

Vol. 796
No. 268



Thursday
7 March 2019

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

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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
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
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 7 March 2019

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Portsmouth.

Female Genital Mutilation Question

11.06 am

Asked by **Baroness Jenkin of Kennington**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to reduce the risk of female genital mutilation for girls in the United Kingdom and internationally.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, FGM is child abuse, and the Government are clear that we will not tolerate this appalling crime. We have strengthened the law on FGM and were pleased to see the first UK conviction earlier this year. We are also helping communities around the world to end this harmful practice once and for all.

Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con): My Lords, I am delighted that my noble friend confirms that FGM is indeed child abuse. Would she also agree that the excuse of cultural practice is no reason for cutting young girls, either in the UK or anywhere else around the world?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I totally agree with my noble friend. Cultural practice is often used interchangeably with religious reasons. In fact, the practice of FGM has nothing to do with religion. If cultural practice is harmful to children—and this practice is terribly harmful to girls, not only when it is done but throughout their whole lives—then we will look to end it.

Lord Morris of Aberavon (Lab): My Lords, as a criminal lawyer, I am fully aware of the problems of successful prosecutions, particularly when there are family interests, but the fact that there has been only one successful prosecution must mean that something is deeply flawed in investigating or prosecuting. Will the Minister convey to the Attorney-General my request that he considers inviting the inspectorates of police and CPS for their views?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: What I think the noble and learned Lord is pointing out is that, actually, this is quite a hidden crime. It has various protections, if you like, with family members and doctors not willing to come forward. Although we have had only one prosecution, we have at least had that one and we now need to work from there. We have had a lot of campaigns in local communities to highlight the fact that this is an illegal practice and should not be going on in communities.

Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD): My Lords, would not a simple and effective step be to make the responsibility for ensuring that children are being effectively taught

about the dangers and illegality of FGM part of Ofsted's responsibilities? I met with Nadhim Zahawi and Karma Nirvana last summer and Mr Zahawi seemed enthusiastic about the idea, but I have not heard anything since. Could the Minister gently nudge the right honourable gentleman and find out whether he intends to implement this measure?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: One thing the noble Baroness might find helpful is that it is an offence to fail to protect a girl from FGM. She mentions schools—clearly, they have not only a safeguarding role but a welfare role. Professionals are now being trained to look out for the signs of whether a girl has gone through FGM, forced marriage or another form of illegal practice.

Baroness Masham of Ilton (CB): My Lords, is the Minister aware that in 1985 I took the first bit of legislation on female circumcision through your Lordships' House and that the noble Lord, Lord Glenarthur, who is here today, was the Minister? This shows how difficult the situation is, as there have been several bits of legislation since 1985.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I commend the noble Baroness for the work she did back in 1995—

Baroness Masham of Ilton: In 1985!

Baroness Williams of Trafford: In 1985—even further back. I also commend my noble friend Lord Glenarthur. The noble Baroness points out the difficulties of this. If people, particularly family members, are reluctant to come forward, it becomes very difficult to drive out. However, we have made a small amount of progress, and certainly some of the FGM protection orders that we have introduced have helped to stop girls from being cut.

Baroness Harris of Richmond (LD): Does the Minister know about the spoon campaign—that is what I call it—where young girls are told about putting a small spoon inside their underwear when they go through checks at airports? This alerts the security officers to the fact that these young girls are frightened and need to be taken care of, so that their parents cannot take them out of the country to be cut.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I certainly have heard of the spoon campaign—I heard the lady who initiated it speaking in Manchester the other week. It prevents not only FGM but forced marriage, which is another benefit. It is such a wonderful, simple campaign, and I commend it.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, the Government are to be congratulated on the various pieces of legislation that have been taken through. However, this is much more complex and is not simply a legal issue, as we have heard. That does not seem to solve the problem; it is clearly a cultural issue. The Minister has already referred to some of the attempts

[THE LORD BISHOP OF ST ALBANS]

that have been made to change culture. What efforts are being made to talk to community leaders, who are some of the key people in those more traditional and sometimes hierarchical communities, to try to get the cultural change, so that this becomes an unacceptable practice and something which we really can see addressed?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The right reverend Prelate goes to the nub of the problem: it cannot be solved by legislation alone. Certainly, we are doing some work around the world in giving UK aid. At home, we need to get to the point where those community leaders not only see that this is wrong but articulate that to members of their community, explaining that this is not only unacceptable and illegal but that it maims girls for life.

Baroness Corston (Lab): My Lords, when I was the Member for Bristol East in another place quite a long time ago, I used to work with secondary school head teachers to discuss instances when girls said they were being taken to another country, often a home country of their family, for a long holiday. The school would then do what it could to investigate the purpose of the trip and try to alert the authorities. What work are the Government doing with schools?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: As I outlined to the noble Baroness, Lady Burt, professionals in schools clearly do not have only a duty of care to their children and a safeguarding role; there is now an offence for failing to protect a girl from FGM. Schools are now trained in spotting various safeguarding issues, including the signs that a girl might be taken away. Actually, the girl is not necessarily taken away or taken abroad; it can definitely happen here at home and we must not dismiss that. We have work to do in training our school staff but also the work in communities that the right reverend Prelate talked about.

Equality Act 2010: Commencement of Section 106 Question

11.14 am

Asked by **Baroness Gale**

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have any plans to bring section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 into force.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, like all uncommenced provisions in the Equality Act 2010, we keep Section 106 under review. The Government are working to support women and disabled people to participate in politics. This includes the EnAble Fund to support disabled candidates in meeting campaigning costs, primarily for the English local elections in 2019. Ultimately, political parties are responsible for their candidate selection and should lead the way in improving diverse representation. Many already do so through training and mentoring schemes.

Baroness Gale (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for her Answer, but it is very similar to an answer she gave to my Written Question on 17 September last year. The Government are saying that nothing has changed and that they have no intention of implementing Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, but would the Minister agree that to solve a problem one must have the data to identify it? That is the reason for Section 106. Once political parties publish this data it will show for the first time any action required to improve the diversity of candidates. Parties can then take a number of measures that they feel necessary, which is what Labour did to increase the number of women candidates. Does the Minister agree that there is a need for all parties to improve the diversity of candidates, which would eventually lead to all our elected institutions looking much more like the people they represent? Increasing diversity is the important thing if that is to happen.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I most certainly agree with the noble Baroness that we need to improve the diversity of candidates so that both Houses of Parliament look like the people they represent. She talked about data, which is really important. I call on all political parties to improve, collate and report their data, not only so they can look to it themselves, but so that candidates who might wish to join and represent a political party can also look to it.

Baroness Hussein-Ece (LD): My Lords, women, disabled people and ethnic minorities are woefully underrepresented in our Parliament and public institutions, but there is a new phenomenon: the disproportionate level of abuse that a lot of women and disabled people in particular put up with on social media. The Prime Minister was recently quoted as saying that it has become so severe that it is "threatening our democracy". Can the Minister say what action is being taken to combat this?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I agree with the noble Baroness and, indeed, with my right honourable friend the Prime Minister. The abuse of some female representatives—I can think of a few, such as Luciana Berger—is so severe and has been so bad for them that I am surprised some of them are still in Parliament. It is absolutely up to the leadership of political parties not just to recognise the abuse, but to deal with it promptly. That is the only way we will drive out some of the abuse we are seeing.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab): My Lords, would the Minister agree that one of the first challenges is to instil in people who might have disabilities, or who feel themselves in some other way to be disadvantaged, the confidence to recognise their potential to contribute, and that this needs to start early? In that regard, I commend to her the work of Chickenshed in north London, which works through theatre practice to give young people with a very wide range of abilities an enormous amount of confidence and the ability to see themselves as the leaders of the future.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I thank the noble Baroness for commending Chickenshed to me; I will certainly look into it. She makes a really good point about disabled people knowing their ability, and the chances and opportunities open to them in life, no matter what they might wish to do. I am very pleased to see that we have more representation of disabled people in the media, in dramas, on television and in film. Disabled people should know, just like the rest of us, that nothing need hold them back.

Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con): My Lords, I would like to return to the Question from the noble Baroness about Section 106. Without enacting the legislation, it is very hard for those who are concerned about diversity to hold political parties to account. I ask my noble friend again: why are the Government so anxious to not enact the legislation?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I think the issue is that the Government feel that all political parties should be responsible for being diversity-inclusive when they select and elect their candidates. We have given funding of £250,000 for the EnAble fund, which will help this year, but we feel that individual political parties should then show leadership in this area.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): The Minister said, rightly, that both Houses should represent the country as a whole more effectively. Is she aware that half the Members of this House live in London? What does she suggest might be done to make it easier to have better representation from other parts of the country in this Chamber?

Baroness Williams of Trafford: I thank the noble Lord for that question. I am sure that he lives not in London but in Scotland. I am another of that half who do not live in London, quite deliberately, because we need to look outside London—for example, when we think about the Northern Powerhouse or employment opportunities. London is a bubble unto itself and it is very important for the other regions to play their part, in the economy and otherwise.

Universities: BAME Women in Leadership Positions *Question*

11.21 am

Asked by Baroness Falkner of Margravine

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to increase the number of black and minority ethnic women in leadership positions in Russell group universities in England.

Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con): My Lords, equality and diversity in higher education is a priority for this Government. On 11 October 2018, the Prime Minister set out her expectation that more must be done to create a workforce representative of British society today. As part of the race disparity audit, the Government

have asked higher education providers to tackle ethnic disparities in their workforce, using tools such as the race equality charter and the race at work charter.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (LD): I thank the noble Viscount for that very helpful reply and I unequivocally uphold university autonomy and independence. He knows, however, that the latest data shows that of 19,000 UK university professors, only 25 are black women. This is reflected across senior roles in the Russell group. Does he accept that institutions receiving those public funds must go beyond the race equality charter and uphold race equality law? In the absence of a regulator for this aspect of HE, will he look at collaborating with the Higher Education Funding Councils to see whether we can get more accurate data on what is holding back recruitment, retention and promotion in this sector?

Viscount Younger of Leckie: I start by applauding the work that the noble Baroness continues to do in this field. I acknowledge that the figures are of concern; that is why, in addition to the October announcement I just mentioned, on 1 February the Government announced measures to tackle ethnic disparities in higher education, specifically in recruitment and progression opportunities for ethnic minority academics. The noble Baroness may know that Karen Blackett is the Government's race at work champion. She will be working at institutions, including universities, to address inequality by taking practical steps, such as introducing apprenticeships and offering mentorships.

Lord Garel-Jones (Con): Does my noble friend agree that universities are independent institutions and that that independence is an important ingredient in creating the prestige that British universities enjoy globally? Consequently, does he agree that universities should not have a responsibility to deploy effective recruitment procedures?

Viscount Younger of Leckie: My Lords, there is a balance. I thank my noble friend for making that point because this House took through autonomy for institutions during the passage of the Higher Education and Research Act, so that autonomy is important. On the other hand, the Office for Students has a statutory duty to protect the academic freedom of English higher education providers, so while it has its duty to put some pressure on the universities, equally, universities must be allowed to make decisions themselves as to who they employ and how much they are paid.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab): My Lords, the dearth of black, Asian and minority ethnic people, particularly women, in senior positions in Russell group universities, is shocking but not surprising. Surely it is a symptom of so few BAME students having been to those universities over the years; academics who were themselves at Russell group universities tend to dominate senior positions there. They should adopt appointments policies that deal with underrepresentation in the short term. I welcome the Minister referring this matter to Karen Blackett to look at, but have attempts

[LORD WATSON OF INVERGOWRIE]

by leading universities to widen student participation not proved inadequate? Should the Minister now advise the Office for Students, as the regulator, to put greater pressure on Russell group universities to make sure that their admissions policies are fit for purpose?

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The Question is mainly focused on staff and the workforce. There is more to be done to create a workforce that represents British society today, particularly in universities. It is important that universities, as the noble Lord alluded to, set up a pipeline to encourage BME students to come in, go on to do research and then become academics. That is a genuine focus of this Government.

Lord Laming (CB): My Lords, is it not in the interests of universities to ensure they are attractive to a range of young people who have the ability to benefit from universities, irrespective of their colour, background or religion? Therefore, is it not in the interests of universities to ensure that they are seen as a welcoming place for people of a different colour or background, and make sure they have a range of academic staff who reflect that range of interests?

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The noble Lord makes a good point. It is important that, wherever universities are based, they reflect the area they are in and, equally, adopt the policies that the noble Lord has mentioned. There is more work to be done and universities know this. Pressure is being put on them by the Office for Students.

Lord Grocott (Lab): My Lords, the Russell group is referred to in the Question and is frequently the object of discussion in higher education policy generally, and much referred to by the Government as well. Can the Minister tell the House what characteristics are required for universities to be members of the Russell group? I understand that it is a self-selected group, but maybe I am wrong. Could he also explain how the views of the Russell group differ from those of other groupings of universities in the sector?

Viscount Younger of Leckie: It is a good question from the noble Lord. I asked that very question, about what the definitions are for those universities that are part of the Russell group and for the rest of the universities in the UK—and there is not one. I acknowledge, however, the point the House has made: of the total academic staff at Russell group universities for 2017 to 2018, 11% were male professors and 3% were female professors. There is more work to be done to put pressure on the Russell group universities.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, I declare an interest as a former Russell group university teacher. Is the problem, particularly for women and women from ethnic minorities, not undergraduate recruitment, but getting through the graduate student and post-doc stage? Would the Government, in collaboration with HEFCE, look at adequate funding for people through that difficult process, as well as informal discrimination

against young women as opposed to young men, which I certainly saw as a graduate student supervisor from time to time?

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The noble Lord is right. It is not so much for HEFCE now, but there should be collaboration between the Office for Students, Universities UK, UCU and other bodies, working together to make progress in this area.

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, I declare an interest as a former chancellor of a non-Russell group university. Further to my noble friend's point, is there a difference between the people employed within the non-Russell group and those in the Russell group? Is there actually a difference or is this a problem across all universities?

Viscount Younger of Leckie: I think it is a problem across all universities. There are figures that I could spend ages going into, but it is a problem across all universities and more work needs to be done, as I have said.

Yemen: Women and Girls *Question*

11.29 am

Asked by Baroness Hayman

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the case for urgent humanitarian assistance for women and girls in Yemen was discussed during the Foreign Secretary's recent visit to that country.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, last weekend, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary visited Yemen to push for progress, becoming the first western Foreign Minister to visit since the conflict began. The conflict has exacerbated the vulnerabilities faced by women and girls. Gender-based violence has increased and gender inequality has become further entrenched. Since 2017, the United Kingdom has provided support to more than 1,700 victims of gender-based violence. However, it is only by securing peace—an opinion shared by all in this House—that the position of women and girls can be substantively improved.

