t get enough hours of contact. I’m paying all this money, so why don’t I get the hours”? As an

arts student, I was given guidance and lots of books, then told to go away, study, do the work, come back and see where I made mistakes and where I could improve. Are students being taken through it in a step-by-step process? They think, “We’re paying for it. We should get some more help”.

Perhaps we need to look at this in a slightly different way. The idea of what students are getting seems to be changing rapidly, as is the role of the parents supporting those students—the bank of mum and dad, as has been referred to. They are asking what their child should get with all this debt, regardless of whether they are actually going to pay it back or not. We need to look at that. The perception of what is happening is very important, because as we all know, perception becomes knowledge and knowledge becomes reality, regardless of how flimsy the foundation is. That is the process; people behave in reaction to that knowledge and reality. If, as seems to be going on right now, people are voting against something because it is terribly unfair, and we say we will change it—I put that promise right up there with free beer for everybody.

However, if that is what people are doing, that is the way they get in. It distorts the argument. We have to look at what they are going to get out of the experience and package it differently. We may well have to change that burden of debt from being an individual thing to a societal thing once more. I cannot see any solution other than some form of graduate tax, because the burden will get bigger and the perception—you will not be able to write it off or do anything with it—will get bigger. We will have to repackage it. Is that not what finance does all the time? I suggest we start doing the same thing quite quickly.

Finally, on the idea of perception, I want to raise another issue, which may be outside the debate. Special educational needs in universities is now much more a problem of the institutions themselves. When we considered the Higher Education and Research Bill, I tried to see whether we could get a good guide to the job of the universities when dealing with the lower levels of this issue. I am still waiting for a good answer. I am still waiting for somebody to counter the argument that we should let the courts sort out universities’ level of responsibility. When we are looking at the idea of perception, I hope that such issues can be included in the thinking. I hope I will not have to bring that subject back to this House.

1.18 pm

Lord Balfre (Con): My Lords, I also begin by thanking Lady Smith for a wide-ranging and useful debate. I am a member of silent generation; however, I am not a member of the silent party. One of the most astonishing things about the debate is the total absence of Labour speakers, apart from the noble Lord, Lord Hunt. It is not as though Labour has nothing to say on the subject. I would be interested if the noble Lord could tell us whether this was an instruction from the Whips—or is the Labour Party genuinely mute? I will try to make up for them by making one or two mildly radical suggestions.

First, we are told that pensioner poverty has halved between 1997 and today. That means there are still a lot of pensioners living in poverty. We should not

forget that. Secondly, this intergenerational argument should not be regarded as an opportunity to bash the old. The basic problem is that the wage economy has collapsed in the last 15 years but the pensioner economy has been maintained thanks to the input of largely public money.

The great problem that exists between the generations, including this third generation, is that some of us are much better off than others, often because we bought our houses many years ago and were in defined benefit pension schemes if, as in my case, you spent your entire life in the public sector. I left school at 16. I did not have a single day's unemployment until I retired at the age of 60. I did not have to sign on. I was in a number of jobs but they linked, one to the other. That is a quite different experience from today.

I shall make a few suggestions on having a slightly fairer taxation system for the elderly. The first concerns TV licences. In a couple of years mine will be free. Why should it not be a taxable benefit? I am not saying it should not be free for poor pensioners, but why not make it a taxable benefit so you declare on your tax return that you have a television licence, just as you declare you have a pension? The winter fuel payment is another. It is astonishing that, seven years into our Government, we are still defending what Labour did in creating a benefit that goes to millionaires, tax free. At the time I remember saying this was impossible. Gordon Brown had a very wishy-washy explanation as to why it was needed, but I still do not see why I, as a 40% tax payer, should get a benefit that is substantially more for me than it is for an old-age pensioner. You do not have to save the money; you could redistribute the winter fuel payment so the poor pensioner has more and the richer pensioner pays for it.

It is high time to look at the administrative costs, as well. There are nonsenses such as the £10 Christmas bonus, introduced by Barbara Castle, of blessed memory, 30 years or more ago. Some of these benefits hang around for ever, such as the 25p a week extra that I will get in my pension when I reach 80. All this has an administrative cost. We could look at that.

Reference has been made to the exemption from national insurance. If I am lucky enough to earn extra money on which I will pay tax, why should I not pay national insurance, when the noble Baroness who moved this Motion—who is also not in receipt of a bus pass—would pay? Yet, I could be lecturing, as I have, in the very same building she works in. We could be in the same classroom giving a talk to the same people—even that has happened—and we could receive cheques on which I would not pay national insurance and she would. Frankly, this does not make sense.

The old are healthier and they also live longer. They can cost more in end-of-life care, but there is a tendency for us to think that because they get old, they cost a lot more. In fact, most health expenditure is in the last 24 months of life. The two basic problems we have are, first, the rise in the cost of the NHS, which has always moved ahead of inflation—most of the savings the Government have made have been swallowed up in this. Secondly, we have to look at the fact that the elderly are not smoking or drinking as much, so they

are not putting as much back into the Exchequer in excise duties. I am not suggesting they should, but the pattern of excise duties is moving.

I will say a quick word about the young. Earnings have fallen and housing is difficult, but, to echo the sentiments of some noble Lords, more needs to be done. Messing around at the margin with tax relief and other reliefs will only generate price increases, as, of course, has quantitative easing. The fact that mortgages are so cheap makes them much more affordable, which means house prices go up.

At some point we need to recognise that for the older generation, class continues to divide the income groups more than anything else. For every poor pensioner there is a rich pensioner, but for both there is a strong class factor. If you live in the north on a council estate and start work at 18, you are more likely to be poor. It is as simple as that.

My final suggestion is: when we look at pension ages, why do we not base them on years of national insurance contributions? Why do we not say that if you start work at 18, work for 45 years and pay into the NI fund, you should be able to retire at the age of 63? If you go to university and pay for 45 years into the NI fund, you would retire at 68. We know that there is a mortality differential associated with income and occupation. These are one or two of the things we should look at when we consider intergenerational fairness. It is a far more complex issue than many outside this House imagine.

Baroness Goldie: My Lords, I apologise for further interruption. We have a quite serious slippage of time. When the Clock shows seven, will noble Lords please terminate their remarks and sit down?

1.26 pm

Lord Filkin (Non-Afl): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, on this important debate. I declare two interests. First, I am delighted to be a member of the Intergenerational Commission, chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Willetts. It has been one of the most thoughtful processes I have ever been involved in. Secondly, I chair the Centre for Ageing Better, an independent body promoted by government, committed to trying to make it possible for many more people, young and old, to benefit from their longer lives. That is the focus I will bring to this question on intergenerational fairness: how do we make it possible for more of today's and tomorrow's older people to benefit from their longer lives?

Many of us in this House know the benefits of longer lives. We are enjoying them daily. We know that there are great intergenerational benefits from that. So many grandchildren have relationships with their grandparents in ways that were less common 50 years or so ago. That leads to an enormous increase in societal well-being. We know that this process has not stopped. Demographers forecast that 50% of girls born today will live to be aged 100 or more. These are great societal gains and we should celebrate them.

However, they do not come without risks, of which there are a number, but I will focus on just two. The first is income. The noble Lord, Lord Turner, put it graphically and truthfully in his famous report that

[LORD FILKIN]

longer lives mean we have to work longer, save more or both. There are no other options. Contrast that with the Financial Conduct Authority's significant survey last week of I think about 13,000 non-pensioner adults, of which 31% had no private pension. They were relying on either the state or their spouse. I will leave it to noble Lords to decide which of those is riskier.

Great progress has been made on auto-enrolment, which we should celebrate, but none of us would have thought this was a particularly sensible system, which effectively puts all the responsibility and risk on the individual to save for their own pension, to have foresight and to be able to make sacrifices. It also shunts all the investment and longevity risks. Not many other countries in the world have such a risky platform for later-life income and we should not think for a second that the job of pension reform is done, even though progress has been made, not least by the noble Baroness, Lady Altmann, and many others.

What is to be done about this? I shall say two things quickly. Keeping in the labour market—particularly helping today's 50 year-olds keep in the labour market—is fundamental. So is increasing the housing supply radically: that does not necessarily mean more owner-occupiers; what we are concerned about is increasing the supply of good-quality housing which enables people in later life not to have the burden of increased housing costs. If today's 30 and 40 year-olds have to pay high rents in later life, they have to increase their savings yet further, and they will struggle to do so.

The second big issue we need much more debate about is that because there are going to be many more of us, for many reasons, there is going to be a very significant increase in the demand for and the cost of the NHS and social care. We are not just debating about now, we are also debating what is pretty certainly going to happen over 10 years. There are many reasons for NHS cost increases, and I will not go into them, but longer lives is one of them—if you are alive another 10 years you have many more episodes of health treatment. Secondly, many more older people generate more costs. Between 2010 and 2030 there will be 50% more 65 year-olds and 100% more 85 year-olds and they all go into those last years of life at some point, when their cost burden will increase.

The *Lancet* in April produced an epidemiological report which said that there will be a 25% increase in the number of disabled people in our society in 10 years' time. That, for planning purposes, is now and we have, therefore, to face up to the increased health and care demand and cost over the next decade. As part of this, we clearly need a proper social care settlement, as was well said by the noble Lord, Lord Turnbull. We cannot fudge this, we have to get the right balance between risk and contribution and between public and private expenditure. Wherever that balance is struck, it will certainly require more public expenditure, either to compensate for caps or to face up to the underfunding of people with moderate needs who are currently going without any social care at all: there will be many more of them over the next decade.

When I talk in private to leading economists and ask for a rough view of what they think the increase in NHS and social care costs will be in 10 years' time,

I get a figure of 2%. That is a very small figure, but a 2% increase in GDP, which is what we are talking about, is equivalent to £1,400 more in taxation for the average family. There is no science in that figure of £1,400, but if we can keep it to less than £1,000, we will be incredibly lucky. This is not the end of civilisation. The issue is that today's and tomorrow's younger people have a right and expectation in our society for decent health and social care standards, but we have to recognise that we have to pay for that. No Government, I fear, are going to stand up and say that each family will have to pay £1,000 more tax in 10 years' time, but we need at least to promote a debate on that and recognise that the funding of that has to have some basic principles. If we are to meet those standards, we have to take account of people's needs, but also of their means to pay—wealth as well as income—because that is the ignored issue, as the noble Lord, Lord Turnbull, said. We have to take account of both, and age as a filter as to whether you need help or not is an increasingly obsolete measure.

I hope that out of this, and out of our work, we will affirm the fundamental importance of good later life for tomorrow's older people as well as today's and face up to some of these significant public policy challenges that are implicit in longer lives and more older people.

1.34 pm

Lord Bird (CB): My Lords, I am very pleased to be talking on this subject and I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham, for the opportunity. I am interested in it because when I decided to apply to become a Cross-Bencher—and was accepted—it was because I realised that all the work I was trying to do around social intervention was always passing through the prism of government. For instance, in the early 1990s I could give homeless people an opportunity to stand on their own two feet, earn their own money and morph their way out of poverty, while at that very moment—this is not a party-political point—Mr Blair started to put a shedload of money into giving people who were on the streets social security and got rid of a whole group of people. We were trying to turn them into workers while they were turning into beneficiaries. That is one reason there is such a clogging-up in areas of social housing even today. I decided that I would try to get into government and do something, and the thing I want to do is to prevent poverty happening.

I am very happy that the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, raised the case for intergenerational fairness forming a core part of government policy. I would like to add to—or maybe subtract from—that and put the case for prevention across all government departments, so that they are charged with preventing things happening, rather than being very clever and astute, which is what they do. As I have said in the House, we have so many clever people who are very good at fixing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

If we look at the National Health Service, it is an absolute abomination that we are not all asking: when are we going to fulfil what Nye Bevan said in 1948? He said that within 50 years the people of Britain will be a lot healthier, live a lot longer and be in control of their own health. Yet we have a situation now where we have lost the prevention budgets of those early days when,

because they did not have so much money, people went into the schools and taught people like me not to get ill. We have destroyed all that, destroyed all social medicine, and now we have to spend ever more on people who are not really unwell at birth or in the early stages of their lives, but become unwell because they are eating the wrong stuff, drinking the wrong stuff and not having the right exercise. When are we going to have a National Health Service, rather than a national “let us get back to health” service? We could send a coach and horses through all the budgets we have talked about today.

The other reason I came into the House of Lords was to be practical. I notice that 64% of the younger generation, those between the ages of 16 and 24, are stuck in rented accommodation and this figure will go up and up. What can we do to help them have a better life? Noble Lords will know that I have been working on the Creditworthiness Assessment Bill, which is a very simple thing. Why are we ruling out those people who have a rent record and not a mortgage record? Why are they paying more for credit? Why can we not bring those people into the property market by giving them the chance of not paying so much for their credit, so that they can then start enjoying some of the largesse that others of us have enjoyed? My Bill is soon to have a Second Reading; I am sorry to promote it but I hope noble Lords will jump in and enjoy it. We have cross-party interest.

When you look at Britain, 87% of all money lent by banks is lent in and around property—the buying and selling of property—we have a real problem. Where is the money to build the new generations of work? Why are we going to have baristas? Why do we have to have people with cheap jobs—the £8 an hour or £10 an hour jobs? Where are the real jobs going to come from? I want to know when we are going to start spending on the new generations. When will we start spending on the industries and new investment? If we do not get that right, we shall be in a situation where, increasingly, we will just get poorer and poorer.

It is interesting to consider a sum of money in the region of £50 trillion: it is the largest amount of money in the world and it drives capitalism, Goldman Sachs and all the big operators. That £50 trillion is the world’s pensions. Is there a way that we can tap into that enormous wealth and get it creating the new work for the new generations? I would like those kinds of things to be done. Most of all, however, I would like social security to be turned into social opportunity, because those people who are left behind are costing us an arm and a leg as they tread water. What we should be doing is freeing them up so that they can participate in society as well.

1.41 pm

Lord Shipley (LD): My Lords, I too thank my noble friend Lady Smith of Newnham for enabling us to have this debate. It is a particular pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Bird, and to listen to his experience, because that experience is of such enormous value to this House, particularly that relating to the prevention of poverty and ill health. I wish him very well with his campaigning.

I, too, am a baby boomer. I was born into a very different world, with very limited opportunities for travel, for example, and many more limits in terms of consumer goods and communications. I entered married life when we saved up to buy things, and we had no credit cards. I noted the comments of the noble Lord, Lord True, about the fact that we are simply in a very different world. It is not necessarily a better world or a worse world: it is simply a different world. I had the benefit of a final salary pension, which I obviously still enjoy. I went to university with my fees paid and I had a grant towards living costs. Of course, in those days, very few people went to university; these days, many people go to university, and, as we have learned, there is now a huge national debate taking place about issues of student support.

I thought that my noble friend Lady Smith of Newnham was right to say that this is a long-term issue that needs vision and inclusive thinking. I also think that the contribution of the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, was particularly important, partly because he is a member of the Intergenerational Commission. He reminded us that the equitable distribution of resources should be at the heart of government policy, and I concur with what he said. If our debate today helps that national debate, we will have done the issue a service. I emphasise that I, too, do not see the debate on this issue as being about conflict between generations. It is, rather, about being aware that today, average pensioner household incomes exceed those of non-pensioners after housing costs are taken into account. That is evidence of intergenerational unfairness.

The latest facts on housing are of great concern. In July this year, the average price of a domestic property was £226,000. It had risen by £11,000—or 5%—over the previous year. The number of new affordable homes—that is, the sum of those at affordable rent, social rent, intermediate rent and affordable home ownership—fell in England from 66,000 in 2014-15 to just 32,000 in 2015-16. The English Housing Survey tells us that, on average, households in the private rented sector had higher housing costs than those with a mortgage.

The Government have undertaken a number of measures in an attempt to alleviate some of the problems relating to housing. They have introduced Help to Buy, which was needed to help those facing high prices with limited incomes. It has helped people to buy some 135,000 properties, which in turn has helped to boost housing supply in a limited way. There is, however, also evidence that it has encouraged an increase in house prices and supported the speculative development model which results in builders paying high prices for land and subsequently land banking it. As I have said on a number of occasions, we need taxation to be levied on those who deliberately sit on land on which they have secured planning permission but not built.

The Government have undertaken a number of measures, such as the housing infrastructure fund and the homebuilding fund, which have only tinkered with the problem of demand vastly outrunning supply—for the big problem in housing is supply. The Government have published a White Paper about it and are about to publish a Green Paper on the future of social housing. Then, last weekend, the Secretary of State intervened

[LORD SHIPLEY]

to say that the Government should borrow more to build homes, something that these Benches have regularly called for. Although he was right to do so, the Treasury is being difficult. We therefore now have an unhelpful public disagreement within government. The Government have a problem with their commitment to build 1.5 million new homes by 2022, but it is essential that those homes get built to reduce the impact of the shortage of homes not only over that period but in succeeding years. Doing so will require public support for direct government intervention in further measures that will directly help young people.

The evidence of inequalities is becoming pretty stark. The OECD recently said that the Government have allowed regional and intergenerational divisions to worsen, leaving millions outside the south-east in low-skilled jobs. The Financial Conduct Authority has said that one person in six would not cope with an increase of £50 in monthly bills. Many of those are young. The Institute for Public Policy Research this month reported that young people were being left further behind. Half our country—many of them young—have average household wealth of £3,200, whereas the richest 10% own 45% of the country's wealth. The International Monetary Fund said very recently that it is time to tax the rich to help the poor. I concur with that. When we read that 15 million people of working age in this country are not paying into a pension, we should be very worried.

As an example of what the Government are doing wrong, we could look at the changes made earlier this year in housing benefit entitlements for 18 to 21 year-olds, when the age of majority is 18. It is a form of discrimination as it takes money away from younger people. Let the Government build more houses by direct intervention and let us now lead a national debate to ensure that we improve intergenerational fairness and not simply think about who can secure the most votes at the next election.

1.48 pm

Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con): My Lords, I too am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, for introducing this excellent debate, and I particularly endorse her comments about the short-termist approach by all Governments, which is so damaging to this country. I suspect that this is quite an uncomfortable subject for most of us in this Chamber, and the more research I did for the debate, the more uncomfortable I have felt. Most of us are sitting on a very substantial asset, or, in many cases, more than one. We own assets that young people of the age we were when we bought our homes—27 years ago in my case, with a couple of young children—cannot even dream of. Here in this Chamber today we are, as we have admitted, mostly baby boomers born between 1946 and 1965. As we have heard, there are also members of the Silent Generation—or Traditionalists; those born before 1945—and we even have the odd member of Generation X, covering 1966 to 1980. But we do not have a single millennial here to tell us for themselves how they feel about the intergenerational shift in wealth and services from young to old. What is more, I doubt that many committees here ever hear from them as witnesses.

I am particularly grateful to have heard from the patron saint of millennials, my noble friend Lord Willetts. I am only sorry that not enough of the baby boomers who now run this country listened to him at the time of the publication of *The Pinch*, some seven years ago. I congratulate him on the work of the Resolution Foundation and in particular the Intergenerational Commission, which is doing so much important work and thinking in this space.

I first became aware that the millennials had had enough a few years ago when my own children started to get angry on behalf of their generation. It has been a long while in the making but the situation has now come to a head, and as we have heard, there is a risk that the millennials will be the first-ever generation to record lower lifetime earnings than their predecessors. While there is no natural right for succeeding generations to be better off, the cards in this game seem to be unfairly stacked against them.