Baroness Hayman (CB): My Lords, I thank the Minister for that response and his recognition of the situation of women in Yemen. I draw the House's attention to my interests as set out in the register. Even before the war, Yemen was rated as the worst place in the world to be a woman. Since then, in the desperate humanitarian crisis that has occurred, women and girls, and of course their children, have suffered disproportionately, with the latest report from the International Rescue Committee showing a 63% increase in the past four years in the number of incidents of rape, gender-based violence, and forced and early marriage. Does the Minister accept that humanitarian efforts

must prioritise the needs of women and girls and their children to look to protect them, and that women need to be involved as equal partners in discussions on peace?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The short answer to both questions is yes. Through some of our programmes in Yemen, particularly those led by DfID, £39 million has been allocated to address issues such as forced marriage, on which Yemen is a priority country; 6,000 girls directly impacted by forced marriage have been assisted with counselling and health provision. A further £65,000 has been allocated for outreach work as far as is possible to ensure that early marriage is also addressed. I absolutely accept the noble Baroness's point on peacekeeping. That is why the Government have committed internationally, more recently in the context of the Commonwealth, to women's peacemaking networks. As we approach International Women's Day, it is important that, at the UN, here and elsewhere in the world, emphasis is placed on the importance of women in conflict resolution.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, the IRC report gave some horrific examples and made a series of recommendations. One was humanitarian access, particularly to health centres and hospitals that provide support to women and girls who have been subject to gender-based violence. Access to them has been restricted; they have been bombed and damaged. What exactly are the Government doing on all sides to ensure that there is proper humanitarian access?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I thank the noble Lord. He and I have spent a fair bit of time on this issue and will continue to work together; I think we are very much at one on it. My right honourable friend's recent visit again highlighted the importance of peace and of supporting the efforts being made through the UN, including the UN resolution that has been passed. There are three elements to that, one of which is about ensuring humanitarian relief. Current figures show that while the ports of Hodeidah and Salif remain open, distributing that aid further remains a big issue. A second element relates to fuel supplies—some 86% of the requirements of Yemen were met last month. However, again, it is about getting those fuel supplies out. Those are the fundamentals. On girls and women and the protection of health centres, that was a priority raised by the Foreign Secretary with both sides, including representatives of the Houthi community, to ensure that as we address the fundamentals of food and humanitarian aid, protection for girls, particularly from child marriage and forced marriage, is also high up the agenda.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine (LD): My Lords, wearing his hat as the Human Rights Minister, is the Minister aware of the report by the University Network for Human Rights showing that US and British arms were used in 200 unlawful bombings recently and that most of the casualties were women and children? Will he consider more prohibitions on the use of the arms that we are selling to Saudi Arabia in its pursuit of this ghastly war in Yemen?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The noble Baroness will be aware that the United Kingdom adopts the very stringent system of rules that exists across the EU, as well as a national code, on any military assistance. We remind any country that we sell arms to or give support to of those rules, and I assure her that we review this regularly in the context of the conflict in Yemen. She is right to raise these issues, but our military assistance—for example, the support we provide to Saudi Arabia—is specifically about training, particularly on the important issue of international humanitarian law. We take every opportunity to remind all our allies of those important priorities.

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, that training does not seem to be working. We have people in Saudi Arabia advising how to use the weapons we have sold it, and we have just released statistics showing how amazingly careful the Royal Air Force has been to not kill civilians when using its weapons, yet that is not happening in Yemen. Why are we not teaching people how to use these things without causing mass civilian casualties?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The noble Lord will know from his own experience that teaching does not happen in one day; it is a consistent effort over a period of time. It is important to know that, in any intervention around the world where the United Kingdom gives support through military assistance and training in international humanitarian law, anyone who engages requires that training over a period of time. I take on board the challenge he has presented, but also the tragic nature of the Yemen conflict. That is why the Foreign Secretary has again pushed for a political settlement; that is the only way to prevent the civilian casualties we have seen over a period of time and their impact on communities and on women and girls. That is why he was in the region pushing for that, not just with Yemen but with the likes of the Emirates and the Saudi Government as well.

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con): My Lords, will my noble friend tell us whether we are managing to get support to women's organisations and women's human rights defenders in Yemen?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As I said in response to the noble Lord, Lord Collins, while humanitarian assistance is getting through, a real challenge remains around the safety and security of getting those supplies further around the country. We are looking not only to identify agencies but to ensure their safety. In this regard, our main focus has been to ensure the protection of UN agencies on the ground, so that they can distribute aid and provide the support that my noble friend talks of.

Brexit: Import of Radioisotopes *Private Notice Question*

11.37 am

Tabled by **Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of a 'no deal' Brexit on the import of radioisotopes which are vital to the diagnosis and the treatment of cancer patients.

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean (Lab): My Lords, I beg leave to ask a Question of which I have given private notice.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con): My Lords, the Government have been working very closely with the Royal College of Radiologists and the pharmaceutical industry to ensure that the NHS has robust contingency plans in place so that patients can continue to have access to medicines, including medical radioisotopes, whatever the EU exit outcome. Yesterday, the Royal College of Radiologists published sensible and pragmatic guidance to specialist NHS clinicians, which the Government support, to ensure that all necessary operational planning has taken place before 29 March.

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: My Lords, the Royal College of Radiologists, the British Nuclear Medicine Society and the UK Radiotherapy Board have all stated categorically that Brexit, particularly a no-deal Brexit, will mean delays in the supply of imported radioisotopes, which are so vital to the diagnosis and treatment of cancer patients. I too have read the guidance the Minister referred to, but does she agree that all these authorities are not convinced anti-Brexiters trying to sensationalise the position? They are experienced and skilled in prolonging and saving the lives of cancer patients and they are clear that a no-deal Brexit will put already vulnerable patients at risk, while an extension of Article 50 will improve matters considerably. Does she further agree that while these authorities are making this point, if there were no other reason than that, the risk to people who may be diagnosed or may already have cancer is reason enough to take no deal off the table now?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I thank the noble Baroness for this. It is a very important question that she has raised. The Government's first priority is to ensure continuity of care and patient safety, no matter the outcome of EU exit. That is why we have been putting important medical supply and contingency plans in place for the unlikely event of a no deal, even though that is not the Government's plan.

The guidelines issued by the Royal College of Radiologists were in response to the plans from two major suppliers, representing at least 80% of the market, which have arranged contracts for air freight capacity to commence this month for the supply of radioisotopes. It is important to note that many isotopes already use air freight, and their deliveries will see no change in their arrival arrangements. Of course, the supply in these routes is relevant because radioisotopic materials have a short half-life, and therefore these changes, although minor, will have an impact on clinical pathways.

It is absolutely right for the Royal College of Radiologists to put some guidelines in place, and we have been working closely with it, the Department of Health and NHS England to offer clinics practical advice in allowing adjustment in their clinical processes. We do not expect any patient harm to arise from this, and the changes in clinical pathways and practice are

expected to be minor and short-lived. We do not expect any delays or increased waiting times to arise from this; this is straightforward, practical advice to support clinics in adapting to changes in delivery times.

I hope that is a reassuring Answer for the noble Baroness, and that it has clarified what was, I think, some sensationalist media reporting of the advice.

Baroness Walmsley (LD): My Lords, it is not this House that needs reassurance but doctors and consultants, who are feeling the need to reduce their treatment lists next month because they simply do not trust the Prime Minister to avoid a no-deal Brexit. The reason for that is because she adamantly refuses to take it off the table, despite the fact that, as a negotiating tool, it is about as much use as a chocolate fireguard. The other side knows that she cannot use it; when will she take off the blinkers?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I thank the noble Baroness for her question. This advice has come not from the Prime Minister, but from the Royal College of Radiologists. On the basis of that advice, we know that many services will be unaffected. For other services, the NHS is already working closely with suppliers to minimise the impact of changes to medical radioisotope delivery times, which are expected to be a matter of hours and easily managed by clinics. But it is appropriate that they should be given sensible and practical advice to ensure that patients are protected and that patient safety is maintained to the highest possible standards.

Baroness Thornton (Lab): My Lords, in many ways this Question is the just-in-time question of healthcare. We know that our manufacturing industries, particularly the automotive industries, will be affected by Brexit because of the just-in-time nature of their work. This is the just-in-time of cancer care. If you do not have the isotopes the tests do not get done, because the delivery is timed for the morning of an appointment when patients are due to arrive at the hospital—if there is nothing to give them, they then have to go home and wait for another slot.

My question to the Minister, who has done her best to reassure us on this, is: what calculation have the Government made of the risks? Certainly, the organisations which have waved a flag about this are not trying to panic anyone; they have legitimate concerns that they may have to delay treatment and tests because of Brexit. What calculations have the Government made of the risks there would be to people's lives from delays that may happen as a result of this lack of just-in-time?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I think I answered that in my response to the noble Baroness. We have assessed that we do not expect any patient harm to arise from this, and the changes to clinical pathways and practices are expected to be minor and short-lived. It is one of the reasons why we started working with industry early in the process to ensure that air freight capacity was put in place. It is also why

we have been working with the Royal College of Radiologists, NHS England and the department to ensure that the guidance was put in place, so that clinics could be prepared to adapt to these changes in delivery times.

Lord Ribeiro (Con): My Lords, the EU Home Affairs Sub-Committee looked at this matter and debated it in a take-note debate in July last year. At the time, I flagged up the importance of developing a new generation of alpha- and beta-emitting isotopes for cancer treatment in helping to mitigate the problems of importation. The then Minister, my noble friend Lord O'Shaughnessy, reassured the House that quite a lot of work was indeed going on with regard to proton beam treatment, that the Christie Hospital would be starting that very soon—that was last year—and that another unit was on the go. So there are alternative provisions for cancer treatment with proton beam therapy. None the less, there is an issue about what would happen in a no-deal Brexit as regards the gap between what we currently receive and what we are able to provide. Can the Minister say anything about when we can expect these new systems to come on stream? It is a challenging question, so she may wish to write to me on that.

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I thank my noble friend for that helpful question. I assure him that both the Christie and UCL proton beam programmes are well under way, and we can be proud of our world-leading programmes in cancer proton beam therapy. I cannot give him an exact progress update on that, so I shall write to him on it. However, he is absolutely right that we must make sure that we progress those programmes, as well as ensuring that our supply of imported radioisotopes remains protected during the Brexit period.

Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan (Lab): My Lords—

Lord Tebbit (Con): My Lords—

Lord Warner (CB): My Lords—

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park) (Con): It is the turn of the Cross Benches.

Lord Warner: My Lords, to what extent does the Minister consider that patients will be put at much greater risk in a no-deal scenario if a large number of oncologists up and down the country take the view that they cannot rely on the supply of medical isotopes and therefore start a programme of delaying access to an assessment and treatment by them? Does she consider that the Government cannot give these assurances because they do not know what the behaviour will be of individual clinicians who require the isotopes to treat their patients?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: One of the reasons why we worked so closely with the Royal College of Radiologists to provide the guidance, as well as working closely with NHS England to communicate

to the NHS, is to ensure that reassurance has been sent out through the system with regard to the arrangements which have been made for medical supplies so that those concerns can be allayed and to ensure that clinical pathways are not disrupted. For that reason we do not expect any patient harm to arise from this, and changes to clinical pathways and practice are expected to be minor and short lived.

Business of the House

Motion on Standing Orders

11.48 am

Moved by **Baroness Evans of Bowes Park**

That, in the event of the Northern Ireland (Regional Rates and Energy) (No. 2) Bill and the Northern Ireland Budget (Anticipation and Adjustments) (No. 2) Bill having been brought from the Commons, Standing Order 46 (*No two stages of a Bill to be taken on one day*) be dispensed with on Tuesday 12 March to allow the Bills to be taken through their remaining stages that day.

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park) (Con): My Lords, the Legislation Office is already accepting amendments to the regional rates and energy Bill in advance of the Second Reading debate, as per paragraph 8.3 of the *Companion*. The anticipation and adjustments Bill is a money Bill. I beg to move.

Lord Empey (UUP): My Lords, a pattern has been developing over the last couple of years, whereby nearly every piece of Northern Ireland legislation is being done using the suspension of the Standing Orders to push through Bills in a single day. This morning it is proposed that two Bills go through all their stages in one day. Yesterday, in the other place, there were objections from all sides of the House that no scrutiny of any significance was being provided, certainly of one of the Bills—the renewable heating scheme Bill—even though it is significant to many businesses and individuals.

We know that from time to time it is necessary to use these procedures—I accept that—but we have here a pattern that every meaningful piece of Northern Ireland legislation is shoved through in one day on this basis without scrutiny, and there was a universal view of disquiet in the other place.

I appeal to my noble friend the Leader of the House to consult her colleagues in government to try to bring this process to an end, so that legislation is dealt with through a proper process. I know that they will argue that in this or that particular case, circumstances need quick resolution—but on this series of Bills, I disagree. One Bill deals with the regional rate. The regional rate has been set in February every year since 1973. That is part of the process. We knew a year ago that the rates for the renewable heating scheme had to be renewed because we passed a Bill that said that they would be renewed in one year. Similarly, budget matters come annually and there has been no prospect in the past few months of the Northern Ireland Assembly

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being re-established and an Executive being in place to deal with these matters. So I appeal to my noble friend the Leader to prevail on her colleagues that, if Northern Ireland legislation comes to this House, it is subject to the normal parliamentary processes, because we are almost at the point where these matters are an abuse of the parliamentary process.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, I will briefly add my strong support to the noble Lord, Lord Empey. He has made an extremely important point, which is all the more important because the Executive are not in being and the Assembly is not meeting. It is therefore incumbent on this House and the other place to look in some detail at matters which affect the lives of people throughout Northern Ireland. I add my plea to his: we should not indulge in this process again, especially during a time when Northern Ireland has no adequate devolved government.

Lord Adonis (Lab): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Empey, makes an extremely strong case. Surely the presumption should always be against an extraordinary procedure. We have had this a number of times in respect of Northern Ireland legislation, and the case being made by Members of the House from Northern Ireland seems to me to merit very serious consideration by the Leader.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): My Lords, I also support my noble friend Lord Empey, who I have known for a long time and who was a very distinguished Minister in Northern Ireland. He knows a lot about Northern Ireland legislation. It is not just that the Northern Ireland Assembly is not sitting at the moment—which is a very strong argument. It is also about the business of this House. I know that my noble friend Lord Adonis will agree that for the past few weeks, and in the coming few weeks, our Order Paper has been full of hundreds of statutory instruments, most of which we hope will not be needed. We heard earlier from the Home Office Minister, the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, in reply to one Question, that no deal was an unlikely outcome.