Hot on their heels and about to jump into the workplace melting pot of Traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X and millennials are the centennials, who will account for 30% of the global workforce by 2025 and have different characteristics again. They have no idea about a world without digital technology. From the moment they were born, technology has touched every part of their lives. They have never had to cash a cheque, use a hard encyclopaedia for homework or even open a filing cabinet. They have also grown up in the public eye. Social media took off in 2000, so it is in their nature to document their lives online for all to see. Their knowledge of social media can be a great asset. Their phones, which they stick to as glue, are their computers, and it is completely natural for them to take notes on them in meetings and the workplace. They are totally digital natives.

What is urgent for policymakers—and frankly, for all of us—is the revolution under way that will leave our labour market changed beyond recognition. Most pertinent here is that so many of the jobs that were enablers of social mobility from the 1960s onwards will be swept away on a tide of turmoil and tech. In the UK, 35% of jobs are in danger of automation; by the same token, over 1 million new jobs will be required in the digital sector by the end of this decade alone. By the time these centennials enter the job market, it will be unrecognisable to those of us in the Chamber today. But that group of very young people are for another day.

A number of noble Lords have concentrated their remarks on housing, employment and earnings, pensions and pensioner benefits, and the political difficulties in challenging the current position on those. I will highlight just one example of the kind that the noble Lord, Lord Storey, also highlighted. I am 61 and for nearly two years I have been entitled to free public transport in London under the concessionary travel scheme. Frankly, that is ridiculous. This generosity has also had an unintended side-effect because, as the number of people who work beyond state pension age has risen—many of whom work flexibly, without being stuck with regular hours—concessionary fares have enabled more and more of them to travel to work free of charge. Of the over-60s who use the London Underground

or Overground network on a given day, at least 25% travel to work free of charge, saving thousands of pounds a year. Surely this benefit should at least be in line with the retirement age.

Many of our generation are fitter today than we were 20 years ago and we intend to remain fit and healthy into old age—or at least I certainly hope so. We have a duty to do so, not only for a more personally enjoyable old age but to reduce our own intergenerational footprint by keeping out of hospitals and adult social care for as long as possible.

No one today has mentioned the cost of sustained immigration. I accept that this issue is very sensitive but with an average of more than 250,000 immigrants every year for the past 10 years, we cannot ignore the effect that this also has on services and therefore on this debate.

This is challenging and difficult stuff and there are no easy answers. The material sent to us all by Age UK, for example, makes a powerful argument in favour of support for pensioners—for the triple lock and so on. The younger generation has no such powerful group to argue similarly on its behalf, but I end with a message of hope. The millennials I know are more thoughtful, more creative, talented and educated, and more resourceful than we were, and thank goodness for that.

1.54 pm

Baroness Greengross (CB): My Lords, I declare an interest as the CEO of the International Longevity Centre-UK, a think tank which helps people to plan for the future in the light of demographic change. I am also chair of a new intergenerational fairness forum, which will probably morph again into an all-party group on intergenerational fairness. We want to work together with many noble Lords who have spoken on these issues to devise and promote policies that support intergenerational fairness. The first inquiry that the forum is undertaking is on funding for higher education. I am sure that the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, will be pleased about that and I hope that she will be involved.

One idea that I sometimes dream about, having been a former commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, is that the Government could perhaps introduce intergenerational impact statements in new policy and legislative change, just as they look now at the impact on equalities and the environment. Whatever happens, it is important that Ministers consider the impact of policy on intergenerational relationships and in terms of intergenerational fairness. That would not just make public policy more equitable but encourage long-term thinking.

I commend the work which we have heard about from many noble Lords—colleagues working in these fields—and particularly that of the noble Lord, Lord Willetts. I hope very much to continue working with him on some of these issues. I like the way that he recognises in his commission that we need business, academia and policy-making people to come together if we are really to repair the social contract where it is not still effective, as it must be.

The Social Mobility Commission has published reports in recent months examining these issues in some detail. It reported that pensioner households

now have incomes £20 a week higher than those of working-age households, whereas the number of home owners aged under 25 has more than halved. There are many gross inequalities that we need to look at closely. We must always bear in mind that, as I think we know, the share of the population aged 65 and over is projected to grow from 18% in 2014 to 24% by 2039, which is not far away.

I was also pleased to see the Government's welcome for the Work and Pensions Select Committee's report on intergenerational fairness and, importantly, that the Government agree that the debate on this should not be conducted in divisive or adversarial terms. But so far, the Government's approach to this issue has mainly been through the lens of ensuring economic security for working people at every stage of their life, including retirement. That is a very important part of the debate and I would be grateful to know whether the Minister has anything to offer us by way of an update on those perspectives.

We have heard the warning from the noble Baroness, Lady Altmann, whose special competence in these issues is amazing, that we must be careful to remember that many older people still struggle very much to live well on their pensions. It is terribly important to make sure that we are being fair while we look at fairness, because we know that recent research has shown that between 2005 and 2013, while the risk of poverty among the 65-plus has fallen by 8.2 percentage points, or a third, many old people are still not able to live well on their pensions. We need a balanced view all the time.

We have an amazing range of public services in this country, which a lot of other countries do not have, and our ambition must be to make sure that the UK is the best place to grow old. To get that right, we have to make public policy support both older and younger workers if we are to make sure that this continues to be fair and is not rocketed into unfairness.

More very old and very young people in the workforce are the people we have to worry about. Those in middle age, particularly those under 50, are doing much better in terms of income generation. We know that at 50 your work plans are at risk. In fact, they are better when you are 60-plus. We have to look at all those issues and what we mean by older and younger. However, let us not forget those in the middle who are doing the most to increase our income from taxation. We must not pitch generations against each other.

Today the Sutton Trust came up with worrying statistics about education. We have to be careful to see that a poor education and an inability to save for a pension will inevitably lead to poverty in later life. Future spending reviews must not undermine the drivers of increased longevity either. Preventing ill health and inequalities in life expectancy must remain a priority.

The work that the noble Lord, Lord Filkin, and those working with him have done is to be appreciated and I thank him for it. He made clear that the Government must not in any way underestimate this.

I shall end with a comment on housing policy. I feel very strongly that housing with care for older people would benefit not only older people but the young as older people would move out of their homes. If we

[BARONESS GREENGROSS]

could get rid of the unlevel playing field so that builders of retirement housing with care could compete with the wider building industry, we could solve a lot of our problems in housing policy, the NHS and social care.

2.02 pm

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con): My Lords, it is great honour to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, who is a leading authority on so many of the topics encompassed by this debate led by the noble Baroness, Lady Smith of Newnham.

It interests me that the two groups in society who feel very unhappy at the moment and who want things to change are highly educated young people and less well-educated older people. Clearly they are using different vehicles to express their desire for change, but both these groups feel that their views are not taken seriously and that they are somewhat misunderstood.

In my remarks, I shall focus in particular, certainly initially, on older, less well-educated people. I might describe them as working-class pensioners, but when I say that I do not mean working-class pensioners who are currently poor but those who have worked hard and struggled to achieve their modest financial security. If we need to rebalance the economic situation between the old and the young described by my noble friend Lord Willetts and many others today, we must understand why some older people feel ignored and disappointed, even though they have a better financial situation now. The answer to that is twofold. One part is that we do not recognise and discuss often enough the challenges that they overcame to succeed. I know there has been passing reference to this today, and I shall come back to that. The other thing we do not do is see how their experience and knowledge in overcoming those challenges would help us support young people better to meet their needs. As has already been said, older people want to help younger people, and they have a lot of knowledge, experience and wisdom that could be put to good effect.

I was born in 1967 and grew up in the 1970s, so I think that means I am a young Generation X. I lived in a place where the factory at the end of the street employed thousands of people. My parents and my friends' parents worked there or in the building trade. Their purpose in life was to provide security for themselves and their family. In trying to do that, they had to battle with a lot of things such as the three-day week, petrol shortages and factory closures. They were trying to fulfil that purpose in the face of quite a lot of difficulty, but they succeeded, and a lot of them were the first generation of their family to buy a house. They got there, and they made it.

When we talk about people's property, particularly people who have gone through that kind of experience to get to where they are, putting their property at risk to pay for their care is quite hard for them to cope with. It undermines the fundamental purpose that they were trying to achieve because it puts their security at risk. In a way, it is worse than that because successive generations since, such as my generation or younger baby boomers, who are better educated and have taken advantage of other opportunities, have dismissed or diminished the things that people such as my parents

and their generation relied on to become successful, such as financial prudence, avoiding debt, saving, the importance of skills, a vocational education and their family. For some of them it must feel as though we are asking them to pay the price for our incompetence. We have to find a way of acknowledging how that must feel to them, and at the same time we should be seeking their advice on what we should do in future.

It is rather insulting to suggest that people such as those I have just described are nostalgic or want to turn the clock back. When I talk to my parents and their friends, I do not find them nostalgic at all. They will tell you that there was no such thing as the good old days. They very much recognise that this is all about the future. When they think about the future and the challenges for young people, they will say that their needs are the same as theirs were. Young people want work and housing, they rely on their friends and their family, and they want that sense of belonging and purpose. It is interesting that research shows that young people want things such as honesty, clarity and respect for others. These standards and values are as important to young people as they are to older people.

When we think about all these complex issues that we are trying to address when we look at different policy areas, we must not forget that if we are to rely on each other—which we evidently need to do—we need not just to acknowledge the challenges those who went before us overcame, but to seek their advice more than we have and recognise that some of those standards and behaviours that they relied on to succeed are the same things that young people need now, and that the people who are letting them down are often those of us who are sandwiched in the middle. Like my noble friend Lady Jenkin, when I talk to young people I feel very heartened by their attitude and their aspirations for their future.

2.10 pm

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, this has been an excellent debate, and the speech we have just heard is a very good example of the high quality and of different experiences being brought to bear in this House. It was very good to hear the noble Lord, Lord Willetts—*The Pinch* was the starting point for many of my thoughts on this subject, probably some years ago now. I too was surprised by the absence of Labour speakers. I am told that Labour is a party that cares a great deal about equality, and this is one of the underlying issues to do with equality and inequality in this country. I was glad that the noble Lord, Lord Lamont, sat and listened at least to the opening speeches in view of his article in last week's *Daily Mail*, in which he said that, "the very idea of intergenerational inequality is bunk"; indeed,

"it is one of the silliest political concepts ever conceived, and yet it has been taken up with manic enthusiasm by ... the Resolution Foundation".

I worry about the *Daily Mail*, which has four pages today attacking universities and intellectuals. It is a newspaper which attacks immigrants all the time, attacked judges the other month, attacked a major international organisation, the OECD, last week and now attacks intellectuals this week. I wonder who it will go on to

attack next and begin to wonder when the Conservative Government will have the courage to stand up to this hysterically reactionary newspaper and defend the concept of open debate and free speech.

The Social Mobility Commission talks about three overlapping problems of inequality in the United Kingdom: that between rich and poor, that between London and the poorest regions, and that between the old and the young. I was struck last week, on seeing a graph in the *Economist* on OECD figures for the gaps between the richest and the poorest regions in major countries, by how Britain stands out for the gap between London and the south-east and places such as Yorkshire and Lancashire. That is something we should also worry about, and it is why Members of this House such as me begin to go on more and more about the problems of the north and the imbalance in public spending between London and the south-east and the north.

Returning to the question of intergenerational inequality, I am glad that a number of noble Lords emphasised the extent to which growing longevity alters the nature of the equation. This House is, after all, a perfect example of that. When pensions were introduced in 1911, the average life expectancy was 57, and the pensionable age was 60. A welfare state of that sort was therefore easily affordable. When the National Health Service was introduced after the Second World War, life expectancy was a little higher—although not by too much—and there was not much you could do about people with a range of conditions for which many of us in this House have already been treated by the NHS. The situation has been changing and, as we have a higher and higher number of people in their 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and over the age of 100, the question of intergenerational inequality is a major one. My son is now a systems biologist working on various micro-organisms which cause serious diseases, and the speed at which work in that area is developing has huge implications for longevity and medical practice and for what can be done for the elderly in the last two or three years of their lives.

We need a sober, cross-party debate. All parties in government have struggled with this in the last 20 or 30 years. I suggest there might be a very strong case for a Lords sessional committee, for example, which would discuss this question in the broadest terms, because that is one of the ways this House can throw light on difficult issues that each party finds it hard to grasp. We need to ask how we promote longer-term perspectives in government and how we deal with issues where we have to address what we are leaving to our children and grandchildren.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer talks a great deal about the need to get our public debt down so that we do not leave the debt to our children, but he does not talk enough about what sort of investments we should make so that our children will have a better life, better infrastructure, better industries and so on to inherit. I find the selling off of capital assets in the public sector to fund current spending, to hold taxes down, amazing—it was one of the things in the coalition that I most disapproved of and tried to argue against—but it has, after all, been going on for the last 30 or 40 years.

There is an underlying question here about whether taxes are too low in this country for the challenges we face, for old and young, in the next 15 to 20 years. There are the questions of taxing housing assets, which we do much less than most comparable countries; of the extension of the national insurance age, which the noble Lord, Lord Balfe, mentioned; and of the costs of social care, which the Conservatives themselves raised before the election and then backed out of during it. The cost of paying for the NHS, including end-of-life care, is huge. I think it is correct to say that half of what is spent on each person by the health service is spent in the last two years of any person's life.

The Social Mobility Commission in particular stresses the importance of early years and education up to the age of 18. My perspective on this comes from having done most of my politics in northern towns and cities. I look at younger people there without much aspiration or much help, in relatively poor schools where the savage cuts in local authority spending have meant children's social services are no longer provided, most schools do not have nurses, obesity is a problem because of the quality of the food they eat, and they do not understand how to move from school into work and have very little idea of what sort of skills they need for the sort of work they will face. Local further education colleges have had their budgets cut, so the transition to work and training for that half or more of our 18 year-olds who do not go to university is poorly provided for. I find deep cynicism in West Yorkshire about the new apprenticeship scheme and whether it really will focus on providing skills for young people or be used to provide transitional skills for those already in work.

These people—the left-behind as the noble Lord, Lord Bird, said—are also British citizens and we will leave to our children a much more deeply divided and much less peaceful society unless we address some of their problems. This is an intergenerational issue but also a deeply important social issue. We need better apprenticeships and more effort put into local economic and industrial regeneration. The point that the noble Lord, Lord Bird, made about banks that do not spend enough time thinking about investing in local regeneration is strongly felt there. Housing—both housing to buy and a revival of social housing—is crucial, and the prospect that the impact of technological change will make their situation worse, with insecure, unskilled work and zero-hours contracts, as the noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin, said, is also a serious problem. We have to debate this issue.

One of the reasons I have been converted to the idea that we should introduce votes at 16 is that, as the proportion of our voting population who are retired rises, so it would help to redress the balance if we also increased the number of young people.

The welfare state was introduced before the First World War partly because, as government began to recruit the working classes into the Armed Forces for national security purposes, it discovered that many in the working class were underfed, unfit and uneducated, and that they therefore needed to spend state money on people we would treat as our citizens. The welfare state now benefits increasingly the middle-class retired,

[LORD WALLACE OF SALTAIRE]
 who live 15 years longer than the working-class retired, who benefit a great deal from the National Health Service; and the poor—

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen (Con): Time.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: I apologise. This is not a sustainable basis for a peaceful and united national community. It is an issue we must address.

2.20 pm

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab): My Lords, at times I have felt a little lonely today. None the less it has been an absolutely fascinating debate, and I congratulate the noble Baroness on it and on the way she opened it. I commend noble Lords who have spoken because of the tone of our debate. We have had a forensic analysis of some of the huge challenges facing us if we accept the premise of an intergenerational crisis on fairness, but there is a conclusion among noble Lords that we are not talking about warfare. Every day, we see so much support, caring and co-operation between the generations and that is what we have to build on as we develop policies in the future.

The noble Baroness, Lady Smith, was right to draw attention to what is a real conundrum: the short-term political horizon versus the need sometimes for long-term planning and decision-making. She mentioned climate change, which was a very good example, but clearly noble Lords have mentioned other examples in domestic policy where, for instance, we see proposals that might impact some of the benefits that older people receive but then get short shrift. The Government's experience in relation to the funding of long-term care in the last election—which mirrored our own experience of when Mr Cameron attacked us for the “death tax” in 2010—does not always encourage politicians in terms of proposing policies which they deem to be in our interest in the long term.

The noble Lord, Lord Wallace, wondered whether we should have a Select Committee on this matter, and I think that is worth suggesting. It did strike me that, on climate change, through thick and thin, there has been a general consistency over many years now. I wonder whether having the Committee on Climate Change—a statutory advisory committee to Government—has been helpful. I wonder whether that is some kind of model we might think about in dealing with some of these very difficult issues.

Clearly, the demographics show us that we will have a growing number of older people in our population. Many of them have benefited from the benefits that noble Lords have mentioned and which they now question. Certainly the last Labour Government presided over a halving of the number of pensioners in poverty, not least through the introduction of pension credit. But our health and social care system is under considerable strain. Every year, the number of patients requiring treatment is going up, and there is clearly a huge problem. Our hospitals are unable to discharge patients because of the lack of care, community and care homes—we debated that this morning. So far there has been precious little idea about how we will meet this ever-growing problem, which we know will be with us for at least 30 years.

On the other hand, in our debate today we have had some very concrete suggestions about a way forward in many of these areas. It would be wrong to be negative by thinking that we are in such a state that there is no way through. I warmed to the suggestion of the noble Lord, Lord Best, that in relation to the imbalance in housing, the concept of rightsizing in accommodation and help-to-move packages—which would then release housing stock—deserves attention. Particularly because of the way he presented it, that could be seen as an incentive to older people, rather than a cutback in their benefits, or putting their home ownership under threat because of care bills. I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, that one of the very difficult issues is how, for instance, we could release equity in people's homes or ensure that the distribution of housing stock was more equitable than it is.

Certainly, the housing situation is bleak: the waiting list for council accommodation is long; housing rental costs for young people are high; and the number of home owners under the age of 25 has halved. Your Lordships' Economic Affairs Committee said that the root of the crisis in housing is in the restriction of land supply and of the planning system, the failure to replace council houses bought under the right-to-buy scheme and the lack of incentives for private companies to build more affordable homes. None of this is insurmountable; it needs the political will. I hope that we can see housing rise much more to the top of Governments' priority order in the next few years.

The noble Lord, Lord Willetts, referred to the issue of young people's expectations. The fact is that the younger workforce will be earning less than their parents' generation in comparison and younger people are increasingly reliant on their parents and grandparents for support. Alongside that, the world of work has become much more insecure, with fewer full-time and reliable jobs. We have seen an explosion in part-time jobs and, in particular, insecure work, such as the introduction or development of zero-hours contracts. All of these lead to a very insecure position for many young people. The noble Lord, Lord Bird, asked where the new industries are, and that is a very good question, as was his second question: where is the investment coming from to invest in those jobs which provide the kind of stability and satisfaction that we need to see?

Education and skills are very important. I do not want to go into this debate about tuition fees, save to say that the noble Lord, Lord Willetts, has received a gentle push-back from noble Lords. I particularly warmed to the comments of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Salisbury that, however you define student loans, to many young people they are a debt—a psychological barrier. I was also interested in what the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, said about our parents' attitude to debt. We are in a position where, in a sense, the Government embrace debt and tell young people that it is a good thing—I wonder whether that is wise.

There are so many experts here on pensions, but I agree that the position is precarious. Having a son whose employer is now putting 1% into the pension scheme makes me feel such anguish about what those people will get when they retire in terms of a decent pension package. The noble Lord, Lord Filkin, talked about

its precariousness. On the other side, the noble Lord, Lord Bird, talked about unleashing the power of pension funds in order to invest in the kind of infrastructure that we will require. I cannot help feeling that on pensions we have a huge amount of unfinished business.