It is outrageous that Northern Ireland legislation, which is important and which we should be looking at in detail, is not looked at properly, whereas we are being flooded with all these statutory instruments, hundreds of which we hope will be totally unnecessary and void. I strongly support the noble Lord, Lord Empey, and I hope we can say that support in this House is coming from all sides, just as it did in the House of Commons.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords, I add my support to that argument. The people of Northern Ireland are being doubly short-changed: they do not have an Assembly, and what is being done in Parliament, in both Houses, is a wholly inadequate form of scrutiny. Would you not think that, when there is no functioning Assembly in Northern Ireland, this House and the other place would take more responsibility for effective scrutiny, not less? In those circumstances, the argument being put is extremely powerful.

Baroness Evans of Bowes Park: My Lords, I recognise the concerns raised by noble Lords in this short debate. I assure them that I understand how unsatisfactory the present situation is. We as a Government do not want to be in this place. We are working very hard to restore an Executive in Northern Ireland, but I am afraid that it is important that these Bills make progress next week. As I said when I moved the Motion, the Legislation Office is accepting amendments to the rates and energy Bill ahead of Second Reading, and we will of course ensure that we have time to debate them. I very much appreciate the co-operation of the House on these matters. I have heard the concerns raised and will report them back. However, we need to make progress with these Bills.

Motion agreed.

Business of the House

Motion on Standing Orders

11.55 am

Moved by **Baroness Evans of Bowes Park**

That Standing Order 46 (*No two stages of a Bill to be taken on one day*) be dispensed with on Thursday 14 March to allow the Supply and Appropriation (Anticipation and Adjustments) (No. 2) Bill to be taken through its remaining stages that day.

Motion agreed.

Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Bill

Third Reading

11.55 am

Motion

Moved by **Baroness Hodgson of Abinger**

That the Bill do now pass.

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con): My Lords, I thank colleagues across the House who participated in the Bill's progress. The three debates were excellent and I am grateful to my colleagues for ensuring the Bill's safe passage through the House. I also thank officials in the Whips' Office and on the Bill team, especially Linda Edwards, for their help. We return the Bill to the other place, where I hope it will be considered at the earliest opportunity to get these important measures on to the statute book. I beg to move.

Bill passed and sent to the Commons.

Trade in Animals and Related Products (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Import of and Trade in Animals and Animal Products (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Veterinary Medicines and Animals and Animal Products (Examination of Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Waste (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

International Waste Shipments (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Ozone-Depleting Substances and Fluorinated Greenhouse Gases (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Motions to Approve

11.56 am

Moved by Baroness Vere of Norbiton

That the draft Regulations laid before the House on 10, 16 and 17 January and on 6, 11 and 18 February be approved.

Relevant documents: 14th Report from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee (Sub-Committee A) and the 15th Report from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee (Sub-Committee B). Considered in Grand Committee on 27 February.

Motions agreed.

Brexit: Protection for Workers

Statement

11.57 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Henley) (Con): My Lords, with the leave of the House I shall now repeat a Statement made in another place by my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The Statement is as follows:

“Mr Speaker, I would like to make a Statement about workers’ rights when we leave the European Union. Before I do, since this is my first time at the Dispatch Box since his death, I want to put on record our deep appreciation of the life and work of Lord Bhattacharyya. A heroic figure in British manufacturing,

Lord Bhattacharyya’s work attracted investments to which hundreds of thousands of working men and women owe their livelihood. A Labour Member of the House of Lords, Kumar worked easily with Ministers—indeed, Prime Ministers—from all parties for the benefit of the people of the West Midlands and the nation.

The United Kingdom and this Parliament have a proud record of improving the rights of working men and women, from Shaftesbury’s factories Acts and William Hague’s Disability Discrimination Act to the minimum wage introduced by a Labour Government and the national living wage brought in by a Conservative Government. While the EU sets minimum requirements in many areas of workers’ rights, and health and safety requirements, time and again Britain has been in advance of them and has chosen to exceed them.

The EU agency for the improvement of working conditions ranks the UK as the second-strongest, behind only Sweden, of all 28 member states for well-being in the workplace. The UK offers 39 weeks of statutory maternity pay compared with the 14 weeks required by the EU. We have given fathers and partners a statutory right to paternity leave and pay—something that the EU is only just starting to consider. Our national living wage is one of the highest in the EU and the Low Pay Commission, which advises on it, is widely respected. As we have not, in practice, been limited by EU standards, there is no reason why we should not maintain this record of leadership outside the EU.

The Prime Minister has given a commitment that Brexit will not be allowed to erode workers’ rights. Nevertheless, some honourable Members have advanced the view that a parliamentary mechanism should be established to monitor and implement that commitment. The honourable Member for Great Grimsby introduced a Private Member’s Bill to that effect, and the honourable and right honourable Members for Bassetlaw, Don Valley and Stoke-on-Trent Central proposed an amendment to a previous Motion in a similar vein. We have been discussing closely with Members across the House and with trade unions and businesses how we can turn this intention into law. The Government are today publishing draft clauses for inclusion in the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill to put these commitments into law.

There are two main features of the clauses. First, there will be a new statutory duty placed on Ministers bringing forward a Bill that affects employment or workplace health and safety that they should certify, before the Second Reading of any such Bill, that it is compatible with the principle of non-regression that the Prime Minister has given. They will be required to provide explanatory information to Parliament in support of the statement, which will be drawn up following consultation with businesses and trade unions. This will ensure that while respecting and upholding the sovereignty of Parliament, in the future Members of this House will be able clearly to consider the compatibility of every proposed measure with the non-regression principle to which the Prime Minister has made a commitment.

The second aspect of the draft clauses concerns future EU legislation. Parliament will be given the opportunity at least every six months to consider any

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changes to EU workers' rights and health and safety standards in the workplace. This will be reported to Parliament through a document which has been subject to consultation with employers and trade unions. It will be scrutinised by the relevant Select Committees of this House. The Government will be required to table an amendable Motion on their intended course of action on those new EU rules. For example, the Government may set out that they intend to legislate to give effect to those commitments; that they intend to give effect to them in a different way; or that they do not intend to give effect to them, setting out their rationale.

A number of legislative proposals are under consideration in the EU which have a deadline for transposition into national law after the implementation period. We would expect them to be put forward for Parliament's consideration under this new process. The draft clauses, published in a Command Paper today, combine well our determination to honour the commitment the Prime Minister has made not to see workers' rights weakened, with respecting the sovereignty of this Parliament.

A similar framework will also apply to environmental protections as the UK leaves the EU, implemented through the Environment Bill. On 19 December, we published the draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill, which is the first part of a much larger environment Bill to follow in the next Session. The draft Bill outlines our proposals to establish a world-leading body to hold Government to account for environmental outcomes after the UK leaves the EU. The draft Bill also requires the Government to publish a statutory policy statement on the interpretation and application of nine environmental principles, including the four contained in the EU treaties. Further, the Government will legislate to ensure that where future Bills could affect environmental protections, a Minister of the Crown will make a Statement of compatibility to Parliament and provide explanatory information. We will also create a new statutory duty on the Government to monitor any strengthening of environmental protections and regulations by the EU and to report regularly to Parliament about the Government's intended course of action in those areas. This will give Parliament the information it needs to consider whether domestic protections need to be strengthened accordingly.

Through these commitments, the Government will provide a robust framework for the maintenance and strengthening of environmental standards as the UK leaves the EU. In addition to these measures, I am also announcing today steps that will strengthen the enforcement of employment rights. The vast majority of businesses operate fairly and treat employees well, but I have been concerned about practices in a small number of firms in a small number of industries where abuses of conditions are used to the detriment not just of workers but of reputable competitors who suffer a disadvantage by comparison.

I intend to consult broadly on establishing a new body to bring together the relevant enforcement functions of the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, HMRC and the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate.

As part of the forthcoming spending review we will consider what level of funding is appropriate to ensure that it is adequately resourced to deliver its strengthened remit.

The measures I have announced today reflect a process of engagement across this House and with employers and trade unions. Not everyone will agree with every proposal. But if, as I hope, an agreement can be reached on the withdrawal process, they serve as a helpful guide to how we might find and act on common ground across the House in the next phase of negotiations. I commend this Statement to the House".

12.05 pm

Lord McNicol of West Kilbride (Lab): My Lords, I first thank the Minister for repeating the Statement made in the other place and especially for his kind words about Lord Bhattacharyya.

The crux of the Government's announcement is the two amendments they will table to the implementation Bill. We are told that these seek to ensure there is no regression of workers' rights, and that Parliament will be given an opportunity to consider how rights in the UK tally with those in the EU. These are noble aims which I am sure this House can get behind. However, I am afraid that on this side of the House we have considerable concerns over whether these amendments will achieve and deliver this.

I remind the Minister of the comments that Frances O'Grady of the TUC made yesterday in response to the announcement:

"In the face of a government determined to reduce rights, these measures would in no meaningful way compensate for the loss of the protections that currently exist".

The TUC and various unions have been clear in their response to the proposals, saying that they are not good enough and fail to protect workers after we leave the EU. Noble Lords will not be surprised to hear that I agree with those statements.

I turn to specifics. I am interested in the Government's process of getting to this announcement. Can the Minister detail his department's process of consultation with the different unions and the TUC? The issue at the heart of this announcement is that, even if a Statement by the Government notes that legislation would in fact lead to a regression of rights, there is no power to stop the Government proceeding with their intended course of action. Can he explain how these amendments would stop a Government reducing workers' rights if they wanted to? If he thinks I am being a bit unfair, I remind him of the working time directive. It was a Conservative Government who sued the European Commission, claiming that there was no legislative basis for the directive since working time had nothing to do with health and safety at work. Luckily for workers in the UK, the Government lost.

On the process of adopting future improvements in EU legislation, the proposal is equally lacking. The only means of challenge is through Parliament, not the courts, and thus subject to any Government's majority—not material facts that could be legally tested. Furthermore, these proposals apply only to changes to primary legislation. Any other forms of legislative change would not be covered. Given that

the bulk of UK legislation to implement EU law is secondary legislation—the Working Time Regulations, TUPE and health and safety regulations, to name but a few—would the examples given above be covered under the new proposals? As we have seen recently, Commons procedures may not permit sufficient amendments to actually deal with all the problems at hand.

The Statement uses the words “standards” and “reduction of standards” and I seek clarification from the Minister on this. In speaking against Amendment 3 on the Trade Bill last night, the Minister said:

“First ... The term ‘standards’ does not have a single legal definition which can easily be called upon ... Secondly, on the notion of ‘reducing’ standards, how the Government would prove that they were or were not reducing them would be problematic”.—*[Official Report, 6/3/19; col. 631.]*

The Government cannot have it both ways. Either the use of the terminology “standards” and “reducing standards” is correct and proper or it is not.

The Statement provided today is not good enough. The comments made at its beginning suggesting that the Minister’s party has suddenly assumed the role and mantle as a champion of workers and working people is baffling. Annual earnings are more than 3% lower than they were in 2008 and nearly 4 million people are now in insecure work. If the Government are serious about workers’ rights in the UK, they have a long way to go to prove it.

Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD): I agree with the Minister that we have a proud record of protecting workers’ rights. As he said, in many cases they are stronger than in European law.

I welcome the enforcement measures announced by the Secretary of State yesterday on existing rights. We all know that it is pointless introducing legislation unless someone intends to enforce it, and enforcement costs money. We on these Benches will look closely at the forthcoming spending review to check that the Secretary of State has been as good as his word.

What we see in the Statement yesterday and the Opposition’s response is a playing out of the traditional distrust between the two parties. The Government seek to assure the Opposition that they will not dilute workers’ rights post Brexit. However, I agree with Labour that the Statement does not provide all the protections that would guarantee that workers’ rights will not fall behind those enjoyed by workers in the European Union.

In the Commons yesterday Opposition spokesperson Rebecca Long Bailey, and the noble Lord, Lord McNicol, this afternoon, made the telling point that the promise given by the Government does not apply to secondary legislation, which could allow each existing EU-derived right to be watered down with ease. This latest move has been described as a cynical attempt to buy off wavering Labour MPs from leave constituencies so that they can justify voting with the Government on the EU withdrawal and implementation Bill. We on these Benches will not fall for it and the Government have a long way to go yet to satisfy a distrustful Labour Party.

The arithmetic does not yet stack up in the Government’s favour and, as things stand, they are destined for another whopping defeat in the Commons next week. The only way to guarantee that British workers’ rights keep parity with those of European workers is for Britain to remain within the EU. Why do not Labour and the Government realise that it is in the interests of all the people they represent to give them a say and back a referendum on the deal?

Lord Henley: I remind the noble Baroness, Lady Burt, that we have had a referendum which quite clearly stated that the people of this country wished to leave the EU, and there is no point in trying to readdress that question.

My right honourable friend made an announcement about how we will continue to protect workers’ rights in the future, and I am grateful that the noble Baroness took, to start with, a reasonably positive approach to this, agreed that we had a proud record in this area and welcomed his announcement about enforcement. I note what she said about examining carefully any future announcements about the level of resources. No doubt we will come to that in future business.

I am afraid the noble Lord, Lord McNicol, took—probably under orders—a less positive approach to my right honourable friend’s announcement. I do not accept a lot of what he said or the somewhat negative remarks that I also heard the general secretary of the TUC, Frances O’Grady, make on the radio yesterday morning. I think she and the noble Lord are being very negative. I give an assurance that there have been considerable discussions with MPs on his side of the House and with trade unions, as the noble Lord knows. He will know that my right honourable friend has regular meetings with individual unions and the TUC. He has committed to bring forward legislation to hold the Government to account for non-regression on these rights.

The noble Lord thinks there is no guarantee of no reduction in rights. He seems to have very little faith in Parliament being able to achieve those things. He might prefer to leave these matters to the European Court of Justice or to what is going on in the EU. I stressed that our rights here go well beyond anything that has ever emerged from the Commission. We will continue that, and we have set in place a process that will allow Parliament to provide proper scrutiny of the processes and the rights of workers, taking into account the needs of employers and of those who are not working but are seeking work to make sure that the labour market works for them and provides them with jobs.

The noble Lord also wanted to know a little more about the scope of these measures and what will be included. I assure him that TUPE will be covered and make clear that the equality framework directive and other equalities directives, where they relate to non-discrimination, equality and work, will also be covered. Working time and holidays, including the working time directive, will be covered. Directions providing protections for part-time, fixed-term and young workers will be covered, and I could go on. My right honourable

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friend has made it clear that we want to cover all employees and provide protection for them, and to allow Parliament appropriate scrutiny of these matters.

12.17 pm

Lord Balfre (Con): My Lords, I thank the Minister for his Statement. We need to remember that trade unionists do not all vote for the Labour Party. More than 30% of them vote for the Conservative Party. Furthermore, statements by the TUC are capable of selective quotation, so I shall selectively quote from Frances O’Grady’s statement:

“successive UK Governments have been exceptionally resistant to introducing improvements even when they are required to do so by the EU”.