Clearly, there is no magic wand to wave. But we could adopt a coherent set of policies to help young people in relation to housing, education and greater security at work. This does not need to be at the expense of the chipping away at hard-earned protections for older people. Of course we face hard decisions about public expenditure, the role and level of taxation and the distribution of public finances, and some tension is inevitable, although the noble Lord, Lord Turnbull, indicated that we have some flexibility, which I hope that the Government will listen to, given the distinguished experience that he brings to your Lordships' House.

The key message from this debate is that we would like the Government to focus more on intergenerational fairness. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, that it is a debate for the whole of society. I also agree with the noble Lord, Lord Tugendhat, that, building on the experience of 2017, the more that younger age groups vote, the better. I, too, would go for votes at 16, and I suggest to the noble Lord, Lord Young, that, having encouraged so many more young people to vote, it is a great pity that the electoral register that his Government are so determined to bring in will not reflect that increase in young voters' interest in elections.

2.30 pm

Lord Young of Cookham (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to respond to this debate as the Minister in the Government who happens to have more experience of more generations than any other. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Smith, for selecting this subject for debate and for moving it so well. We have had an astonishingly good debate—non-partisan, apart from a few jibes from the noble Lord, Lord Hunt.

Any debate that has in its Motion “fairness” and “across all departments” of government gives the Minister replying a rather long frontier to patrol. I will try to address as many points as I can, but I may be defeated by the clock. In response to the point made by the noble Baroness, and underlined by the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, about looking at the long term, it is perhaps better to debate this subject in the upper House, where we are not so focused as individuals on the next election and can afford to take a slightly more detached and long-term view.

I shall first try to put this debate in a broad context by talking about the role of government in addressing fairness. The Government have a responsibility to address inequality between the rich and the poor. Major disparities between households are not only intrinsically unfair, but lead to a fractured and unstable society. Although there is a political debate in this country about how progressive Governments should be, about the extent to which the promotion of equality should erode the freedom of the individual—the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, implied that taxation should be higher than it is—all parties subscribe to progressive taxation on incomes and on capital. That debate has been about what I call horizontal equity—looking at households across the

spectrum and reducing disparities between them, levelling up where possible rather than down and using the proceeds of economic growth to do so.

Our debate this afternoon has been about something different: fairness between generations—looking at cohorts up and down, as it were, rather than across, and identifying unfairness. This is a much more complex issue for Governments to address, for reasons that we have heard in the debate, because whereas poorer people do not necessarily become rich, younger people necessarily grow older. Also, older people give money to their younger generation—we heard this from my noble friends Lord Tugendhat, Lady Altmann and Lord True, and from the noble Lord, Lord Filkin, on the Cross Benches—and support is often given in kind the other way round, to an extent that rich people do not give money to poor people. This extent of intergenerational exchange and transfer adds an extra dimension to the traditional debate.

Carried out insensitively, addressing intergenerational equality could have the perverse consequence of a particular generation missing out as policies change, or, as my noble friend Lord Willetts explains in his excellent book, a particular generation benefiting at the expense of those who went before and follow after. A related issue in this context is the extent to which today's generations can borrow to enhance their own lifestyles at the expense of potentially depressing those of the generation to follow.

The good news about our debate today is that the temptation to portray this as pitting one generation against each other has been resisted. This is not a zero-sum game, because, as I explained, people move from one cohort to another. The role of the Government should be, as my noble friend Lord True suggested, one of clearly targeted intervention to address specific problems and, as the Prime Minister has said, to try to build a country that works for everyone.

We need to approach this with a view to bringing people together rather than prising them apart. Nearly all those who contributed agreed with that premise. We have this debate against a background of a social contract, mentioned by my noble friend Lord Willetts—that the next generation will be better off than the one that preceded it—coming under some tension.

Much of our debate has focused on the issues facing the younger generation, and before I look at this subject by subject, I want to pick up a general point made by several noble Lords. Yes, there are real problems for today's generation. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Salisbury said that hope was being sapped, but my noble friend Lady Jenkin put a slightly different perspective on it, because in some ways, the prospects for young people today are actually quite bright. Theirs is a generation that is healthier, with far greater access to higher education than their parents and grandparents, with record numbers—particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds—going to university, life expectancy up, youth unemployment falling, rates of smoking, alcohol consumption, drug abuse and teenage pregnancies down and with access to affordable travel overseas, which was denied to earlier generations. As my noble friend Lord True said, thanks to technology, there is access to information,

[LORD YOUNG OF COOKHAM]

music, entertainment and social exchange to an extent unimaginable 25 years ago, so there is something to put on the other side of the balance sheet.

I take on board the suggestion made from two Front Benches that there should be a Select Committee to look at intergenerational issues, and of course I will pass that on to the usual channels. I fear that I do not read the *Daily Mail* since it launched a fairly serious attack on me back in the 1980s, I think, and it is not a paper that is in the Government Whips' Office, so many of the recent exchanges have passed over me.

Housing is one of the most pressing issues facing the younger generation, a point well made by the noble Lord, Lord Best. The simple truth is that, as a country, over decades, we have not built enough homes. We had a good debate on housing last week and there was consensus on that point. As a result, the number of homes has not kept pace with our rising population, fuelling soaring house prices and also rents, as many noble Lords have mentioned. The Council of Mortgage Lenders predicts that by 2020 only a quarter of 30 year-olds will own their own home, as my noble friend Lord Willetts said. By contrast, more than half the generation currently approaching retirement were homeowners by their 30th birthday. We are seeing an entire generation effectively locked out of the housing market, with all the implications that this has for opportunities to find work, start families, put down roots and acquire capital and security, as mentioned by my noble friend Lady Stowell.

That is why we have this ambition to deliver 1.5 million homes by the end of 2022. At a time of significant restraint on public expenditure, with difficult decisions being taken right across Whitehall, we committed £25 billion to housing in the previous Parliament and recently announced another £12 billion. That is evidence of our determination to make progress. We need to build more homes, faster and in the right place and, whether the homes are to buy or rent, ensure that they are more affordable.

We have to make more land available, particularly land owned by the public sector, and encourage local authorities to build more homes, including homes for rent. One of my noble friends wanted more incentives to save, but in a way that was not wholly accessible. I think that the recently introduced Help to Buy ISA ticks that box, offering people an opportunity to save for their first home.

On home ownership, as I said in our debate last week, our Help to Buy equity loan helped more than 134,000 households to buy a new-build home, and 81% of those were first-time buyers—39% had a total household income of £40,000 or less and 90% had a total household income of £80,000 or less. Many young people can afford the repayments, when it comes to home ownership, but not the deposit. That is why the Help to Buy equity loan can address that.

My noble friend mentioned renting. We are banning unfair letting fees, capping deposits and providing landlords with incentives to offer longer tenancies, and we are ensuring that all landlords are members of a redress scheme to speed up dispute resolution. We are also making sure that all letting agents are registered.

We recently announced another £2 billion for the affordable homes programme, increasing the budget to more than £9 billion. Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that local housing allowance rates in the social rented sector for general and supported housing tenants will not go ahead. There was quite a lot of comment about making better use of the housing stock. The noble Lord, Lord Best, the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, and others emphasised the need for that. I was very interested in the proposals put forward the noble Lord, Lord Best.

Local authorities should have clear policies for addressing the housing needs of particular groups, including older people. Given the importance of this issue, the DCLG is consulting, as part of its review on planning the right homes for the right place, and the consultation ends on 9 November. Through the Neighbourhood Planning Act, we are introducing a new statutory duty on the Secretary of State to produce guidance for local planning authorities on how their local development plans meet housing needs for older people. Progress is being made on that front.

On the economy, there were many recommendations for the Chancellor—some for cutting taxes and some for raising them—and I shall pass those on. Some may feature more in thoughts for our manifesto than in immediate plans, given the commitments that we have already given. We want to provide economic security for people at every stage of their life. We have a progressive taxation system: the top 1% of income tax payers are paying more—28% of all income tax, up from £34.5 billion to £46.7 billion in 2014. With the vast majority of taxpayers kept out of capital gains tax, we have raised £8.4 billion from those who have made significant gains. That is why our rules on inheritance tax, mentioned by a number of noble Lords, strike a balance between ensuring that the average family can pass assets on, while at the same time facilitating redistribution, so that wealth is not unfairly concentrated. That is why we are continuing to take action on the deficit.

Our national debt is forecast to peak at around 90% of GDP by the end of the year, which is the highest it will have been in 50 years. Like the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, I was very interested in the intervention from the noble Lord, Lord Turnbull. I was slightly surprised by his remarks, as a former Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, that national debt should go higher. When I was briefly a Minister in the Treasury, the culture was very much the other way. However, we should look at the case that he made, although there is not only his view or my view about an acceptable level of borrowing by the Government; the international money markets may take a slightly more cautious view. I think that it was the Governor of the Bank of England who said that we are to some extent dependent on the generosity of strangers. In the meantime we are trying to get debt falling and to increase economic resilience.

Youth unemployment is at a near record low. There are a record number of people in work, and there are around 750,000 job vacancies, meaning greater opportunities for all. We need to focus on ensuring that, once people are in work, they see their wages rise

and take home more of their pay package. I thought that my noble friend Lady Jenkin made a very important point about the changing nature of the job market as we look ahead, and how young people have to be prepared for that. We have increased the national living wage to £9 an hour by 2020, and cut income tax for over 30 million people.

Supporting people in retirement after they have worked hard all their lives continues to be a priority, especially as it can be more difficult to increase your income once you have retired. As the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, said, we want this country to be the best place to grow old. My noble friend Lord Tugendhat said that it was time to think again about the triple lock, although that is more a matter for the next manifesto than an immediate option.

Under successive Governments, we have seen the percentage of pensioners living in poverty fall dramatically. In the 1970s, 40% were in poverty; today, that figure is 16%, a success of the policies of some 30 years ago to which my noble friend Lord Tugendhat referred. We have seen big rises in the living standards of pensioners. However, as my noble friend Lady Altmann said, it is important not to generalise. More than 1 million current pensioners rely solely on the state for their income. As my noble friend Lady Stowell said, quite often those are people who have had a tough time in life before they retired. That is the background to the triple lock uprating of pensions in 2011 and why we have committed to continuing it over this Parliament. For those with another income, of course, the state retirement pension is taxable.

This is not a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Young people will become old themselves, and today's young workers will become tomorrow's pensioners. However, mindful of increases in life expectancy, we are committed to regularly reviewing the state pension age each Parliament in the interests of intergenerational fairness. The first review of the state pension age, in July this year, proposed increasing it from 67 to 68 in 2037-39, seven years earlier than the currently legislated date of 2044-46, saving £74 billion by 2045-46. We are also minded, in the long run, to commit to up to 32% as the right proportion of adult life to spend in receipt of state pension. That proportion is consistent with the average spent above state pension age experienced by people reaching state pension age in the last 25 years. The 2017 Labour manifesto proposed maintaining the state pension age at 66. This would have built up a further debt of £250 billion by 2045-46, which would have to be passed to later generations.

Higher education was a major topic in our debate. For young people, one of the biggest advances in recent years has been the explosion in higher education opportunities. Graduates can earn, on average, at least £100,000 extra lifetime earnings after tax. We had various ways of presenting student finance in the debate—on one hand, from my noble friend Lord Willetts, on the other hand from the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Salisbury. The point was made that what really matters is how it might be perceived by the students. There has been some unfairness in the time; I have only two minutes left, which means that I

shall not be able to make all my points. But on student finance, the OECD's Andreas Schleicher said in 2016 that the UK,

"has been able to meet rising demand for tertiary education with more resources ... by finding effective ways to share the costs and benefits".

On health, there has been real progress. However, on obesity, if we are not careful the next generation may not live as long as this one—and we have plans to address that.

On migration and refugees, an important issue raised by the right reverend Prelate, we transferred more than 900 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK from other EU countries, including more than 750 from France. Perhaps I could write on some of the other issues, such as those on climate change raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone. It would take me two minutes to read out my note, so I hope that the House will understand if I do not do so. The noble Lord, Lord Addington, and many other people asked specific questions—and I have the answers, but not the space to read them out.

To conclude, on a raft of issues—housing, taxation, employment, pensions, higher education and health—we are making significant strides to support people across the generations, giving young people the opportunities to get on and giving older people security and dignity in later life. The two are not mutually exclusive. We want to continue to renew the unspoken social contract—one generation helping another and being helped in turn—that has forged and strengthened our society, and renew belief in aspiration and the belief that, across the generations, our country can and will prosper.

2.49 pm

Baroness Smith of Newnham: My Lords, I am grateful to all Members who have spoken this afternoon and brought such expertise to the debate. It has been fascinating and incredibly well-informed, and touched on a set of issues for which the national debate is normally too limited.

I was handed a note from the Table to say: "The debate must finish by 1451 and, if it does not, I will have to stand up and shut you down", or words to that effect. The silent generation has been very vocal this afternoon and left those of us from Generation X with very little time to sum up. So I am not going to go back over the issues, other than to say that I am grateful to all three Front-Benchers for taking the time to think about these things. Across all parts of your Lordships' House this afternoon there has been an attempt to look at ways of changing the tone; to think of ways that are innovative, and to accept that these are issues which should not bring tension between different generations.

Motion agreed.

Burma: Rohingya

Question for Short Debate

2.50 pm

Asked by **Baroness Helic**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they have taken to support the Rohingya refugees currently displaced in Bangladesh.

Baroness Helic (Con): My Lords, I declare an interest as per the *Register of Lords' Interests*.

More than 600,000 Rohingya refugees are sheltering in desperate conditions in Bangladesh. The numbers arriving since 25 August this year and the speed of their displacement are greater than the flow of refugees at the height of the Syria conflict. It is the world's fastest growing refugee crisis.

We know that people only flee in such a manner—on foot, without food, injured, carrying their babies and braving landmines or the sea—because they are running for their lives. In this case, they are fleeing the reported razing of nearly 300 villages, the brutal execution of civilians and the rape of women and girls, all within an atmosphere of widespread public hatred towards a persecuted minority and, sadly, a muted response from Aung San Suu Kyi.

I was born in a country where, in the course of one weekend and under the noses of the UN peacekeepers, 8,500 men and boys were slaughtered in Srebrenica in 1995. The term “ethnic cleansing” was born in Bosnia to describe policies designed to purge a land of part of its population through murder, expulsion and rape, fuelled by an ideology of ethnic superiority and segregation. The failure to prevent ethnic cleansing and genocide in Bosnia led to one of the most intense periods of soul-searching in the history of the United Nations and to one paramount conclusion. The report commissioned by the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, stated:

“The cardinal lesson of Srebrenica is that the deliberate and systematic attempt to terrorize, expel or murder an entire people must be met decisively with all necessary means”.

It is hard to argue that what has been happening in Myanmar for some time is anything other than that—a deliberate and systematic attempt to terrorize and expel an entire people—and as such, it demands a decisive international response. The basic needs, protection and right of return of the Rohingya refugees should of course be at the centre of that response.

Bangladesh has shown great generosity and I welcome our Government's announcement of £47 million in humanitarian aid. I note, however, that the amount pledged in Geneva fell considerably short of the total requested by the UN. Will the Government urge other countries to do more, given that, for instance, less than one quarter of the sites hosting refugees in Bangladesh have access to clean water?

The reality is that humanitarian aid is essentially there to lessen the human suffering, but it cannot solve the crisis. The conflict in Syria is a sad example: the international community has spent more than \$28 billion in aid so far, but 11 million Syrians are still displaced from their homes.

The Rohingya crisis is a man-made disaster which demands a political solution in Burma itself. I am therefore asking the Government about their policy in four areas. First, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has described the violence as, “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”.

The UN Secretary-General agrees with him, and so does our Foreign Secretary. If it is textbook ethnic cleansing, then it is, by definition, a textbook situation in which the UN Security Council should act to insist

on full humanitarian access, on the right of refugees to return, on their human rights as citizens of Burma, and to open the way for sanctions if the Government and military do not comply.

I welcome reports that the UK and France have put forward a draft resolution. Can the Minister say what he expects, and when he expects it to be put to a vote? Can he confirm whether the UK is seeking a resolution under Chapter VII or Chapter VI of the UN charter?

Secondly, there are reports of large numbers of survivors of sexual violence among the refugee population. According to MSF, of those who have come to its clinic for treatment relating to rape,

“about 50% are aged 18 or under, including one girl who was nine years old and several others under the age of 10”.

The UK's preventing sexual violence initiative was set up in 2012 for exactly this kind of situation—to prevent the use of rape as a weapon and tactic of war. It includes a team of more than 60 people, such as police and forensic experts, who can be deployed to help gather evidence of crimes and give support to survivors. Have any of the experts been deployed in Bangladesh? If not, will the Government undertake to send a team as a matter of urgency? Will they also urge the UN Secretary-General to deploy the UN team that exists for the same purpose? Can the Minister also say what action the UK is proposing internationally to ensure accountability for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity?

Thirdly, we all recognise the stranglehold that the military exerts on politics in Burma, their prime responsibility for what is happening and the multiple ethnic conflicts facing that country. However, it is shocking to hear statements such as that of Minister for social welfare, relief and resettlement, suggesting that,

“Muslim people killed their own Muslim people”,

in Rakhine state and that there is “no case” of the military killing civilians. I welcome our Government's decision to suspend training for the Burmese army and the EU-wide suspension of visas for senior officers. Does the Minister agree that there is a compelling cases for asset freezes against the military leadership?

Given that it appears that there is some level of political-military collusion in the so-called “clearance operations”, will the Government consider whether measures may be needed if members of the Myanmar Government or government officials make statements inciting hatred against the Rohingya population or block the return of refugees? Will the Government be prepared to make the case for this at EU level?

Fourthly, recent reports suggest that the Rohingya militants responsible for attacks in Rakhine state receive funding from groups in Saudi Arabia. Do the Government share this assessment and if so, what actions will be taken to raise this with the Saudi Government?

My hope after the war in Bosnia was that technology would make atrocities like Srebrenica impossible because people and leaders would see, and act. That hope was sadly misplaced. There seems to be a widening gap between what we stand for as democracies and how we react collectively to crises—from Syria to Sudan, from Burma to Yemen. On our watch, we are permitting the rapid erosion of fundamental laws and standards designed

to protect civilian life against, for instance, the use of chemical weapons, barrel bombs, the bombing of schools and hospitals, and, now, ethnic cleansing. It comes at a time when international institutions themselves are under huge pressure from the threat of mass withdrawals from the International Criminal Court, for example, and to cut UN funding.

I hope that our response to the Rohingya crisis can mark a turning point, not a further erosion of our collective will. I hope too that the Government will make every diplomatic effort in the coming months to defend the rights of the Rohingya people and, in doing so, defend international peace and security and our own interests and moral authority as a country and as a society.

2.59 pm

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead (Lab): My Lords, at the outset, I thank the noble Baroness very much for drawing attention to a very serious and deeply depressing situation.

I have followed what has happened in Burma for decades and never in all that time has there been anything as horrifying as the current crisis. It has been building since October last year and has intensified since August, but the response from the international community, including, sadly, our Government, has been ineffective. Humanitarian aid is welcome and vital, but in Burma it is seriously impeded by the ruling regime. In impoverished Bangladesh, now providing refuge to over 800,000 Rohingya, it has to be increased and accelerated if we are to have a proper response to the situation analysed so well by the noble Baroness.

Hundreds of thousands of people are starving, malnourished and threatened by lethal diseases, including cholera. In just two months, more than 600,000 Rohingya—over 60% of whom are children—have been forced to flee by the genocidal determination of the Burmese Government to expel them from that country. No one will ever know how many have died in the relentless exodus by land and sea. The human rights violations perpetrated against the Rohingya include mass executions, systematic rape and torture, countless child murders, forced labour, extortion, looting and the destruction by fire of over 200 villages. The United Nations Human Rights Commissioner has justifiably called it, “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”.

Too often we have heard the declaration “never again” and then mourned repeated genocides. That is happening now and the powerless Rohingya people can do nothing to protect themselves. Tragically, as we heard, they get no support from Aung San Suu Kyi, and repatriation is not feasible: it would simply mean a return to internment camps. Relief and rescue must now urgently be provided from outside Burma. That means putting pressure on the UN to restore the measures that helped to propel change in 2012. It must also mean that the UK now imposes targeted sanctions against military officials and army-owned companies, and that the existing EU arms embargo must be extended to all supplies that could be used by the military. We should do everything in our power—political, diplomatic, economic and legal—to stop the terrible genocide in Burma. I urge the Minister to announce a new approach and add action to aid and words.

3.03 pm

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, I join the noble Baroness, Lady Kinnock, in welcoming the powerful and eloquent introduction to our debate of the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, and thank her for that. I am vice-chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Burma, of which the noble Baroness, Lady Kinnock, is chairman.

Two months ago, the Rakhine advisory commission established by Aung San Suu Kyi, and chaired by the former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, published a report that offered a way out of this morass. However, within hours of its publication, a small militant group attacked police posts, precipitating a grossly disproportionate response by the Tatmadaw, the Burmese army, leading to this current crisis.

In condemning the initial attacks, we should concur with the United Nations and be equally clear that the Burmese army’s response to those attacks amounts to crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. As one journalist put it, the Burmese army,

“wants to destroy an ethnicity, not end an insurgency”.

When more than 600,000 Rohingya—over half the population—have fled to Bangladesh, and harrowing accounts of the most extreme barbaric human rights violations are consistently repeated by survivors, it is impossible to reach any other conclusion. Of course, this is not by any means the first violence endured by the Rohingya: they have faced severe persecution for decades and, since 2006, I have repeatedly raised it in your Lordships’ House.

In 2013, I cited the Human Rights Watch report that stated,

“what is happening to the Rohingya people”,
is, in its words, “genocide”.

In 2015, I told your Lordships that,

“one in five Rohingya has now fled since 2011”.—[*Official Report*, 18/6/15; col. 1240.]

A year ago, the former President of East Timor, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate José Ramos-Horta, together with the human rights activist, Benedict Rogers, wrote:

“A human tragedy approaching ethnic cleansing is unfolding in Burma, and the world is chillingly silent ... If we fail to act, Rohingyas may starve to death if they aren’t killed by bullets first”.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Kinnock, reminded us, so often we say “never again”, only to watch it happen all over again, from Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia, Darfur to the genocide—it was named as such by the House of Commons—of Christians, Yazidis and other minorities in Syria and Iraq.

I hope that the noble Lord will tell us what action Her Majesty’s Government are taking now to address the immediate humanitarian crisis, described by the UN Secretary-General as “catastrophic”, to address impunity and to gain urgent unhindered access for international aid organisations and human rights monitors. Does he agree that although much international criticism has focused on Aung San Suu Kyi—undoubtedly, she should have done more—she does not control the army? The person with the power to order the troops to stop the carnage is the commander-in-chief, General Min Aung Hlaing. If the violence is to end, the decision to immediately cease their operations in Rakhine state

[LORD ALTON OF LIVERPOOL]

lies squarely with him. Have Her Majesty's Government told General Min that, in the light of all the evidence available, we will make a referral to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity to be laid against him and those who have perpetrated these crimes?

What are we doing to promote the citizenship rights of Rohingyas and to facilitate their safe return to their villages in due course to rebuild their homes and their livelihoods, and to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, and of course in due course to promote a reconciliation process? Will we work for a global arms embargo of the kind that the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, mentioned? Will we work at the Security Council for targeted sanctions on military-owned enterprises? On what basis will we introduce a resolution before the United Nations Security Council to address this crisis?

Lastly, I urge the Minister to hold regular meetings with groups in London with expertise in Burma—most particularly Burma Campaign UK, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, as well as representatives of the exiled Rohingya community—to discuss the crisis and to encourage clear statements about the rights of minorities from Daw Suu, especially during the visit of Pope Francis when he visits Burma next month.

Having travelled to Burma four years ago and met Daw Suu—on the day after I visited a village where Muslims had been driven out during an arson attack—and having addressed civil society activists in Rangoon and hosted in this place Burma's courageous Cardinal Bo, an outspoken voice for the Rohingyas and other minorities, I had hoped that Burma was on a path of progress. Yet I cannot ignore the truth that the country now faces the worst human rights crisis in many years, not only for the Rohingyas but for the Kachin, Shan and others. In responding to this emergency, we must not neglect Burma's other tragedies that continue to unfold. This catastrophe requires specific and urgent action. Like all other noble Lords, I look forward to the Minister's response.

3.08 pm

The Lord Bishop of Coventry: My Lords, I join others in thanking the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, for securing this debate and for her most profound speech. I acknowledge, too, the others in this House who have led on this deep human tragedy. I also acknowledge the humanitarian help provided by the UK thus far.

Over recent days, I have been in contact with Bishop Paul Sarker, who leads the small but vibrant Anglican Church of Bangladesh. He describes the situation as an extreme violation of humanity and talks of the extreme pressure that Bangladesh is experiencing at the moment, as well as its readiness to do all that it can. He pleads for greater action by the international community to support agents of compassion, such as his church, and to address the underlying causes of the crisis. In that spirit, I raise three practical issues and a longer-term one.

First, NGOs working on the front line need urgent help. At least one heroic NGO working on the ground has told me of the urgent need for international

humanitarian agencies to be able to register their organisations in Bangladesh as quickly as possible and to have long-term permission to operate. Caritas and Christian Aid currently have, I believe, only two months in which to operate. Speedy and efficient registration processes are self-evidently vital. Without them, they cannot deliver food and medical supplies, let alone establish safe places to protect the children. I have heard terrible reports of children being trafficked and women being raped. Help is needed to stop starving Rohingyas being lured into drug trafficking as carriers. Therefore, I ask the Minister what Her Majesty's Government are doing to help expedite the necessary registration.

Secondly, as important and necessary as long-term return is for the Rohingya people, what can be done to ensure that reported plans for the repatriation of those forcibly driven out do not involve them in being forcibly driven back against their will and exposed to further danger?

Thirdly, following other points that have already been made, what are Her Majesty's Government doing to ensure that the witness testimonies of those who have been harmed are recorded so that those responsible for the atrocities can be held to account, as they must be?

Looking at long-term solutions, I am conscious of the analysis of the underlying issues in the Kofi Annan report, referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Alton. The report refers to the entrenched poverty of the Rakhine, as well as the Rohingya, and to the nutritional status of all the children in the state being,

"the worst in the country",

It calls for communal participation and representation, intercommunal cohesion on border issues, and for the bilateral relationship with Bangladesh to be addressed, along with the need to abolish the distinction between different kinds of citizens and clarify the rights of those who reside in Myanmar without citizenship.

Given that, the report tells us, the Myanmar Government expressed willingness to implement "the large majority" of the commission's recommendations, and in the light of a reply from the noble Lord, Lord Ahmed, that I had to a Question very recently stating that the Government,

"assess that the Commission's recommendations provide the most realistic solution to address the longstanding and underlying issues in Rakhine",

I ask the Minister what efforts the Government are making now to provide diplomatic, legal and other expertise to assist the State Counsellor and the Government of Myanmar to deliver on that promise.

I end with the call of Pope Francis, who, as we have been reminded, will be visiting the country soon, on men of good will to work for those who are persecuted so that the people of that country,

"may be given their full rights".

Those words echo Cardinal Bo of Yangon, who visited Parliament last year. He said in a recent interview that, "the Church reaffirms the rights of every person in the country".

He said that,

"Peace is possible and peace is the only way",

and rightly so, but as he warned us in this place and the United Nations Commission for Human Rights, the “intolerable situation” in Rakhine state and the injustices suffered by the Rohingya, are, “not a basis for a stable, peaceful future for my country”.

3.14 pm

Baroness Berridge (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend Lady Helic for securing this debate and outlining the truly staggering scale of this crisis. It is not surprising that Bangladesh has struggled to cope. In 10 days, Bangladesh received more refugees than mainland Europe did from across the Mediterranean in the whole of 2016. Although the UK Government have committed £47 million since the end of August, more is, unfortunately, needed. I hope that my noble friend has praised the response officially to the Bangladesh Government and outlined what further aid will be given.

This crisis did not appear out of the blue. In 1982, the Government of Myanmar passed a law declaring all Rohingyas to be illegal immigrants, thereby removing their citizenship. However, in the first elections in 2010, Rohingyas had the vote if they had a white card, and Rohingya MP Shwe Maung was elected for Rakhine state. But in 2015 they were stripped of their right to vote, with very little international outcry. Sadly, it is not clear whether Her Majesty’s Government have ensured that UK support to assist the developing democratic Myanmar has not inadvertently supported this ethnic and religious discrimination, which is the basis of this crisis.

In your Lordships’ House on 6 June 2016, I asked Her Majesty’s Government how Rohingya with no identification papers could apply for UK tourist, work or study visas now on offer in Rangoon. I would like a guarantee that visas to come to the United Kingdom issued in Rangoon are in fact issued in a religiously and ethnically non-discriminatory manner, or we should stop issuing them to anyone. Could my noble friend please outline how many visas have been issued in Rangoon in the last two years and how many have been to Christians or Muslims who are within the ethnic minority population?

Similarly, is it the case that the embassy in Myanmar employs local people? If it does, please can my noble friend assure this House that they are from all the different religious and ethnic groups in Myanmar, or is the UK taxpayer paying only for the employment of the Buddhist majority population?

Perhaps most importantly, in terms of the UK taxpayer, since 2015 DfID has budgeted around £290 million on development projects in Myanmar. Much of the money will have been distributed to local NGOs in Myanmar, so have Her Majesty’s Government ensured that these NGOs are employing Rohingya Muslims and Christians as well as other citizens of Myanmar? In supporting development, is DfID merely building up NGOs through our aid budget that employ only the majority population, which is basically Buddhist? Part of this development work includes the UK Parliament’s own librarians and clerks doing capacity-building work, which is now funded out of the DfID budget. Again, who is the UK taxpayer training? Is it just the majority Buddhist population?

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, which I co-chair, published our report, *Rhetoric to Reality*, yesterday and my noble friend kindly attended. In it we have asked for more detailed tracking and auditing, as I have outlined, of DfID’s funds, but also particularly that we support NGOs and organisations that seek to build religious tolerance in countries.

The private sector must also play its role in supporting human rights. Standard Chartered Bank is the first western financial institution to open a representative office in Burma, and Unilever opened its first factory in Myanmar in 2013. While the CEO, Paul Polman, has in his private capacity signed an open letter to the UN over the military offensives in Rakhine, the company has kept silent. Has my noble friend spoken to these companies operating in Myanmar about whether they are facing similar issues in employing people from across the ethnic and religious communities in the country?

The Rohingya must return home from Bangladesh, but as equal citizens of Myanmar, which is one of the recommendations from the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State’s final report. It was said that:

“The current constitution, drawn up by the military government in 2008, must be amended to incorporate the basic rights and aspirations of Burma’s ethnic nationalities”.

Those were the words of Aung San Suu Kyi on 21 June 2012 in Westminster Hall. This Parliament bestowed a high honour on Aung San Suu Kyi by inviting her to be the first person from Asia to address both Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall. Alas, I am not sure she would be given the same honour today.

3.19 pm

Baroness Nye (Lab): My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Baroness for introducing this debate and noble Lords for all the powerful speeches that have preceded mine. I also declare an interest as a trustee of the Burma Campaign UK, which has long campaigned for human rights in Burma.

The fact that nearly 1 million people have had to flee to a neighbouring country because of the systematic murder and rape by the military in Burma is a shocking indictment of the world we live in. The fact that ethnic cleansing on this scale can happen again is a reminder of the fragility of our world. One million people is as if nearly all of Birmingham ceased to be.

While reports of attacks by the military might appear to have diminished over recent days, the remaining Rohingya in Burma are being starved to death because humanitarian assistance is denied access to Rakhine state, where 140,000 Rohingya are living in IDP camps which are in reality prison camps.

The UK Government should adopt a twin-track approach in supporting the Rohingya. First, we must help the displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh and surrounding countries with humanitarian assistance and healthcare. The British people have shown their humanity by their response to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal, and I am pleased that the Government have increased the level of matched funding, but I hope that the Minister will announce today that the Government are keeping the level of aid under review

[BARONESS NYE]

and that it will be increased as necessary, as well as urging other countries, especially fellow Commonwealth countries, to pledge further funding.

The other approach must be to put pressure on the military so that they understand that they cannot act with impunity. It is not possible for the Rohingya to be repatriated as Aung San Suu Kyi has suggested because there is nothing to go back to. Their home villages have been destroyed and their only prospect is indefinite internment in even more IDP camps. It has been made impossible for the Rohingya to prove citizenship, as the noble Baroness just explained.

Only economic measures will get the military to change their behaviour. It has happened in the past and it is the only sure way to get them to change in the future. The generals did not wake up one day and decide that democracy was a good idea. They were under significant international pressure, which was causing them domestic problems as well. All the reforms in Burma have been carefully orchestrated by the military, underpinned by the 2008 constitution which they drew up to ensure that they kept their grip on the pace and speed of change. They knew that Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD would win elections and they needed to keep control of the levers of power in the security ministries whilst keeping a block on reform in the Parliament, too. That constitution stops Aung San Suu Kyi having any control over the army, in the same way as it stopped her becoming president—but she did not let that stand in her way. Her voice could mobilise international and domestic opinion, but, so far, that has not happened. Aung San Suu Kyi was a beacon for the human rights movement, but is letting herself now be described as a shield for the military. While we regret her inaction, that does not shift responsibility from the military.

There is a view, wrongly held in my opinion, that the military are looking for a reason to take back control of the country. But how is a coup in their interest? They know full well the international consequences if they removed Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as the domestic problems that it would cause them.

I am sure the Minister will talk about the UK's five-point plan, but the UK and the international community must have a concerted programme to achieve those laudable aims. That will happen only if the military see that their economic interests are hurt if they pursue their programme of ethnic cleansing. So I hope the Minister will say that the British Government will impose visa restrictions on the military and their families, promote an international arms embargo mandated by the UN and halt investment in and business with military-owned companies. What is happening in Myanmar and in Bangladesh has consequences for the whole world, and the British Government should be at the forefront of action to stop this appalling situation.

3.23 pm

Baroness Sheehan (LD): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, for bringing the deeply distressing situation in Myanmar for debate in your Lordships' House. She is indeed well qualified to do so, as her opening remarks showed.

A Muslim terrorist attack in northern Rakhine province is the justification that the outside world is asked to accept for the merciless, inhuman attacks on villages and civilians which resulted in more than 600,000 people fleeing to Bangladesh to date, thousands killed, hundreds of villages burned and reports of horrific human rights atrocities including mass rape—even of very young children—torture, execution without trial, and the blocking of aid and independent observers. It has been described by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.

I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Alton, that we should have no truck with this utterly disproportionate military response against Rohingya civilians, who have suffered decades of persecution. The 1982 Myanmar nationality law stripped the Rohingya people of statehood and restricted freedom of movement, state education and civil service jobs—the noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, gave us great detail of how that has affected the civilian lives both of the Rohingya and of other minorities.

The Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh now number almost a million, as 600,000 of them join the 300,000 who had previously fled their homes in Myanmar after similar atrocities. There is a clear pattern of a desire by Burmese nationalists to cleanse the region of all non-Buddhist nationalists. Today, it may be the Muslim Rohingya being singled out and driven out, but make no mistake, the ruthless Buddhist nationalists will, in time, also come methodically for Christians, Hindus and anyone else who is not a Buddhist nationalist.

What should Britain do? Britain has authority on the international stage to lead, not just on mustering an effective humanitarian response to aid the refugee camps in Bangladesh—welcome though that is—but on co-ordinating a response aimed at stemming the army's actions. I pay tribute to the Government of Bangladesh, who, despite domestic challenges, have shown such generosity in welcoming those who have nothing.

To date, action on our part has been woefully inadequate. The removal of UK military training personnel is hardly commensurate with the scale of events in Myanmar. I wholeheartedly agree with noble Lords who have suggested, or indeed demanded, that the military be held personally accountable. Will the Government urgently seek a UN Security Council resolution to impose a global arms embargo on the Myanmar army? Will they urge the Myanmar Government to allow unhindered access to all parts of Rakhine state for international humanitarian aid, human rights monitors and the media? Will they urge the Myanmar Government to implement immediately the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission, chaired by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan?

I have reserved my closing comments for a few words on democracy. Some exhort us to not criticise Aung San Suu Kyi because she is walking a tightrope in her attempts to bring an end to the generals' power, and thus bring democracy to Myanmar. The Nobel Peace Prize laureate herself knows that democracy is much more than fair and free elections. It is about putting in place a state apparatus that will deliver the international norms that define a civilised society:

the rule of law; an independent judiciary; and human rights for all citizens, regardless of race, gender, creed or sexual orientation.

Sometimes the argument that the means justify the end is used to mitigate condemnation of actions, but what can justify means that lead to an end which is in itself abhorrent? In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu—also a Nobel laureate, like Aung San Suu Kyi—what the Government in Myanmar are pursuing is no less than apartheid. When Archbishop Desmond Tutu uses that word, the world must pay heed; and when Aung San Suu Kyi fails to condemn what is happening in her country, we must question what has happened to her moral compass and not rein in our criticism.

3.28 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I too thank the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, for initiating this timely debate. The Rohingya crisis has been fast evolving over recent weeks; but, as my noble friend Lady Kinnock said, we must not forget that the Rohingya people have suffered decades of terrible persecution, being denied citizenship and marginalised. As we have heard, there are now nearly a million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. I too welcome the funding made available by the Department for International Development and the international community but, as she said, estimates are that we are 20% short of the required amount. What steps are the Government taking to ensure we meet the full target? What are we doing to make sure other countries make similar contributions?

I also welcome the Government's efforts in raising this issue at the UN Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as convening an international meeting in New York with Kofi Annan. However, as my noble friend Lady Nye said, Ministers have been asserting that this action has focused the international community on the implementation of the five-point plan, which says that: the security forces must stop the violence; there must be full humanitarian access within Burma; refugees must be allowed to return to Burma in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner; the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine state, chaired by Kofi Annan, must be implemented rapidly and in full; and, above all, Burma must grant access to, and fully co-operate with, the UN Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission.

As we heard, Aung San Suu Kyi has announced measures including the establishment of a new civilian-led body to oversee the return of those who have fled and the development of Rakhine into a state in which all communities can live together. The Government have said they are watching closely to ensure that Aung San Suu Kyi's words translate into swift action and that they will keep challenging her to ensure that the five-point plan is implemented. I hope the Minister will tell us what the Government's assessment is of progress so far. Does it meet the definition of "swift action"?

On 11 October the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, said in the Chamber that, "it is the military who are behind this ruthless and brutal treatment of the Rohingya", and he pointed out the UK is, "providing some military training through education on issues such as human rights",—[*Official Report*, 11/10/17; col. 222.]

and that this had been "suspended". We are calling on the EU to do likewise. I welcomed that decision, but I do not understand why the same consideration is not given to DfID funding of parliamentary advice and WFD funding of advice to the union Government. Surely we need to act against all authorities that have failed to act to protect the Rohingya community?

As noble Lords have said, if we do not get progress, what are the Government going to do next? Will they support calls for UN-mandated sanctions, particularly targeted sanctions and travel restrictions against members of the military? As the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, said, we have seen clear evidence of gender-based violence, which is a significant threat in Myanmar and Bangladesh. What is DfID doing to respond to the specific needs of women as part of its response, including supporting survivors of gender-based violence and protecting women from further attacks?