Those of us who have been fortunate enough to serve in the European Parliament will remember the blizzard of letters that we received from such people as the noble Lord, Lord Mandelson, imploring us to oppose the working time directive. I make the point that both parties have form in this matter and that when I asked a leading trade unionist a few ago to name me one significant advance that he had from 13 years of Labour government, he could not name one.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): Ask the Minister a question!

Lord Balfre: I will ask a question. In repeating the Statement, the Minister said:

“Parliament will be given the opportunity at least every six months to consider any changes to EU workers’ rights”, and so on, and referred to,

“a document which has been subject to consultation with employers and trade unions, and which will be scrutinised by the relevant Select Committees of this House”—

meaning the House of Commons. Can he give us any more enlightenment on whether there will be any opportunity for this House also to scrutinise these documents? We are, after all, a bicameral legislature.

Lord Henley: My noble friend has made a number of points very well, particularly the fact that not all trade unionists vote Labour. He also referred to remarks made by Frances O’Grady, the general secretary of the TUC. I think Frances O’Grady is absolutely wonderful; it is just that we do not necessarily always agree on every matter. She took rather a negative approach to my right honourable friend’s announcement. I assure my noble friend that a document will be produced by the Government every six months after consultation and it will refer to any changes made in the EU. We might want to consider whether we wish to follow those changes, do something better or reject them for whatever reason. My noble friend referred to how they would be examined by another place. I am sure this House will find ways of examining them, just as another place will.

Lord Monks (Lab): My Lords, Frances O’Grady certainly does not need any defence from me. She very much reflected the trade union mission in life, which is

always to seek more—one word: more. Some business schools could learn from that mission statement. This is an astonishing change from the Government. We have been faced with a stream of anti-union and anti-worker legislation from them and their predecessor, and I can now see a change. It is not a huge change, and the motives for it are extremely murky in terms of next week’s vote and so on, but I ask the Minister to confirm two things. First, how does he see the role of trade unions going forward? Will there be an institution in which they will be involved to make sure that everything announced in the other place yesterday happens? Secondly, I would like him to repeat—I shall savour the moment—that the Government have no intention of changing the working time directive.

Lord Henley: My Lords, I imagine that Frances O’Grady would not want to be defended by me. I merely said that I did not agree with her on certain matters but that I thought she was wonderful in many other respects. The noble Lord said that he always wanted more. Lots of people always want more but it is important to get the right balance so that, as my right honourable friend made clear, we protect the rights of those in work, we do not impose excessive burdens on employers and we create a situation in which it is easy for those who are not in work to find work because work is available and employers want to employ people. That is something that unions should always remember. Although they are assiduous in looking after those in work, they should remember those who are not in work, and we want to create the right environment for them.

The noble Lord then asked whether there would be an institution involving trade unions. I cannot commit to creating any institutions; nor do I think it necessary to do so. What is important is that my right honourable friend, or whoever holds that office or is in government, has an open-door policy whereby they can continue to consult, talk to and have a dialogue with trade unions and all others who have an interest in the matters we are talking about.

Finally, just because the noble Lord wanted to hear me say it, I was asked to make it clear that we have no intention of getting rid of or watering down—I cannot remember the precise words he used—the working time directive. I can give him that assurance.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, I am sure we are all glad of that last assurance from my noble friend the Minister. I thank him for making the point so effectively that the most fundamental right of workers is the right to be able to work. It is therefore crucial—I hope my noble friend will agree—that we leave the European Union with a proper deal, which will not jeopardise much of the remaining manufacturing capacity of this country as well as service and other industries. Does he agree that this is fundamental, and that it is therefore crucial that a deal is produced next week which can command the support of the other place?

Lord Henley: My noble friend is quite right to talk about the fundamental right to be able to work. That is why we consider it very important, for example, that

employers have the right to hire and fire. If one restricts the right to hire and fire—as we find if we look at, say, our neighbours in France—employers are less likely to want to take people on. As my noble friend and I made clear, we should consider the rights not only of those in work but of those seeking work. I confirm to my noble friend that we very much hope we will get a deal next week that our colleagues in another place will feel able to endorse, and that they will back my right honourable friend the Prime Minister.

Lord Morris of Handsworth (Lab): My Lords, I suspect that this is an occasion when we must be grateful for small mercies. We are grateful that, at last, for whatever reason, workers' rights have got on to the Government's agenda. But if the Government really want to deal with workers' rights and make the workplace more habitable—a place of co-operation and commitment—they need to get rid of a lot of the issues that prohibit such an environment, which we could all share, work for and develop.

I notice that the Statement says nothing about zero-hours contracts—not a word. One problem currently affecting British industry and workers' contributions to productivity is the so-called gig economy—here today and gone tomorrow. When we talk about workers' rights it is in the context of family, but there is nothing here about family: nothing about mothers, and indeed fathers, having the opportunity to take time off to take the children to school or to hospital; and nothing to ensure an environment that combines work, community and family. It is a tripartite relationship, but nothing was said on that. We welcome what has been said so far but we hope that, when the Government return to this House, it will be with a more positive and enduring attempt to make life in the workplace better than it is today.

Lord Henley: I am sorry that the noble Lord takes a faintly negative attitude to the announcement we have made today, particularly in the light of all that we have done—and propose to do—to improve conditions at work. I refer the noble Lord to the report we commissioned from Matthew Taylor. That report made recommendations; I forget the precise number. I will say that there were 59 and we accepted 58, although I cannot remember what the 59th, which we did not accept, was. We have taken all those recommendations on board. We will be bringing forward further legislation—after the legislation that I have been talking about, which will come with the withdrawal agreement Bill—to deal with the recommendations in the Matthew Taylor report and other matters.

I am sorry that the noble Lord comes back again to zero-hours contracts. That was something that Matthew Taylor looked at; he recognised that they serve a very useful purpose in certain conditions and saw no case whatever for legislating against them. Again, that is one of Matthew Taylor's recommendations that we accept.

Lord Hope of Craighead (CB): My Lords, one should not ignore the contribution that the European Court of Human Rights has made in the development of workers' rights, particularly for part-time workers,

for whom significant changes have been made as a result of rulings by that court in the interpretation of measures passed in the European Parliament—directives, regulations or whatever they may be. Can the Minister assure us that, in the process described in the Statement, account will be taken of developments through the court in the interpretation of the measures which are to be looked at in the process we have been told about?

Lord Henley: I can tell the noble and learned Lord that we are delighted that we will no longer come under the influence or aegis of the Court of Justice of the European Union, but obviously we will still take note of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, just as we always have.

Lord Hope of Craighead: If I may, I remind the Minister that it is the European Court of Justice which interprets the European legislation I am talking about; it has nothing to do with the European Court of Human Rights.

Lord Henley: I am terribly sorry. I misheard the noble and learned Lord and thought he was referring to the European Court of Human Rights. We will continue to take account of that. We will no longer be bound by the European Court of Justice—the ECJ—but we will take note of any judgment from it. However, it will be for Parliament to make decisions about that because obviously we will no longer be bound by the European Court of Justice.

Lord Beith (LD): My Lords, it is helpful that the Government have today published the clauses to be inserted in the withdrawal Bill that deal with these matters. However, there are only 12 sitting days left for that Bill to pass through both Houses and none of the other clauses of that Bill have yet been seen by anybody outside the Government. How are the clauses to which the Minister referred to be adequately scrutinised in the two Houses?