We are witnessing ethnic cleansing. Like the House of Commons, this House needs to say that loud and clear. As the noble Lord, Lord Alton, said, there should be no impunity for such action. What steps are the Government taking to better support efforts to gather evidence so that the people responsible are properly and fully held to account?

3.33 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Lord Bates) (Con): My Lords, I too begin by paying tribute to my noble friend Lady Helic for securing this debate and for the powerful way in which she introduced it, drawing on her personal experiences of the horrific events in Bosnia. It is tragic and salutary that we connected the events of 1995 and now, in the sense that Kofi Annan's report was the definitive report at the time and he is at the heart of trying to seek a way forward in this crisis as well, drawing on those experiences.

I will try to use my time to respond to some of the detailed and focused questions, but I think that some of the responses will benefit from a further meeting, if noble Lords are willing. However, before I address those questions, I should begin by updating the House on the Government's response to the situation of the Rohingya in Bangladesh, on the situation in Rakhine state and on the border, and on our diplomatic efforts.

We condemned the attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army in late August, but, as the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, said, the violence carried out against the civilian Rohingya population was completely disproportionate and utterly appalling, and we condemn it without reservation. The noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, asked about allegations that funding has been coming from other sources. We will look into that and I will write to her on it.

More than 600,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh in a matter of weeks. Tens of thousands more are believed to be displaced within Rakhine state. Humanitarian access remains severely constrained. The noble Lord, Lord Collins, asked what we are doing to ensure that we get access to that area. The UK co-sponsored a resolution at the Human Rights Council that set up a fact-finding mission to look at the human rights situation in Burma. We recently supported a resolution to extend

[LORD BATES]

the mandate of the mission until September 2018. In addition, as noble Lords would expect, I spoke to Jane Edmondson, who is the head of DfID in Bangladesh. I put on record my tribute to her and her team—something which we do not do often enough. They are working down there in the camps at Cox's Bazar as well as with the Government in Dhaka to ensure that there is NGO access in those areas. I pay tribute to their work, which comes, as usual in many such situations, with great personal risk.

The survivors' accounts of the suffering have painted a harrowing picture. The noble Baroness, Lady Kinnock, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop the Coventry referred to that and to other humanitarian abuses. Burmese security forces and ethnic Rakhine vigilante groups have displaced the Rohingya through a brutal campaign of violence that increasingly appears to be ethnic cleansing. Others have gone much further and we would not detract at all from what those organisations have said. The UK is one of the leading actors in the international community in responding to and seeking a solution to this crisis. I emphasise that word, solution, and I will come back to it. We are calling on the security forces and the Burmese Government to protect civilians, to facilitate full humanitarian access in Rakhine and to allow the safe and voluntary return of the Rohingya.

The noble Baroness, Lady Helic, the noble Lord, Lord Collins, and others referred to the pledging conference that took place on Monday of this week and was a major effort. It might be helpful to the House if I put on record that the pledges totalled \$344.7 million. That fell short of what was expected but the UK contribution was a pledge of \$63 million, which was by far the largest. The next largest donor was the European Commission pledge of \$42 million, followed by the United States, at \$38 million, and then Sweden at \$23 million, along with Australia. We join others in calling for the international community to be cognisant of the severity of this crisis and the urgent need for resources to be found.

Providing humanitarian assistance is the most urgent priority now for hundreds of thousands of refugees who have arrived in Bangladesh and those who remain in dire need in northern Rakhine state. We commend the Government of Bangladesh—as did the noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, and my noble friend Lady Berridge—for their generosity in welcoming so many refugees. The UK is the largest donor to the refugee response in Bangladesh. Within days of the outbreak of violence in August we committed an additional £30 million to enable humanitarian organisations to scale up, we have committed to match donations given through the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal and we announced an additional £12 million at the pledging conference I referred to.

UK aid is making a tremendous difference on the ground. Our support is allowing food to be provided for 174,000 people and has provided safe water and sanitation. I know that one thing that Jane Edmondson and her team were very concerned about in the camps was the possible outbreak of diseases such as cholera, so the washing facilities were absolutely critical in that initial response.

We are targeting the needs of vulnerable women and children, and my noble friend Lady Helic reminded us of the importance of us doing that. Emergency nutrition support will reach 21,000 pregnant and lactating women and more than 60,000 children under five. UK-funded women's centres and health clinics will support survivors of gender-based violence and provide medical help for more than 50,000 pregnant women to give birth safely. The UK has provided £1 million to the Red Cross in Burma, which is currently the only aid organisation able to provide humanitarian support in Rakhine. I cannot at this stage answer the pertinent question of my noble friend Lady Berridge about the composition of those who are delivering the humanitarian aid, but I undertake to make investigations and come back to her. Our diplomatic efforts have been focused on directing international attention on to the Burmese security forces. We have raised Burma three times at the UN Security Council and convened an international meeting in New York with Kofi Annan, the chair of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. The role of neighbouring countries is vital. We are talking to China and India—which have very important roles to play in the region—and other regional states to encourage them to play their full part in resolving the crisis.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Kinnock and Lady Nye, and my noble friend Lady Helic referred to the role of Aung San Suu Kyi on this issue. I very much understand the criticism and grave disappointment felt by many in this House. However, we should not fail to acknowledge in part—and this is why I say that I will come back to the emphasis on a solution—the pressures she is facing, to which the noble Lord, Lord Alton, referred in his remarks. The noble Baroness, Lady Sheehan, described it as walking a tightrope—we recognise that description as well—between the international condemnation and Burmese public opinion which overwhelmingly supports what the security forces are doing. That is the reality and we need to work within that. We believe that Aung San Suu Kyi has now begun to show more leadership, and she has announced a humanitarian mechanism. She has clearly expressed her willingness to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of the Rohingya to Rakhine, and has set up nationwide interfaith meetings to promote respect for diversity and challenge widespread prejudice.

At this point, I refer to the remarks of my noble friend Lady Berridge on the persecution of both Muslims and Christians in Burma, particularly in Rakhine. It is very clear that they are facing persecution there and in other parts of Burma as well. Ministers including the Foreign Secretary have met community leaders, including some from religious minorities, and we have spoken publicly of our support for the importance of freedom of religious belief. That is all the more important as tomorrow is International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day. I pay tribute to my noble friend Lady Berridge and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief for the event that it organised yesterday. My noble friend Lord Ahmad attended that event and spoke powerfully about the importance that we place on defending people's religious beliefs in those areas.

We stand ready to encourage and support Aung San Suu Kyi on taking these initiatives forward, but we will need to see progress. The situation in Rakhine has been difficult for many decades. Noble Lords have referred to that, including the noble Lord, Lord Collins. Resolving the current crisis as well as healing the deep divisions requires sustained and long-term engagement. The UK is committed to supporting the Rohingya, not only now in their time of most urgent need but also during the difficult times ahead.

I will now turn to some of the specific points raised. On citizenship, which was raised by the noble Lord, Lord Alton, and my noble friend Lady Berridge, the Rakhine Advisory Commission makes it clear that citizenship must be addressed in order to make progress in Rakhine. It sets out two approaches on citizenship: making progress on verification under existing laws and reviewing the controversial 1982 citizenship law. It is of course a tragic consequence of those laws, and the failures that are in place, that the Rohingya end up in the situations referred to by my noble friend Lady Berridge, with the difficulty they have in getting visas. To have a visa into any country, you need to have valid identification and travel documents. If they do not have those because they do not have citizenship, then of course it is difficult for that to happen. Again, we will look into that.

My noble friend Lady Helic talked about the response to gender-based violence. DfID is supporting a range of organisations providing specialised assistance on gender-based violence to survivors. At the moment, having spoken to officials in DfID about the stories they are coming across, I know that, anecdotally, the numbers are staggering. We are working with official groups to make sure that those testimonies and reports are recorded so that actions can be taken. She also asked what work we are doing through the UN Security Council. Although we have raised it in three sessions, we also have to be aware of the reality that there is a possibility of veto in the Security Council because countries have an interest in and are prepared to use a veto. However, we were encouraged that on 13 September, for the first time in more than nine years, the Chinese agreed to issue a UN Security Council press statement. We regard that as an encouraging step forward.

Overwhelmingly, this has been a debate which should sober our minds and make the international community wake up and take notice of what is actually happening there. This is yet another man-made crisis which requires a political solution. I pay tribute to all noble Lords who have taken part in the debate, and to my noble friend Lady Helic. I stand ready to meet noble Lords to pursue these matters further as the need requires.

Air and Water Pollution: Impact

Motion to Take Note

3.46 pm

Moved by Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer

That this House takes note of the impact of air and water pollution on the environment and public health.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer (LD): My Lords, we know that air and water pollution are killers, but the recently published *Lancet* commission finding that more than 50,000 UK deaths are attributable to pollution each year—now, in the 21st century—really is a shocking statistic. Of those UK deaths, more than 28,000 are linked to air pollution and over 3,000 to water pollution. As well as the deaths that pollution causes, it drastically affects the quality of life. My noble friend Lady Walmsley will no doubt expand on that.

Over recent decades, the main reason that successive Governments have cleaned up air and water is that the EU has championed a cleaner environment. The ambient air quality directive sets legally binding limits of major air pollutants that impact public health, such as particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide. Despite this, the UK Government have made little effort in this area so in February 2017, the European Commission gave the UK a final warning over its failure to meet air pollution limits for nitrogen dioxide. Thus, after years of inaction, the Government published their air quality plan but that delay has cost us dearly. My noble friend Lady Jolly will detail the severe costs in terms of health, heart and respiratory diseases and so on that that delay induced.

The public are paying with their health, with costs to the NHS, yet the UK Government still provide billions of pounds of public funds to subsidise the domestic production and consumption of fossil fuels—some £6 billion per year domestically and some £3.5 billion abroad, according to a report last month from the Overseas Development Institute. By contrast, the Green Alliance has found that due to renewable energy funding cuts, clean energy investment will fall by 95% over the next three years. Greg Clark has launched his green growth strategy to lead the world in fighting climate change, but at the same time the Chancellor has announced a new £5 billion fund for oil and gas exploration in the North Sea, hoping to find another 10 billion to 20 billion barrels of oil. That seems pretty contradictory.

Of course, car manufacturers are well ahead of the Government here. They are well on the way to planning how to phase out fossil fuel-only cars. I think my noble friend Lord Strasburger will be talking about that. I am sure he shares my frustration that the Government have passed so much of the responsibility for cleaning up city air to local authorities, without introducing in parallel a high-polluting vehicle scrappage scheme, which many city leaders have requested. I know my noble friend Lady Randerson will outline the challenges and explain what a Liberal Democrat green transport scheme would contain.

The health impacts of water pollution will prove to be much more serious than we realise. One threat is from relatively new compounds. An example is microplastic contamination, which has been found in 72% of tap water samples in Europe. I commend the Government on starting to address this matter, because it is very urgent. They intend to ban cosmetic microplastics. The Microbeads Coalition, which includes Greenpeace, has said:

“The ban announced by the UK government is world-leading in its ambition to successfully put a stop to this source of marine pollution”.

[BARONESS MILLER OF CHILTHORNE DOMER]

But I must say, shame on the cosmetics industry for lobbying against the ban in Brussels. I must also commend the Government on the UK signing up to the UN Environment clean seas campaign and making various voluntary commitments on marine protected areas, including in our overseas territories.

Another threat from new materials is well outlined in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology's POSTnote on nanomaterials:

“Engineered nanomaterials may end up in lakes, rivers, oceans, aquatic sediments and soils. When nanomaterials enter water, they tend to aggregate together ... So far, most studies into the effects ... on aquatic life ... suggest that nanomaterials can reduce growth, reproduction, locomotion, breathing and feeding”.

That is pretty much life itself. There is a caveat: that the studies so far,

“used higher concentrations of nanomaterials than current predicted exposure levels”,

but nanomaterials are a very real danger. Will the Minister tell the House what further research into this the Government are intending to do? Nanomaterials accumulate at the bottom of the food chain and food crops can absorb them, so there are a number of threats.

I now turn to the main causes of water pollution besides new materials and how we can tackle them. The first is sewage. There are still 31,000 combined sewer overflows in the UK. As soon as there is heavy rain, these sewers discharge untreated human sewage into our rivers. Failure to implement much-needed sustainable urban drainage systems has cost us and our environment dearly. A question really sticks in my mind: what do you get if you mix a gallon of sewage with a gallon of storm water? The answer is two gallons of sewage—it is fairly obvious. The question comes from the city manager of Philadelphia in the US, which has become a model of how to build green infrastructure to deal with the issue. It had old Victorian sewers too, but in 2000 it began to plan 19 square miles of green infrastructure to cope with 9 billion gallons of sewage: rain gardens, porous pavements, lots of trees, and green roofs in public and private spaces. Everyone is signing up to it. We had a presentation on that in this House, so there was a chance for the Government at that time to take up the idea, but instead they did nothing. London faced a similar issue. Storm water was washing into the Thames. It is only as a result of my noble friend Lady Ludford's petition that proceedings have resulted in the 25 km storm tunnel which will start to deal with this issue. Our cities need to take a leaf out of Philadelphia's book.

The second source of pollution in water is agricultural. Many products are used on farmland for good reason, for example nitrogen and phosphates, but become pollutants once they wash into water. Besides encouraging minimal input use—precision farming, organic farming and so on—what else could be done? South West Water has taken a positive approach and found that reducing pollution at source, rather than treating water downstream, has a truly surprising benefit-cost ratio of 65:1. Its upstream thinking programme supports farmers who are upstream of key water supplies with

grants and advice, so that they can manage their business with clean water and a healthy natural environment in mind.

Clearly, any future farming support must be linked to a clean record, but Brexit poses a risk of actually increasing agricultural water pollution. Why? Removing slurry costs farmers about £12.50 a tonne, and if all of a sudden common agricultural policy subsidies go, farmers will be unable to afford clean-up schemes while transitioning to a more positive way of dealing with this, such as the example I have just cited. There is also a danger that any pollution may go unchecked post Brexit if the Government continue to view reporting requirements as an example of technical requirements that they want to get rid of. The impact assessment lists reducing reporting requirements as a potential cost saving. That is totally wrong. British citizens have every right to know whether the state of their environment is a source of danger to their health. I urge the Government to maintain the reporting requirements and the bodies necessary to do that.

What do we need from the Government in the short term to tackle some of these issues? Next year's review of the national planning policy framework would be a good start. The Government could choose to introduce effective planning requirements for sustainable drainage systems that tackle the sewage situation. I am sure the Minister appreciates that a new agricultural policy whereby land is a crucial part of a newly recognised green infrastructure would be a major part of addressing this need to clean up our water. A commitment must be made to match spending on farm support, while ensuring that the public goods element of any support expands, and the idea that you just bring in some land and get support for it is a thing of the past. Unfortunately, water legislation has been knocked on to the back burner by Brexit. We should by now have had a review of the licensing system for water abstraction and permitting for sewage overflows, but they have both been heavily delayed by Brexit. Brexit leaves little time and no political space to tackle these basic, crucial issues of everyday life.

I end with a plea. If Brexit does happen, we will seek to ensure that the Government continue with environmental reporting requirements, with no cancellation of reporting as a “technical requirement” or seeing it as a cost-saving measure. We will need measures in place to ensure that we continue actually to clean up our air and water. I beg to move.

3.58 pm

The Earl of Caithness (Con): My Lords, I am grateful, as we all are, to the noble Baroness for securing this debate. It is the second time that we have discussed air pollution in a few months; the last debate, on 3 July, was introduced by my noble friend Lord Borwick, who I am glad to see in his place. I am particularly grateful that the noble Baroness included water in this debate, which is important. However, I would say to her that I was sad she was a little negative. There are plenty of positives to be taken from what has happened, which I shall mention.

To me, pollution is anything that is toxic, harmful or a nuisance. As a result, pollution is not a simple problem, but a number of different ones. It is an

international, a national and a local issue, and not a simple problem to address. It is hard to tackle because its effects, which may be long-term and subtle, are often difficult to trace to a particular cause and that makes coming up with a solution very difficult. We cannot eradicate pollution. Even if we can trace the cause, a solution might be hard because it might have been caused by human error, thoughtlessness or incompetence. Our constant challenge therefore is to mitigate the chances of pollution happening. Air and water are essential for life but, as the noble Baroness rightly said, pollution can kill.

Most of the damaging effects of air pollution occur across the life cycle and can begin at conception. The effect can range from premature birth to declining lung function, especially in later life. In the UK, air pollution costs businesses and healthcare services over £20 billion annually and is estimated to result in about 40,000 premature deaths—what a waste. In addition, air pollution causes a reduction in agricultural yields, irreversible damage to ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as damage to historical buildings and monuments—just look at this place. The effect of pollution on plants and ecosystems has been well noted for many years and I am reminded of what the great Scottish gardener WW Pettigrew, who did so much to create the beautiful parks in Cardiff before he moved to Manchester, wrote about pollution in 1928—some 90 years ago. I therefore support what the Minister said when he wound up the debate in July. He said: “The need to improve” our,

“air quality is of paramount importance”.—[*Official Report*, 3/7/17; col. 774.]

I hope he will give water the same high priority.

Despite the current problems, substantial improvement in air quality has been delivered. UK emissions of nitrogen oxides fell by 70% between 1970 and 2015 and almost 20% between 2010 and 2015. In February this year the UK was compliant with all current EU and international emission reduction targets, which have been applied since 2010. I take the completely contrary view to the noble Baroness: the EU has let us down, particularly on emission standards. EU businesses, German car-makers and the Commission have been very poor and have not helped anybody on the European continent. New targets have been signed up to and I have little doubt that, whichever Government are in power, every effort will be made to meet them. These new standards will affect business decisions vital for this country's growth, such as the new runway in the south-east. But it is right that such issues of natural capital are included in the planning stage.

Even if we had no air pollution from within the UK we would still have air pollution because, at times, over half our air pollution comes from abroad, bringing with it in many cases diseases which are damaging both to us and to the environment. Whether we are in or out of the EU, we will have to work with international partners to improve not only their standards but also the measuring of those standards, and the uncensored publication of the true situation.

Being an island does not isolate us from incoming air pollution, but it helps us hugely with water. Our rivers are our own and do not contain another country's pollution. As with air, water quality is a success story.

In the early 1990s just 28% of bathing waters in England met the highest standards. Now it is 93.2%, with even tougher standards being implemented. In 2016, compliance with the EU drinking water directive was 99.96%. The public supply in England provided for a population of over 54.5 million people and came through 313,000 kilometres of mains pipes. Water companies carried out nearly 4 million tests of which only 1,132 failed to meet the necessary standards—that is impressive. We are truly spoilt in this country and take what we have very much for granted.

It is easy to think of polluters as industry and businesses. Those are the easy targets. It is much more difficult for us to acknowledge our contribution as individuals. I mentioned gas boilers in our previous debate, but a recent study in America shows that gas ovens are increasing internal NO_x and carbon emission pollution by anything between 20% and 40%. This is mostly due to bad ventilation. When it comes to water, we as individuals pollute through such items as sewage, wastewater, soaps, washing detergents, oil poured down the drain, high rain street run-off, particularly from our cars, and litter. There is to be a 25-year plan, and that needs to involve individuals and resonate with them, because it is often the poorest and most vulnerable who are affected by pollution although, as I said, they also contribute to the problem.

Post Brexit, we have a huge opportunity to improve our position. I suggest to the Minister that it is the Government, their agencies and local authorities which should continue to set the standards, but let us go back to something like Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution—not subject to ministerial control, as it was in my day, but totally independent, so that the Government set the standards and we take away from their agencies the enforcement thereof. Let us have an independent inspectorate.

4.05 pm

Baroness Walmsley (LD): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Miller for her inspiring introductory speech. As an asthmatic person who has to come to London every week from the beautiful clean air of my home village in North Wales, I have a personal interest in this topic. As I stand by the roadside outside this building, I can smell the pollution, and it certainly affects my breathing. Unfortunately, I know that this is not a short-term effect, because the Royal College of Physicians tells us that the effects are lifelong and can make us more susceptible to infections and cancer. Indeed, I have noticed that too.

However, I am an adult, and developed as a child in an environment with much cleaner air. On the other hand, the children of today, especially those who live and go to school in deprived urban areas, are growing up and developing in air that is toxic. One in five of London's primary and secondary schools is in an area of high air pollution, and 85% of those are in areas of greater than average deprivation. There are 950 schools and 1,000 nurseries across Britain close to an illegally polluted road.

However, we should not be concerned just about areas of high pollution. A recent study in the *Harvard New England Journal of Medicine* concluded that there is no safe level of air pollution and that disadvantaged

[BARONESS WALMSLEY]

people have the greatest adverse health effects, so, for reasons of health quality, we need to tackle it urgently.

The lungs are obviously the most susceptible organ. A study in southern California showed a clear link between the risk of developing early school-age asthma and air pollution associated with traffic. Apart from the obvious lung impairment and consequent increased stress on the heart, it is not widely known that air pollution, particularly the microparticulates in diesel fumes, can cross the placental barrier and affect the developing organs, including the foetal brain. This can have a very serious effect on all aspects of brain development, including cognition, and can also affect older people. We are reducing babies' life chances before they are even born.

Infants are also particularly susceptible because they have a higher metabolic rate than adults and breathe a greater volume of air compared to their size. It is a double whammy: they breathe in more air and are more susceptible to its harmful effects. On top of that, they are often pushed around in buggies which put them exactly at the level of car exhausts. That is why it is particularly important for us to monitor the level of pollution around schools and nurseries and reduce it where necessary. We need to know what the problem is before we can address it.

Schools are usually on main roads, often at intersections, where pollution is greatest because vehicles have to stop and idle. Of course, many parents drive their children to school, although a recent report on air pollution and London schools suggested that this is not a major contributor to air pollution. The same report emphasised the importance to children's health of physical activity and recommended active ways of getting to school, such as walking or cycling. It calculated that the benefits of the activity outweighed the risk of doing it in polluted air. However, it would obviously be better if the air was clean. I know a doctor who has carefully planned his children's walking route to school along those lines, making sure that they walk along the less traffic-ridden roads and experience cleaner air.

I am sure that several speakers will recommend ways of reducing pollution in the first place, such as phasing out coal-fired power stations, supporting renewable energy sources, charging drivers of polluting vehicles for entering clean air zones, mandating reduced emissions standards for private cars, removing the dirtiest vehicles from the roads, encouraging electric cars and the charging infrastructure for them and, of course, improving access to public transport. I agree that those prevention measures are really important but, while we are waiting for all these measures to improve the air we breathe, we need to think about mitigation measures.

Our greatest allies in that fight are trees and other green plants. London is one of the greenest major cities in the western world, with many large and wonderful parks and gardens and thousands of street trees. Not for nothing are our public parks called the lungs of London, and the same applies in other British cities. Private gardens play a very big role, too. A consequence of that is the proliferation of beekeepers in London, since the number and variety of forage plants is so great.

It is probably this fact that prevents us having even dirtier air in London since, not only do trees absorb carbon dioxide from the air and give out oxygen, helping to mitigate global warming, but many of them are also very good at removing pollutants from the air before transpiring it out again.

I am pleased to say that many big developers are quite aware of the benefits of trees and other greenery around their buildings and infrastructure, and build landscaping and planting into the plans from the start. A good example of that is the new American Embassy in Nine Elms Lane just opposite where I live. They are planting many mature trees, hedges and ornamental grasses around the new building, which will buffer the noise and pollution from the traffic and contribute to the well-being of users of the building and local residents. We need local authority planners to insist that all developers do this, and to plan sufficiently far in advance to allow British growers the time to grow the stock they need in the interests of British biosecurity. All noble Lords will have heard about the many plant diseases that we inadvertently import, so I am sure we would all want to support our own home-grown British industry. Do the Government intend to include the planting of trees and green areas in their plans to meet the legal limits for air pollution? I know there is a plan to plant 1 million trees, but many of them will be in rural areas, which have clean air anyway. They should be in urban areas.

Of course, there are those who believe that our limits are too high anyway, so I urge the Government to keep going, even when current legal limits have been achieved. As members of the European Union, we have signed up to those legal limits, which we have still not achieved everywhere. I disagree with the noble Earl, Lord Caithness: it is not the standards that are wrong, it is the people who try to avoid them, such as VW. So, Brexit or no Brexit, will the Government introduce a new Clean Air Act so that we have new systems in place to achieve the standards to which we have signed up?

4.13 pm

Lord Whitty (Lab): My Lords, I join in the thanks to the noble Baroness, Lady Miller, for introducing this debate, and her impressive introduction. I want to use my time mainly to focus on the regulatory framework for controlling air quality in the UK in the post-Brexit scenario. I declare an interest, in that I am the current president of Environmental Protection UK, Britain's oldest environmental charity—formerly the National Society for Clean Air, which was instrumental in bringing into being the Clean Air Act 1956.

I make no apology for repeating my reference to that Act, which I did in the debate initiated by the noble Lord, Lord Borwick, in July. Like the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, I have another, personal interest to declare. As a 10 year-old living in west London with heavy congestion on the ground and under the Heathrow flight path, I was diagnosed with severe asthma. I continued to live in London for many years and, as a result of the Clean Air Act 1956, it began largely to clear up. But for a lot of other people, air pollution is still a problem in London, as it is in many urban and semi-urban parts of the UK.

As the noble Earl, Lord Caithness, said, we have made progress. We have drastically cut sulphur dioxide emissions, for example, and many other pollutants have been reduced. This is partly because of the elimination of dirty factories, partly because emissions have been better managed and partly because there has been better regulation. Whatever the reason, we have made progress. The remaining area is principally, but not only, traffic and that is mainly, but not only, diesel—the wear and tear on the tyres and brakes also contribute to air pollution. Traffic volume is an important issue, but some 50% of air pollution is non-traffic—it comes from construction sites, agriculture, static plant, wood burning and gas appliances. Nitrogen dioxide and particulates have proved very difficult to reduce. Some are stubborn; some have been reduced but are now going up slightly again. There are more than 40 areas within the UK which are not meeting EU standards, which were supposed to have been achieved by 2010.

The medical effects have been spelled out this week in a substantial article in the *Lancet* and by evidence which, I suspect, we have all received from the BMA, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Royal College of Physicians. So we are looking not only at the statistical evidence of air pollution on mortality and on general ill-health, but our physicians have now identified the plausible means whereby damage is done and have shown that very small, ultra-fine particles enter the bloodstream within minutes of being inhaled. As has been said, this is particularly a problem for infants and young children and for children in the womb. The net effect on adults and children has been to contribute to 40,000-plus deaths nationwide, through pulmonary, cardiovascular and other diseases and aggravation of pre-existing conditions.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, said, there is also a social dimension. It affects the least well-off, and children are the least well-off in our society. One could say that the diesel cars of the top 25% are damaging the health of the bottom 25%, and the children in particular.

The way in which this has been dealt with has been very dependent on EU regulations and ultimately on EU enforcement. These regulations have not been met, either within the UK or within many other European countries. Enforcement has been difficult. As the noble Earl, Lord Caithness, indicated, the Volkswagen crisis has shown that the power of the German car manufacturers has overridden the health of the European population. Whether or not there were other ways of dealing with that, it greatly aggravated both the problem and the credibility of the system. The value limits in these EU regulations are at twice the level which the World Health Organization suggests are safe.

Even to meet the EU standards, the UK Government will need a more effective air quality strategy than they currently have. Having been found wanting in the courts twice over the last few months, the latest July version of Defra's air quality plan admittedly includes a number of new elements—in particular, a target of 2040 for the end of petrol and diesel cars, which is less than other public authorities in Britain and Europe

have set. It also provides some funds to support low-carbon vehicles. However, if you add up the totality of the air quality strategy, it is, in effect, a call for local authorities to draw up their own plans without any significant additional powers or resources. It is still not a coherent strategy, nor is it a coherent way in which to develop clean air zones. Local authorities have been somewhat slow in developing those. There is a real need to focus on the areas of worst pollution and to ensure that all central and local government-sanctioned developments near the areas of highest pollution do not cut across that.

This may be a minor example in some ways, but the reference of the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, to trees reminded me that just this week I saw an article in the *Camden New Journal*, which said that it was proposed to cut down 50 plane trees, which absorb pollution, to house temporarily the taxi rank displaced by HS2. That is an absurd counteraction. There is an even worse one: the London mayor has begun to develop an ambitious programme to introduce charges on all diesel vehicles and develop ultra-low vehicle emissions zones, but that could be undermined by the decision on Heathrow. Only yesterday, the *Times* stated that the latest reports suggest that the evidence relating to likely air quality problems arising from the building of a third runway at Heathrow mean that even the EU's current levels will be undermined. I say to the Minister and his transport ministerial colleagues that the *Times* also stated that the risks of those limits not being met are low at Gatwick but very high at Heathrow. Given that new evidence, is the Minister inclined to change the approach to the building of a third runway at Heathrow?

4.21 pm

Baroness Jolly (LD): My Lords, I intend to address air pollution and health. In the light of the recent reports of the Royal College of Physicians and the World Health Organization, I am more than happy to support this Motion in the name of my noble friend Lady Miller.

For far too long, air pollution has remained swept under the rug, even as the UK remains among the worst in western Europe in its protection of the environment. The Committee on Climate Change notes that global average temperature since the late 19th century has risen by 1 degree Celsius, and that global sea levels have risen by about 20 centimetres—eight inches in old money. We are seeing increasingly volatile and historically unusual weather patterns, including not one but two storms hitting our coasts in mid-October, an ongoing degradation of our environment and increasing toxicity of our seas.

The environmental effects of air pollution are detrimental and widespread. Chemical compounds in our air mix with our environment to create acidic compounds in the process of acidification, which can cause harm to soil, vegetation and buildings. Increased nitrogen, a product of industrial and auto emissions, can be deposited in soil, rivers and lakes, affecting the chemical composition of these environments. These can have a severe effect on the plant and animal diversity in sensitive environmental settings. Air pollution is a killer. Recently, the Lancet Commission on Pollution

[BARONESS JOLLY]

and Health found that pollution-related health issues accounted for 9 million premature deaths worldwide, up from 3 million in a World Health Organization study in 2016.

In the UK, it is estimated that 40,000 deaths each year are caused by outdoor air pollution, with even more due to indoor exposure. The noble Earl, Lord Caithness, mentioned gas fires and central heating in that regard. Action to reduce pollutants in the air could lower the figure of 40,000 by 15% each year. It is estimated that health problems arising from air pollution cost the NHS £20 billion each year, adding significantly to the strain on its already stretched resource. Additionally, it is estimated that £3.5 trillion is lost each year worldwide due to air pollution, an alarming 6.2% of global economic output, and that is sure to rise if prevailing trends continue.

Air pollution has been definitively linked to a large number of health conditions. It can cause or aggravate the onset of asthma, acts as a carcinogen and increases the risks of serious ailments such as stroke, heart disease and lung cancer, as well as respiratory disease. These effects are felt over the lifetime of the impacted population and can become lifelong ailments. Further, the health impacts of air pollution are not spread evenly across our population. Pollution-related illness is most heavily concentrated among the most vulnerable groups in society: the poor, the old and young children, as we have already heard. The lower-paid populations are disproportionately likely to live and work in polluted areas; the elderly and children are far more prone to become sick; and children suffer health consequences that remain with them for decades as a result of these contaminants in the air. Asthma, COPD, heart failure and some cancers can all trace their cause to poor air quality.

But not all is gloomy. In recent years, we have seen significant improvements in air quality, and our emissions are continuing to fall across the board. In all categories but one the UK is overall within legal limits, but there is significant regional variation. The Government have taken steps in the right direction. They have pledged £2.7 billion to improve air quality and create cleaner transport. They have acted to promote ultra-low emission vehicles, built electric vehicle charging infrastructures, and promoted cycling and walking. However, there is more to be done to address the issue.

Under devolution, the heavy lifting in dealing with this issue has largely been left to local authorities, the assemblies and parliaments, but not all have risen to the challenge. Although the Government have provided financial assistance for these local authorities to make plans, it remains a national issue that requires heavy co-ordination in order to be successful. My noble friend Lady Walmsley mentioned trees. I do not know whether I was the only one awake at an early hour of the morning to listen to the “Today” programme saying that we are not growing enough trees in the UK and that we are importing far too many trees for our timber. We need to get a move on and start growing trees, which, apart from anything else, capture carbon and, as has already been said, help to alleviate harmful emissions.

However, we need to look elsewhere for examples. In mainland Europe, car-sharing schemes in rural areas are part of the daily commute. That is not unusual—it happens. Some towns allow cars into city centres only on certain days, dependent on their car registration; major cities have well-established electric tram networks; and some insist that deliveries to shops in city and town centres are made out of hours.

We cannot continue allocating money and resources just to “plan to make a plan” in order to address this issue. We must take formative action—and soon. Although we are engaging in the Brexit process, we remain bound by the EU ambient air quality directive and must not allow the Brexit process to serve to undermine our standards and regulations. The description of what happens elsewhere might be classed as “bold”, given our marriage with the internal combustion engine, but Governments, local authorities and councils must be bold.

When summing up, can the Minister address two questions? First, what steps have the Government taken to ensure a reduction in emissions in the devolved nations and regions? Secondly, for the sake of the nation’s health, can he confirm that EU “firm environmental standards” will be maintained through the Brexit process, and can he promise not to reduce standards when we are not even in compliance with current legal standards?

Without further action, air pollution and climate change will continue to have grievous consequences for our public health and environmental conditions in ways that will only become more evident with the passage of time. We in the UK should regain our position as a world leader in environmental efforts. Any new regulations issued by the Government as a result of Brexit must, at a bare minimum, maintain current protections.

4.29 pm

The Lord Bishop of Salisbury: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Miller, for initiating the debate and for her introduction to it and for the contributions so far. It is a debate in which the glass is both half full and half empty. The health impacts of air pollution and water pollution are such that we cannot afford to be complacent in this area. It is also an area of debate in which there are “alternative facts”. Therefore, it is important to keep rehearsing them and to see what gives in the discussion.

At the Dorset Climate Change Conference last Saturday, there was a very serious discussion about the nature and definition of fossil fuel subsidies. The local MP was said not to recognise that there are fossil fuel subsidies, but others quoted published papers that used the same sorts of figures that the noble Baroness, Lady Miller, used in her introduction. They might be in the region of \$6 billion and possibly as high as \$10 billion. There is clearly a disparity about that, but if those figures are anywhere near correct, that is seven times the subsidy available to green energy. It is easier to get to very specific examples where there will be less debate. For example, the subsidies for diesel for refrigeration units mean that that is hardly taxed. That provides a perverse incentive for supermarkets and others to continue to use diesel. That has a big impact in the capital.

Since Monday, we have had the T-charge on older diesel cars. Would it be possible, in addition to reinvesting in cleaner transport, for this money to be used to combat pollution by the sorts of mitigation that have been mentioned already by a number of contributors to this debate, but specifically for what are called ozone gardens? Ozone gardens are planted with plants sensitive to ozone pollution such as snap beans, wheat, clover, common milkweed and cutleaf coneflower, which react visibly, warning when ozone pollution gets high, and creeping bentgrass, red ivy and purple spiderwort, which are efficient at capturing particles. There is only one ozone garden in this country, in Sheffield. They are quite popular in the United States. But I am pleased to announce to your Lordships that the first in the capital is planned for a churchyard, close to City Hall.

Water is such a precious commodity—70% of the Earth is made up of water. A really inspiring exhibition and series of conferences earlier this year called Just Water linked churches and cathedrals around the world—St Paul’s Cathedral, Hong Kong, New York and Sydney. The Archbishop of Cape Town, who was here launching the exhibition and discussion, talked about water in sacramental terms as precious, but the title of his talk used a very telling phrase: “Water is Life, Sanitation is Dignity”. More people have access to mobile phones than to sanitary facilities such as water closets. That is a telling figure. The sustainable development goals envisage that by 2030 safe water will be available to everyone. We will make progress with the sustainable development goals only if we pay attention to poverty and climate change.

Like others in the House, I very much welcome the Government’s clean growth strategy, but what measures will the Government take to pursue the efforts to which we committed at Paris to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius? It is such a strong and difficult aim, but what are we actually going to do to pursue that? How will the clean growth strategy be further developed to ensure that the UK will achieve the fourth and fifth carbon budgets? A big task is ahead of us.

Like others, I am concerned in relation to water and the huge problem of microplastic particles. They are found in freshwater environments in this country in places quite remote from populations. The Government estimate that something like 8 million tonnes of plastic makes its way into the oceans each year, posing a serious threat to our natural and marine environment. Experts estimate that plastic is ingested by 31 species of marine mammals and over 100 species of seabirds. I welcome the Government’s efforts so far. The glass is very definitely half full, but, my goodness, there is work to be done. I urge more ambition in the way that we look forward to the publication of legislation to ban microbeads later this year.

4.34 pm

Lord Lee of Trafford (LD): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend and former room-mate on securing this debate. There is universal support for the eradication of contamination and pollution from our rivers, canals and coastal waters. The benefits are substantial and widespread: public health and sport, animal and bird life, tourism, angling and wider economic benefit.

Much has been achieved in my lifetime. I grew up in the suburbs of Manchester, home to the Mersey, the Irwell and the Manchester Ship Canal. In those days, they were pretty foul, smelly and unpleasant, like so many of our rivers and canals in the industrial north. I was born into an angling family. My great-uncle used to say to my uncle, “Jack, what would you rather do—go fishing?” I was taken as a 10 year-old by my late father and uncle to the headwaters of the River Ribble, learning to fish for trout in the Yorkshire Dales at Horton-in-Ribblesdale in waters controlled by the Manchester Anglers’ Association, which I was a member of for many years.

Thus, at a very early age, I contrasted the clean Ribble waters with those nearer home. Thankfully, through a combination of public pressure, government action, private sector activity and particularly EU directives, so much has changed. The Mersey and the ship canal have been transformed, and Salford Quays is now a major and attractive tourism destination.

When I became Tourism Minister in the late 1980s, many of our beaches and rivers were polluted, and I was always very happy in speeches and by attendance to support cleansing activities such as the Blue Flag awards. I remember acknowledging then that the Thames was one of our greatest unexploited tourism assets. Little did I think that, nearly 30 years later, I would be living in Richmond only a couple of hundred yards from that river, fishing for pike and seeing daily, particularly at weekends, dozens of youngsters happily learning to kayak and canoe and the occasional brave swimmer.

When still living in the north, I made my own modest contribution by stocking our local River Bollin, a tributary of the Mersey, with more than 100 brown trout. At the time, I did not realise that one needed Environment Agency authorisation to stock any river. It came, tested the water, said that it was somewhat marginal but gave me the go-ahead. Thankfully the trout prospered and bred. I was amazed to hear how great an area individual Environment Agency officers had to cover. Is the Minister satisfied that there are enough officers properly to monitor pollution levels and reports of contamination?

Continuing my tourism involvement, for more than 25 years I have chaired the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, the trade body for our major attractions—all receiving more than 1 million visitors a year. There are more than 70 now in membership: the jewels in our national tourism crown. One of our members is the Canal & River Trust, whose team of environmental scientists cares for its 2,000-mile inland waterway network and cleans up more than 200 pollution incidents every year. I pay tribute to the trust for all that it does so effectively, including its £8 million a year dredging programme, the resurfacing and improving of access to many miles of towpaths for walkers, joggers, cyclists and anglers, and the development of so many marinas and basins for the benefit of boating enthusiasts and tourists. When a constituency MP in north-east Lancashire and more recently, I have seen and heard of the development of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal by way of example.

[LORD LEE OF TRAFFORD]

In recent years, I have been privileged to take a week's salmon fishing on the Hendersyde beat of the River Tweed below Kelso. With more than 4 million anglers, fishing is arguably the largest participation sport in the country. Fisheries, fish farms, tackle manufacturers and retailers provide employment for thousands, and the rural economy benefits greatly from visiting anglers.

Sadly, this year I have to report only one small 4lb salmon in a week's fishing, probably the most expensive salmon per pound caught in UK waters this year. I have to say that I am very envious of my noble friend Lady Walmsley, who spoke earlier, who some weeks ago caught a 13lb salmon of which she proudly showed me a photograph. They say that women are more successful anglers—I think that proves it.

Huge strides have been made in recent years in cleaning up our rivers and waterways, as the noble Earl said, but more needs to be done. It is still very much work in progress.

4.39 pm

Lord Robathan (Con): My Lords, it is a pleasure to take part in the debate.

I start by applauding what the noble Lord, Lord Lee, just said about the strides that have been made since we were children. I remember when there were smogs in London; police officers had to wear masks and the buildings were black. They are not black any more, but of course, more needs to be done. What has surprised me, if I may gently say so, is that although this should not be a party political debate in any way, I have heard quite a few party political comments. It was said, "if Brexit does happen"; well, the good people of Britain want Brexit to happen, as we know, and while I applaud the EU for some of the steps it has taken in pushing Britain over the last 30 years into better environmental practice, I heard only yesterday from a former Minister that we are putting forward ambitious programmes in the Council of Ministers but they are being held back, as my noble friend Lord Caithness said, by other countries that do not want to go so fast. This is not a party political debate but something we all wish to see for the benefit of the British people and the world.

I want to focus on marine pollution—which has been mentioned, particularly by the right reverend Prelate—and especially on plastic. I should declare a sort of interest, in that I have been a member of the World Wildlife Fund—or WWF or whatever it calls itself these days—for a lot longer than I have been a member of the Conservative Party. Some people might work out whatever they like from that. Yesterday, I went to the launch of a pamphlet called *Blue Belt 2.0: British Global Leadership in Ocean Conservation*. It was written by my good friend, the right honourable Member for Newbury, Richard Benyon—a Minister for Agriculture in the last Government—and launched by the Foreign Secretary. I commend it to everybody in this House, because we are doing an enormous amount. I will briefly quote from it. This is from the Conservative Party manifesto, but I will come to the other parties shortly:

"We will champion greater conservation co-operation within international bodies, protecting rare species ... the polar regions".

We are setting up marine reserves in the next five years around Ascension Island, Tristan da Cunha and other places. The same commitments, I should say, were in the Labour Party, Liberal Democrat and Green Party manifestos. This is really good stuff where Britain is leading the way. I have visited Ascension Island, South Georgia and the Falklands, and I am delighted that this project is going forward. I hope all noble Lords are as well.

Marine pollution has already been referred to. The sea has been seen as a dustbin for far too long, not just for runoff from agriculture, which is improving with things such as nitrate vulnerable zones—brought in by the EU, I think, but certainly found across the UK—but for sewage, which is of course pretty appalling. Until relatively recently, sewers used to go straight into the water and out to sea; we were dumping sewage sludge in the North Sea only 10 years ago. I do not think we do it any more. We need to look very closely at what we put into the sea. I used to dive a certain amount; I still do from time to time. I took an expedition to Half Moon Caye, off Belize, an awfully long time, perhaps 35 years, ago. I remember a lot of plastic—as well as some fantastic brown boobies, for those who are interested in birds—that had been dumped in the middle of a fantastic reef, where the Great Blue Hole is located. It is a very good dive, by the way. It was fabulous. However, on the island, which was only about half a mile long, there were hundreds and hundreds of flip-flops. The most extraordinary thing was that they were all right-hand flip-flops; I do not know where the left-hand ones went. My point is this: that was 35 years ago, but things have now got an awful lot worse.

The effects on wildlife of plastics in our oceans have already been mentioned, as have cosmetic beads. Let us get this straight: microbeads are being banned at the end of this year in the UK. We are leaders in this area and we should applaud the Government for that; but we need to go further. Today, there was a report in the *Times* on plastic microfibres in fleeces, which I did not know about; I am sure we all have fleeces. Those microfibres get ingested by plankton, which then go into the food chain. In fact, it may kill off the plankton anyway.

There is also a report on coral ingesting microplastics. I am not sufficiently au fait with this, but I think it may mean it gets taken out of the environment and ingested by coral, which I cannot think is much good for the coral. There is also a photograph published today that noble Lords can see online in the *Telegraph* of a stretch of plastic waste that is five miles long and two miles wide in the Cayos Cochinos marine reserve in the Caribbean, where I went on my trip to Half Moon Caye.

What do we do about this? It is not exactly easy, but we need to tackle it. The whole world needs to tackle it, so it has to be through international action. In Britain we have brought in a plastic bag charge, which I applaud—I think everybody does. It was not a particularly party-political issue. I backed it well before it was brought in, as did my Labour opponent in my constituency. We are banning microbeads.

All this is positive, but there is more yet to be done. Education is hugely important. Basic litter is scattered around our roads or thrown into the water. If anybody

has not been diving they should try it one day, because the amount of rubbish you see anywhere that people go, on the bottom of our rivers and harbours, is just appalling. It is international action, through the EU but most especially through the United Nations, that will stop unnecessary waste by getting everybody to deal with it, including developing countries that perhaps think they have better or more important priorities. We need to recycle more. I made my maiden speech in the House of Commons some 25 years ago on recycling. We need to research degradable plastic. However, we need to take action now, otherwise the situation will only get worse and we need to make a world fit for future generations.

4.46 pm

Lord Jones of Cheltenham (LD): My Lords, I too thank my noble friend Lady Miller for this important debate. We have heard a lot of figures about the number of deaths caused by pollution, but the Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health estimates that 16%—one in six—of all deaths worldwide are caused by pollution. It is a worldwide problem, not just one for this country.

I will say a few words on a topic about which I have had a bee in my bonnet for many years: clean water supply. Yesterday on TV I saw an advert by the charity WaterAid. It told the story of a little girl aged about six, somewhere in Africa. Every day she gets up and has to walk for hours, carrying a large plastic container to collect water for the family. The water she fills that container with is not clean water like we get out of our taps, but water full of harmful bacteria. Instead of going to school, this little girl spends a large part of her waking hours fetching water that is positively harmful to her and her family. Every time I visit Africa I come back full of anger that we in the developed world allow so many people in poor countries to live like that little girl, with no clean water to drink.

I once went as an observer to elections in Sierra Leone. The village where I stayed had been in a rebel-held area during the civil war. Most of the buildings were damaged, many with no roof, no water supply and no communications. Every day a rusty United Nations tanker would visit, disgorging into old oil drums what they euphemistically called “water”. This “water” was either brown with green bits floating in it or green with brown bits floating in it. I drank bottled water I had brought from the capital Freetown, but the villagers had no choice. They used this substance for washing, drinking and cooking. I have seen similar conditions in other countries—Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Cameroon and Mozambique.

Yet, I met a professor of meteorology in Namibia who told me it does not need to be like this. Enough rain falls on the African continent that everyone could have access to clean water. The issue is how to store the rain and then distribute it to the people—water infrastructure. Charities such as WaterAid do what they can and should be supported, but I learned some time ago that WaterAid’s entire worldwide budget is less than what is spent by Thames Water on trying to improve the purity of the water supply in its area from 99 point something per cent to slightly more than 99 point something per cent.

We are very good at water in this country and, post Brexit, we are going to need friends all over the world. I can think of no better way to win the hearts and minds of people like the little girl with the plastic container than to help put in the infrastructure so that they can access clean water, so that she can go to school and many fewer people will die from drinking polluted water. So here is a challenge for our Government and for President Trump and our American cousins, too. Instead of threatening to destroy countries such as North Korea, why not use that money instead to help give Africa a decent water supply? Make long-term friends instead of long-term enemies.

We heard from the noble Earl that pollution is also a huge problem for animals and our wildlife. Animals are exposed to air pollutants through inhalation or ingestion or by absorbing gases through their skin. It is mostly the soft-bodied invertebrates, such as earthworms, or animals with thin, moist skins, such as frogs and toads, which are affected by the absorption of pollutants, while birds are more susceptible to air pollution by inhalation, due to their higher respiratory rates. Plants take up pollutants from the air, which are then deposited on leaves, ready to be ingested by an unsuspecting herbivore.

Just as long-term exposure to air pollution can lead to chronic respiratory disease, lung cancer and heart disease in humans, the ways in which pollutants affect these animals are diverse and frightening and include respiratory stress, physiological impairment, gross malformations of bones and teeth, birth defects, and, in birds, decreases in egg production and embryo survival. This can lead to changes in birth, growth and death rates and problems in migrating, which can have disastrous consequences for many species of birds. Of course, problems intensify when pollutants enter the food chain.

Acid rain changes the ecology of our waterways. An acidic stream or river does not make a happy home for our otters, for example, and fish-eating birds such as the osprey will need to find an alternative place to live. Pollution is destroying the environment by impairing its natural beauty, ruining its natural features and depleting natural resources. It is weakening our ecosystem and decimating biodiversity. While humans can, to some degree, protect ourselves from pollution in air and water, our wildlife simply has no defence against it.

When I discuss these issues with friends they ask, “Well, what can I do?”. Here are six things off the top of my head. Next time you change your car, buy an electric or hybrid model. Secondly, stop using insecticides and weed-killers in your garden. Thirdly, investigate using renewable energy in your home. Fourthly, recycle more, particularly plastic, which the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, told us about. Fifthly, contribute to charities such as WaterAid, which are trying, successfully, to supply more people with clean water. Sixthly, encourage your friends, relatives and local representatives—councillors, MPs, even, dare I say, Peers—to take an interest and take action themselves. Air and water: we cannot live without them.

4.53 pm

Lord Strasburger (LD): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Miller for giving us the opportunity to debate these important matters. I am going to focus

[LORD STRASBURGER]

on air pollution, and specifically on nitrogen dioxide's important role in the great harm being caused to our citizens by polluted air. I also have an important question for the Government and I am hoping that the Minister will be able to explain something in his reply that has been puzzling me for a while.

Here are the headlines about the effects of nitrogen dioxide, some of which have already been mentioned in this debate. This silent killer is one of the main contributors to the 40,000 deaths which occur prematurely every year through strokes, heart disease and diabetes. It causes asthma in otherwise healthy children, and negatively impacts children's development; it stunts their lung growth, starting somewhat horrifically in the womb.

In 2012, the World Health Organization moved nitrogen dioxide to its highest classification of the causes of cancer, alongside arsenic and mustard gas. It definitely causes lung cancer and probably also causes bladder cancer. As we have heard, the Royal College of Physicians estimates that the health cost to the UK is £20 billion a year. If that cash cost, that death rate and that serious damage to our children's future were being caused by something like terrorism, badly formulated medicine or food poisoning, the Government would act with great urgency, and rightly so.

Here is the puzzle: why did the Government waste £370,000 of taxpayers' money trying in vain to repel court action whose only purpose was to make them do something? They have not even taken legal action against Volkswagen over its cheating on diesel emissions tests, despite cases being brought across the globe. Why did they spend a large amount of money on trying to avoid having to take steps to make us healthier when it could have been spent on making us healthier? It is bewildering.

More than half of nitrogen dioxide pollution is caused by road transport and about 40% of that is belched out by diesel cars. Surprisingly, diesel cars are much more polluting than HGVs and buses, partly because larger vehicles are subject to much stricter testing. Diesel cars pump out two and a half times the nitrous oxides emitted by HGVs per kilometre, and 10 times as much per litre of fuel. To be fair, there has been some action from the Government on this, but it has been comically unambitious. They came up with a ban on sales of new petrol and diesel-powered cars from 2040, which is 23 years away. This is the Government's idea of a quick win.

Other European countries have been much more challenging to car manufacturers, showing that they are in a hurry to dramatically reduce this scandalous annual death toll. Several have set their deadlines to 2025, and our Government should be doing the same or better. They should also be devising a targeted scrappage scheme to get rid of the diesel cars that are already on our roads spewing out toxic pollutants many times over the legal limit. I would like to put in a word here for the much maligned European Union. Without their many sensible directives on these issues, we would not have any standards for our Government to brazenly flout. We must ensure that those standards are preserved or improved if Brexit were to actually happen.

My home city of Bath is one of the 29 cities that are deemed to be seriously in breach of the legal limits on air pollution. Our World Heritage City is surrounded by hills and has chronic congestion and pollution. House prices in the centre are astronomic, which means that many people have to live outside the city and commute in to town, and many do so by car. The school run is a problem in Bath and many parents do not realise that by driving to school, they are contributing to the pollution that is poisoning their own children.

The current Conservative administration have, like the Government, done virtually nothing about it. Fortunately my Liberal Democrat colleagues in Bath are determined to tackle our city's problems when they win back control of the council in 2019. They really mean business and I am confident that they will succeed in making Bath the healthiest city in the country in terms of its air.

My final point is positive and hopeful. There is an opportunity here for the UK to lead the world in a technological transport revolution. We have specialist skills in battery technology and smart grid technology development, along with plans to be a leader in electric vehicles. If we put our minds to it, we can secure a significant share of the estimated \$1.5 trillion of revenue expected to be generated by 2030 in these new markets.

4.59 pm

Baroness Randerson (LD): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lady Miller for initiating this debate, which has been truly fascinating and comprehensive in the range of speeches undertaken.

I start by saying a few words about water pollution. Many noble Lords have referred to the big strides taken in improvement in recent decades, most of which is due to EU standards. But those standards, as has been said, must be maintained and improved if we leave the EU; that cannot be used as an opportunity to reduce what we require. I say to the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, that talking about Brexit is not a party-political point. His own party is totally split on the issue. However, there is a fundamental point in it about standards on pollution.

Lord Robathan: I agree entirely. I had hoped we are on the right side in this. If the noble Baroness were to read the Secretary of State for the Environment's comments, she will see that Michael Gove is absolutely ahead of the EU on this. She also said, "If we leave the EU". The people voted to leave the EU and we are going to do so. Legally, we are going to leave the EU.

Baroness Randerson: We are a long way off it and have not got very far in the last year or so.

We take it for granted, as my noble friend Lord Jones pointed out, that we have access to clean drinking water when we turn on the tap. But that is not the case the world over and it is not the case with air quality. As we meet one standard on water quality, it is evident that other challenges arise. The right reverend Prelate referred to microplastic contamination and its impact, not just in the sea but on our water supply through the ingestion of microplastic beads. That demonstrates to me that we have to work in concert across the world, with other nations.

Rivers present a constant challenge because four out of five of our rivers in England and Wales fail to meet good ecological standards, although my noble friend Lord Lee pointed out the importance of the improvements. I was grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, for his comments on marine pollution and for mentioning several campaigns on it. I also mention the work done by Sky News, which has run a long-standing campaign on plastic pollution in the sea.

Many speakers have referred to the obvious importance of the impact of pollution on health, particularly air pollution as an insidious threat. Many organisations are working on this now: the BMA, the British Lung Foundation, the British Heart Foundation and the Royal College of Physicians. Friends of the Earth has also done a great deal of work on this. I want to concentrate on transport because that accounts for a third of our NO_x emissions and a fifth of our particulate emissions. That is an average across Britain but if you look at the figures for urban areas, you see that in many of them it accounts for two-thirds of air pollution. We have the worst urban air quality in Europe.

There is a reasonable level of public awareness of the link between nitrogen dioxide emissions and asthma. However, as noble Lords, including my noble friends Lady Walmsley and Lady Jolly, have said, many other problems can be ascribed to this including premature births, low birth weight, child mortality, the development of children's lungs and the decline of lung function in older people. Diesel emissions also cause cancer. We accept the evidence and take action in our personal lives to deal with the link between smoking and cancer, but we are at a much earlier level of public awareness of the impact of poor air quality.

It is much more difficult for people—in particular, children—to avoid poor air quality than it is for them to avoid the impact of smoking, unless they have the misfortune to live in a family where people smoke indoors. Children cannot avoid the pollution because they hold their parents' hands and are taken across the road at the level of exhaust pipes and there are so many cars idling outside schools. We have a great deal of work to do. Will the Minister say how the Government are going to address the public health emergency we face and raise public awareness of it? It is important that that is done because the measures that need to be taken will not be accepted unless there is public awareness. When people bought diesel cars—I was one of them—they did so with the best of intentions. Tackling climate change was a top priority, and people realised the impact of nitrogen dioxide and particulates from diesel vehicles only later. Since then, the EU has had a key role in upgrading standards. I take issue with the noble Earl, Lord Caithness: it was not the EU that let us down about diesel vehicles; it was Volkswagen, which tried to evade EU standards.

The Government's response to this public health emergency has been totally inadequate. That is not just my view; it is the view of the courts. In February, the EU Commission gave the UK a final warning over its failure to meet targets on air pollution. Reference has already been made to the fact that the Government spent £370,000 trying to avoid publishing their plan, but they have now published a third version of it and it is still totally inadequate.

I shall now mention some of the things that the Government should be doing to achieve a comprehensive action plan to improve air quality. We have to change driving habits, and we have to empower local authorities to take action in communities. That is needed at local and national level as well as internationally. Some actions will take time and be expensive; other actions are inexpensive and can be done immediately, such as having far more monitoring sites and air pollution indication signage in pollution hotspots. That would alert the public and encourage people to apply a no-idling rule outside schools, for example. This sort of thing is already being trialled in London, and it is very easy, quick and efficient to do. In turn, this information should be used as the basis for ultra-low emission zones, another thing that London is introducing.

King's College's research has shown that London breached its air pollution limit just five days into 2017, so it certainly needs ultra-low emission zones. In the country as a whole, only six out of 43 monitoring zones in the UK were compliant with legal NO_x limits. We welcome the Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill but we need a much broader Bill that includes a well-targeted diesel scrappage scheme.

There are schemes in the Bill to improve the number of charging points, but there is no reference, for example, to using lamp-posts as locations for them. Diesel buses, hydrogen buses and all these things need to be addressed by the Government in order to have a much more comprehensive approach to this problem.

5.10 pm

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Miller, for tabling the debate this evening, for the compelling evidence she has cited today and for her passionate call for action. I am also grateful to other noble Lords for sharing their experience and their continuing concerns. I refer noble Lords to my declaration in the register of interests.

We have debated the growing threat of air pollution to public health several times recently, and on each occasion the scientific evidence has become more and more damning and, I have to say, the Government's response to that more inadequate. As several noble Lords have pointed out, it is clear that this is becoming a huge public health scandal, with thousands of deaths a year from cardiovascular and lung disease linked to air quality, a rise in COPD and asthma, and a shocking impact on childhood lung development. What is now better understood is that the carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides and particulates do not just invade the lungs but are also absorbed into the bloodstream and even into human brains, with some evidence of a link to Alzheimer's disease. My noble friend Lord Whitty and other noble Lords highlighted the particular harm that occurs to the most disadvantaged and disabled people in our society.

The more evidence is made available, the more alarm bells ring. We are only now beginning to understand the full consequences of the public health crisis. But it seems that the only place where alarm bells are not ringing is in government. When has Jeremy Hunt or Michael Gove made a major speech acknowledging the public

[BARONESS JONES OF WHITCHURCH]

health threat? Why is there not a huge national public awareness campaign? Why has a new clean air Bill not been urgently introduced? If we can find time for a Space Industry Bill, we can find the time for new legislation to tackle toxic air—quite frankly, I know which the public would prefer.

The right reverend Prelate referred to the Government's clean growth strategy, which indeed sets some lofty ambitions to deliver a low-carbon economy and an improved natural environment, including by tackling pollution. But as he pointed out, it is already failing to deliver on its own climate change targets, and this new strategy is woefully short on measurable targets for the short term, which is what we need and which are vital to address the issues before us today. Perhaps the Minister can update us on progress on meeting those targets.

Meanwhile, the issue of air pollution needs national leadership now. Thankfully, Sadiq Khan has stepped into the vacuum, and other mayors are following suit. But the Government's overall plan to pass the problem down to local authorities is simply not working. The latest government statistics show that the number of local authorities missing air quality targets reached a seven-year high last year: 278 of the 391 councils are now declared to have air quality objectives which are not being met. This is up from 258 in 2010.

ClientEarth has highlighted that 45 local authorities are not being required to take action, despite breaching air pollution limits for several years in a row. Not surprisingly, ClientEarth is contemplating taking the Government to court for the third time. So, instead of prevaricating and being embarrassed by successful court actions against them, why do the Government not get a grip, for example, by introducing a Clean Air Act, introducing a targeted diesel-scrappage scheme, providing new incentives for purchasing clean vehicles and setting up a clean air fund to help local authorities conform to the new standards? Can the Minister address these concerns in his response?

The noble Baroness and other noble Lords talk with passion about the impact of water pollution on our environment and, as with other environmental challenges, we are somewhat protected by the EU legislation, such as the European water framework directive and the bathing water directive. While I am sure the Minister will reassure us that the Government plan to absorb these directives and associated regulations into UK law, I hope he will also address the concern that this will be meaningless if there is not also a comparable access to courts and to justice—including a continuation of the precautionary principle—to make sure that these new laws are enforced.

The noble Lord, Lord Robathan, referred to Michael Gove being ahead of the game. He may be on some issues but on this and other issues we are still waiting for answers, so I am very much hoping that the noble Lord will be able to give some guidance on that.

Lord Robathan: While the noble Baroness is criticising the Government so much, can she remind the House who it was that encouraged us all to buy diesel cars which have led to the pollution of which she is speaking?

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: I think the noble Lord knows the answer to that. It was done for very good reasons—as we all know—because of the carbon implications which we were tackling at the time and I think we would all put our hands up and say that, if we knew then what we know now, it would have been a very different policy. But I have to say to the noble Lord that the question I was posing was: how will we make these UK laws enforceable when we take them back into our own legislative framework? I am sure the Minister will answer that question when he comes to it.

In the meantime, we still have major challenges in delivering clean water which is suitable for human health, farming, food, and a healthy wildlife. For example, despite the efforts of the Environment Agency, and others, only 36% of UK rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and ground water was classified as “good” or “better”, as defined in the water framework directive. The Environment Agency's timescale for improving on this record has slipped. The recent report from the WWF on river pollution shows that nearly half of all rivers in England and Wales are polluted with sewage from sewage treatment plants and sewer overflows. Apart from the threat to human health of such pollution, it also has the effect of starving rivers of the oxygen that wildlife needs to survive.

The noble Baroness, Lady Miller, referred to the Thames initiative and last week I visited the Thames tideway route which, when complete, will provide a new sewerage tunnel to capture the 39 million tonnes of untreated sewage which enters the Thames every year. It will finally make it a safe place for recreation and allow wildlife to flourish. But this is only one initiative, and we clearly need stronger powers to mandate water companies to stop sewage polluting our rivers and to make sure that modern, integrated sewerage systems and SUDS are introduced. Can the Minister say what further action is being planned to ensure that this becomes a reality?

A number of noble Lords talked about the impact of agricultural processes and, indeed, that has a major polluting effect. Uncontrolled spreading of slurries and manure, disposal of sheep dip, and use of pesticides and fertilisers are all adding to river pollution. The WWF estimates that agriculture and rural land management are responsible for 54% of water pollution incidents. There is, I accept, a growing awareness of this problem among the farming community, but more incentives are needed to make sure that good practice, such as the catchment-sensitive farming projects, becomes the mainstream and the reality. Hopefully, the payments system replacing the CAP can be utilised to reward those that enhance river quality. Can the Minister indicate whether this is being considered?

Finally, several noble Lords raised the issue of marine pollution. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, that there have been some welcome initiatives, such as marine conservation zones, which were instigated by the previous Labour Government and are of course welcome, but we are still battling with other incidents of direct sewage polluting our seas, part of which comes from the river pollution that runs into the sea. Despite our efforts to clean up our bathing water—and

we have made progress—20 sites were found to be unsafe for swimmers in the latest European Environment Agency assessment, which has just been published. The UK is second bottom in the EU league table. This is, to say the least, embarrassing and does little to enhance our reputation as a tourist hot spot post-Brexit. Organisations such as Surfers against Sewage have rightly been vociferous in highlighting the health dangers of polluted bathing water. Can the Minister update us on what further action is being taken to make our beaches 100% compliant?

Meanwhile, of course I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that microbeads are to be banned, and of a consultation on a bottle deposit return scheme for plastic bottles and cans. That is something that we have been calling for over a long time. The scale of plastic pollution is daunting. In the UK, we use 35 million plastic bottles every day, and nearly half are not recycled. The river, beach and ocean pollution is an eyesore, but more importantly a threat to wildlife and our environment. It has been great to hear David Attenborough talking so passionately about plastic pollution in his latest series of "Blue Planet", and it has been welcome and surprising to hear even Coca-Cola backing the idea of a bottle return scheme. We are indeed making progress. I hope that the Secretary of State will be able to confirm that the Government intend to follow through on this initiative—he will certainly have our backing if he does so. Perhaps the Minister can update us on the timetable for implementation. I look forward to his response.

5.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) (Con): My Lords, I am particularly grateful to the noble Baroness for securing this debate, because it has been fascinating.

As we all know, our environment is a complex system in which impacts on air, water, soils, biodiversity and the beauty of natural landscapes are all interlinked. This will be the core theme of the Government's 25-year environment plan, which seeks to realise our bold ambition to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than the one we inherited.

Air and water do not respect boundaries. Water flows across borders and, as my noble friend Lord Caithness said, up to half of the air pollution in the United Kingdom comes from abroad. In 2014, a total of 17 member states reported failure to meet EU limit values for nitrogen dioxide. This underscores our shared responsibility to take action at home and abroad.

As many of your Lordships have highlighted, poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in this country, exacerbating the impact of pre-existing health conditions such as breathing difficulties and heart problems, as the noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, highlighted. As many of your Lordships have said, those most affected are often the most vulnerable: the young, the elderly and the less affluent. Respected organisations have estimated the annual mortality attributable to poor air quality at between 40,000 and 50,000 early deaths per year. That is a dreadful situation.

I want particularly to pick up the point that the noble Baronesses, Lady Walmsley and Lady Randerson, mentioned about children and schools. Many local authorities have introduced measures to raise awareness and influence driving behaviours, especially around schools. I know, for instance, that the City of Westminster has been particularly strong on idling engines generally; but around schools, that is hugely important. Indeed, clean air zones can be specifically designed to take targeted action for schools, hospitals and other areas where young and vulnerable people are most exposed to harmful emissions.

I think we can all agree—and we have definitely all agreed—that this issue has to be tackled. But it is important to note, because it highlights that it is all achievable, that, as my noble friend Lord Robathan stressed, huge progress has been made since those deadly smogs of the 1950s. The noble Lord, Lord Whitty, outlined that since 1970 emissions of sulphur dioxide have fallen by 96%, nitrogen oxides by 69% and particulates by 76%. That has been achieved because of regulatory frameworks, investment by industry in cleaner processes, and a shift towards cleaner forms of energy.

I very much endorse what the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, said about trees and gardens—in fact, there are two beehives at the Defra offices. Because Grown in Britain was only a fortnight ago, I showed my solidarity by going to—

Lord Framlingham (Con): The Minister is well aware of my keen interest in the planting and care of trees, particularly in urban areas, and I agree very much with everything that the noble Baroness, Lady Walmsley, said. I was very badly affected by the news from the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, that already this ridiculous HS2 project is costing us mature plane trees in London. But could the Minister confirm that when—not if—Brexit happens, it will present us with a golden opportunity to tighten our rules on importing trees and improve our biosecurity, which at the moment presents a great threat to our indigenous tree population?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: That is why my noble friend will be very pleased that Grown in Britain is an initiative that I very much encourage.

I am very much looking forward to visiting in every diocese an ozone garden, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Salisbury outlined. While these achievements show what we can achieve, we know that more must be done. The evidence of the damage from poor air quality to health and the environment has grown significantly in recent years. The most immediate challenge is tackling nitrogen dioxide concentrations around roads—the only statutory air quality limit that the UK is currently failing to meet. In 2008, the UK Government, I am sure in good faith, signed up to tougher standards, based on the assumption that they would solve our roadside air quality problem, but this of course was to no avail. Current Euro 6 diesels emit, on average, six times the laboratory test limit. We should all be pleased that our country led the way in securing the new real driving emissions testing.

As the UK improves air quality, air quality hotspots are going to become even more localised, and the importance of local action will increase. I take a

[LORD GARDINER OF KIMBLE]

contrary view to the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, in that the work we need to do with local government is going to be absolutely imperative. As we get to and reduce the hotspots, it is local knowledge that will enable us to resolve this issue. That is why, in May this year, the UK Government published a clean air zone framework, setting out the principles that local authorities should follow in setting up clear air zones in England. That framework empowers local authorities to make the most of the opportunities offered by the Government's air quality plan.

The Government have committed £3 billion in varying ways to improving air quality. There is the more recent £255 million fund to support local authorities with persistent nitrogen dioxide concentration exceedances, and £1.2 billion for a cycling and walking investment strategy. The noble Baroness, Lady Miller, raised this very important issue. There is £1 billion for improving the infrastructure for ultra-low emission vehicles, and £290 million to reduce transport emissions as part of the National Productivity Investment Fund. Indeed, that money is making a difference. The Clean Bus Technology Fund has reduced emissions of nitrogen oxides from almost 3,000 older buses by 75%. Retrofitting school buses in Manchester resulted in a 92% reduction after two years in service. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund has resulted in 780 km of new cycle routes, 230 upgraded rail stations, and 200 better bus services. Nitrogen dioxide emissions fell by almost 20%—

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: I am sorry to interrupt the Minister, but the issue that none of us can understand—not just we on these Benches, but lots of campaigners and so on—is why the Government will not just adopt a new clean air Act. It is such a simple thing, and would provide a framework for a number of the initiatives he is talking about. However, it would also provide statutory backing for some of the things that are currently voluntary requirements of local authorities, and which frankly are not happening.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: I was going to get to that but I am afraid my time is getting increasingly short because of interventions, so I may have to write in more detail on a lot of these matters.

By next year, 92% of the road miles which we are monitoring—the ones more likely to be of concern—will comply with average annual concentration limits. I hope that the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, and the noble Lord, Lord Strasburger, will be pleased that, per capita, we have reduced emissions faster than any other G7 nation. I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, and all other noble Lords that we must go further. The Government have announced they will end the sale of all conventional diesel and petrol cars and vans by 2040.

Baroness Randerson: Does the Minister not think this is rather late in the day, given that several of the manufacturers have already said they will cease to produce them in the early 2020s?

Lord Gardiner of Kimble: That is the target we have set. As I say, I am very happy to take interventions, but I will not then finish this speech.

The noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, and the noble Lord, Lord Whitty, called for a new Clean Air Act. We will be bringing forward a new clean air strategy for consultation next year and listen with interest to views on whether we can improve our existing regulatory framework. However, more legislation is not always the answer, and we are determined to get on and tackle the problem with the many tools already at our disposal.

Research and infrastructure will be critical. I hope that the noble Lord, Lord Strasburger, will be pleased to hear this. The £246 million Faraday Challenge will boost expertise in battery technology, supporting collaboration across British companies of all sizes. Co-operation between public and private endeavours, with entrepreneurs like James Dyson investing £2 billion in research into electric vehicles, will put Britain at the vanguard of this innovation.

We have seen a sevenfold rise in charge points since 2010 and we have Europe's largest network of rapid charge points. A fifth of electric cars sold in Europe in 2016 were made in this country. We are supporting consumers with combined grants of up to £5,000 to purchase a ULEV and install domestic chargers. ULEV registrations increased by 40% between 2015 and 2016.

As noble Lords have said, everyday activities are also emitting dangerous air pollutants. While all these activities are essential in principle, there are better, cleaner technologies and simple changes that can make a big difference. Medium combustion plants and generators providing power to the national grid are currently significant and largely unregulated sources of air pollution. We are introducing legislation which is expected to reduce these emissions.

Domestic wood and coal burning accounts for 39% of total harmful particulate emissions. Last month the Government launched the Ready to Burn scheme, working with industry and retailers to persuade households to shift from wet unseasoned wood to ready-to-burn wood. The noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, is right to raise this and, as a farmer, I would be concerned about it. In 2015 agriculture accounted for over 80% of total UK ammonia emissions. To reduce this, we have provided practical help for farmers through the Farming Ammonia Reduction Grant Scheme, which has funded slurry store covers, and can reduce emissions by up to 80% during slurry storage. We are also providing on-farm advice.

As far as water is concerned, the health of our rivers, lakes, estuaries, coasts and marine environment is hugely important. I am pleased that a number of noble Lords have mentioned clean seas in the overseas territories where we have undertaken some very good work. I was also struck by what the noble Lord, Lord Jones of Cheltenham, said about our responsibilities overseas. It was a pity that my noble friend Lord Bates was not sitting alongside me to have heard the noble Lord's contribution. I will make sure that my noble friend sees *Hansard*. DfID leads our work to end extreme poverty and access to clean water and sanitation is essential to this mission. In another life, I was very struck when I heard about WaterAid installing solar panels to enable wells to be used which have transformed people's ability to succeed in their agricultural endeavours.

We have set ourselves ambitious targets to return at least three-quarters of our waters to as near their natural state as possible and to improve the rest significantly. Ours is a populous country. We have the industrial past to contend with and continued pressures from agriculture, sewage and urban development. Thanks to previous efforts across the water sector, our water environment is in its healthiest state since the Industrial Revolution. Since privatisation, £25 billion has been invested in sewerage and wastewater infrastructure. The amount of phosphorous discharged from sewage works has reduced by 61% since 1995, and ammonia by 72%; and 7,000 storm overflows have been improved. These investments have improved over 9,000 miles of our rivers and substantially improved the quality of our bathing waters. Last year, nearly 98.5% of our bathing waters met new, more stringent standards, compared with 45% meeting lower standards in the mid-1990s. I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Miller, that more must be done. That is why we want to work collaboratively with a range of partners to drive forward improvements.

As there have been a number of reports on the state of our rivers, I commend to your Lordships the publications of the Environment Agency, including on the environmental performance assessment, which found that the number of serious water pollution incidents has reduced by more than half in the last 15 years, and that 75% of the tests we use to measure the health of rivers and lakes in England have results of good or high status. However, it is essential that we are not complacent. We must build on this. The water industry is already working on tougher targets and we support it in improving its planning and investment in wastewater infrastructure.

Our statutory river basin management plans provide the framework for protecting and improving our water environment. Current plans confirm over £3 billion of investment by water companies in the environment over the next six years. Already, 1,400 miles of rivers and surface waters in England have been enhanced as we move towards our goal of 5,000 miles by 2021.

I am very pleased that the noble Lord, Lord Lee of Trafford, mentioned fishing. Indeed, only a few days ago I was thinking about the number of fish species now in the River Thames that never would have been there many years ago. I very much resonate with his comment that in so many cases the fishing community has often been the first to highlight instances of pollution and I thank that community for its work on that issue. We need to ensure that our rivers become ever clearer not only for drinking but for sporting purposes.

We continue to work with the farming industry. Agriculture is now the most significant source of pollution in our waters, mainly due to run-off of phosphates and sediment into watercourses. We recognise the efforts of farmers to date in reducing pollution and we wish to continue to work with them collaboratively because we must do more. The noble Baronesses, Lady Jones of Whitchurch and Lady Miller, referred to agriculture in particular. I have a lot of information and I shall write to your Lordships on that. Defra's catchment-sensitive farming programme works with farmers to identify the actions they can take to improve

both the environment and their businesses through nutrient management, soil husbandry, management of farmyard manures and use of pesticides. We have also provided £12 million since 2009 for demonstration test catchments to ensure that we have robust evidence on how agricultural pollution can be controlled.

We equally need to address the issues that arise from urban growth. We have recently set out strategic priorities and objectives for Ofwat, the water industry regulator, to challenge water companies to improve planning and investment. We wish to work towards a resilient, affordable sewerage and drainage system for the long term. The noble Baronesses, Lady Jones of Whitchurch and Lady Miller, mentioned sustainable drainage systems. The Government introduced measures to encourage sustainable drainage systems in new developments. They are considering what further measures may be necessary, because these are obviously hugely important.

A number of points were raised about how water companies are working. We need to ensure that the treatment of pollution is as efficient as possible, and we need to remove particulates. Many of your Lordships referred to plastics, which cause much of the pollution in our seas. A very high proportion of marine pollution comes from the land through rivers, so we must address this issue. We have very strong ambitions on plastics, and I am pleased that our country has been pushing forward with a ban on microbeads. I and my ministerial colleagues want to do as much as we can on that front.

In that respect, I think that many of those in the environmental world will recognise that the Secretary of State has a vision of a green Brexit. He has stated very strongly that we need great passion to ensure that we put into practice proper custodianship and stewardship of the planet. It is important to recognise that the air we breathe and the water we drink are dependent on that stewardship.

The noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, mentioned devolution. Although these are devolved matters, we work very closely with the devolved Administrations. As I said earlier, that is essential, as boundaries do not respect pollution.

We in this country want to set very high standards. We produced the Clean Air Act in 1956, 17 years before we became a member of the EEC. That commitment will remain and we have a strong wish to enhance it. Our environment plan is intended for that purpose. Public and private investment, building on shared expertise and knowledge, will ensure that the people of our country can breathe clean air and drink and enjoy the clean water that they deserve. I agree with my noble friend Lord Caithness that that is of paramount importance, and I believe that it is our duty to secure it.

5.41 pm

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: My Lords, I warmly thank all noble Lords who have spoken—in particular for emphasising the international nature of this issue, as that is very important. While I am referring to the international aspect, I assure the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, that I can identify where the other half of the flip-flops are, because I visited Yucatán—a wonderful part of Mexico—which has been spoilt only by the number of left-foot flip-flops on the beach.

[BARONESS MILLER OF CHILTHORNE DOMER]

I would like to mention a couple of other themes that ran through this debate. First, I am very glad that my noble friends brought up the subject of trees, which also play a role in the world of water. My noble friend Lord Jones of Cheltenham mentioned frogs and toads. Of course, frogs and their ability to live in water are a bellwether when it comes to pollution. I think that there is probably further work to do with the Environment Agency on the question of the poor or low status of rivers, because I have slightly different figures from those mentioned by the Minister. However, I would love to meet the Environment Agency at some point to explore further what measures it is using and whether the health of frogs is one of them.

I am also very grateful to the right reverend Prelate for telling us about ozone gardens, which I had certainly

never heard of. I particularly thank my noble friend Lord Lee of Trafford for the very vivid picture he painted of what a clean river means, not only in aesthetic terms but in economic and recreational terms.

All noble Lords brought a great deal to this debate but I commend one issue raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch—the importance of the precautionary principle. In my introduction I mentioned nanomaterials but they are just one example. If we leave the European Union, keeping the precautionary principle as a fundamental bedrock that backs up every decision we make will be of the utmost importance.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 5.45 pm.