Lord Henley: My Lords, how we deal with the withdrawal agreement Bill is a matter beyond my pay grade. The department that I have the honour to represent in this House has published the clauses that we are talking about today. That gives time for some scrutiny of them in advance of the publication of the full Bill and I hope the noble Lord and others will make use of that.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): My Lords, we do not need a crystal ball when we have the history books. I spent 26 years as a Member of Parliament in the other place. Every Bill or proposal to improve workers' rights put forward by the Labour Government, and every argument we made to protect workers against employers, was opposed by the Tories, including the national minimum wage. When there was a Tory Government, the only improvements came because the European Union insisted on them. Why should we accept these warm words from the Government now, when we know the record of all these past years?

Lord Henley: I have to say that that is complete and utter nonsense and I totally reject—

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I was there, but the Minister was not.

Lord Henley: I have been in this House long enough to see what goes on. I think I have been in this House slightly longer than the noble Lord was in another place. Conservative Governments have brought forward a great many improvements. My right honourable friend listed those in his Statement earlier, starting with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, brought in under John Major's Government by my noble friend Lord Hague. Look at the national living wage. Conservative Governments have done a great deal. My right honourable friend went back as far as the Shaftesbury Acts two centuries ago. We have made improvements and will continue to do so, but we will make sure we get the right balance.

Lord Whitty (Lab): My Lords, my noble friend talked about history, as has the Minister, but we also need to consider what the future will look like. Can the Minister understand why there are some suspicions in the labour movement and the trade unions about the intentions of a post-Brexit Conservative Government when so many of his colleagues have held out the vision of a low-regulation, low-cost economy competing with employers across Europe and the world? The whole point about European legislation is that employers cannot undercut each other on workers' rights, yet the Minister himself briefly made a slip when he referred to the relative situation in France against that in Britain. That shows the psychology of some elements of his party in how they see the future. I should like an assurance that that is not likely to be the official policy of a Conservative post-Brexit Government, if such there be.

Lord Henley: Would the noble Lord like unemployment levels at the same rate we see in France, or would he prefer to see employment and unemployment levels at the rates we have in this country, where we also have the right sort of protections for workers but do not have inappropriate protections that prevent people getting jobs?

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab): My Lords, the Statement refers to the intention to establish, "a new body to bring together the relevant enforcement functions", of the gangmaster agency and others. The Minister did not give the exact position in his response to my noble friend. There is an opportunity for a new body to have trade union representation. Can he confirm that that will be under consideration?

My main point relates to two things. First, the gig economy has been raised. Is it in the Government's mind to eliminate once and for all the gap between "employees" and "workers", which has bedevilled many of the issues we have been talking about? There is a need to make sure that all workers are employees so that they can have the rights and protections the Government are now bringing forward.

Secondly, on the new body, is this not the time to bring in some of the other issues that have affected workers' rights, such as giving the Small Business Commissioner statutory powers under this new body? Also, would it not be sensible, as is perhaps alluded to in the Statement, to bring in the enforcement body that the Treasury operates for flagrant breaches of the low pay regulations, including the national minimum wage and the national living wage? They should also be part of the same body.

Lord Henley: I think the noble Lord will find that my right honourable friend referred to HMRC as one of the bodies that might be brought into some new enforcement body. As he made clear, it is a matter for consultation. We will want to consider what possible arrangements we can come to, but I cannot go any further than that at the moment.

The noble Lord also asked about dealing with the problems of the definitions of "worker" and "employee". It is quite difficult. I can go as far back as when I was sitting the Bar exams a very long time ago. I found it quite difficult then; it is still difficult, but it certainly needs to be considered. No doubt that is something we can consider in due course when we come to legislation following Taylor and our *Good Work Plan*.

European Qualifications (Health and Social Care Professions) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018

Motion to Approve

12.38 pm

Moved by Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford

That the draft Regulations laid before the House on 20 December 2018 be approved.

Relevant document: 12th Report from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee (Sub-Committee B)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con): My Lords, the Government recognise the important contribution made by regulated health and care professionals, including those trained in the EEA and Switzerland. This statutory instrument ensures that professionals with EEA or Swiss qualifications have a clear route to seek recognition of their qualification when the UK leaves the EU.

Following the UK's exit from the EU, directive and treaty rights under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union will no longer apply to the UK in the event of no deal, save to the extent that they have been introduced by UK domestic legislation. Parts of domestic legislation implementing the directive will not operate effectively after exit day and there would be no clearly lawful route for holders of EEA and Swiss health and care qualifications to be registered to practise in the UK. This instrument amends professional legislation in the UK to ensure that a system for the

recognition of professional qualifications continues and that professionals with EEA and Swiss qualifications will have a clear and lawful route to seek recognition of their qualifications after exit day.

Arrangements for the recognition of professional qualifications within the EU are provided for by the directive on the recognition of professional qualifications. If UK domestic legislation is not amended, many of the directive's provisions will still be part of UK law after exit day. However, they will not function properly and in some cases will be inoperable. For example, regulators may lose the ability to recognise certain EEA and Swiss qualifications. This would mean, as I have said, that health and care professionals who want to work in the UK will not be able to do so. Changes to domestic legislation, which implements the directive, are therefore needed to ensure that recognition of EEA and Swiss qualifications can continue in the unlikely event of a no-deal exit.

The UK has been a major beneficiary of the arrangements that European directives have put in place on this matter. Since 1997, more than 77,000 EEA and Swiss qualifications in the automatic professions of doctors, nurses, midwives, dentists and pharmacists have been recognised in the UK. By contrast, fewer than 7,000 UK qualifications have been recognised in the EEA and Switzerland. Directives have supported the recruitment of skilled professionals to the UK's health and care sector, so it is important that arrangements are in place to allow for the continued registration of such professionals if the UK leaves the EU in a no-deal scenario.

This instrument deals with the recognition of EEA and Swiss professional qualifications in the UK. It has three main effects. First, it puts in place arrangements for the recognition of EEA and Swiss professional qualifications that are currently automatically recognised. Secondly, it ensures that applications for recognition that are ongoing at exit day can be completed under the current legal arrangements, as far as practically possible. Finally, it removes provisions that are not possible or desirable to maintain in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

I will take some time to set out exactly what the instrument does. It puts in place new arrangements for the recognition of EEA and Swiss professional qualifications that are currently automatically recognised by UK regulators. Such qualifications will become acceptable overseas qualifications. These qualifications will continue to be recognised without additional testing, other than checks on language skills and where there are concerns about applicants' fitness to be registered. The regulations give UK regulators a new power to stop the automatic recognition of a qualification by seeking designation of that qualification if so desired. This is not currently possible under the directive, and this important additional measure will enhance public protection. Such a designation will be subject to Privy Council consent.

The Government have been asked whether they will set out in guidance the criteria to be applied by regulators when seeking designation of a qualification. We do not intend to do so. UK health and care professional regulators currently set the standards for

UK qualifications. In our view, therefore, they are best placed to identify whether there is a case for designating a qualification as not comparable to these standards on the grounds of public safety. UK regulators will be able to seek designation of any qualification that is currently automatically accepted but about which they have concerns. It will be the responsibility of the regulators to present the evidence in support of designation. The most likely basis for designation will be that a qualification does not meet the standard of the equivalent UK professional qualification. The arrangements for the continued recognition of automatic qualifications will be reviewed by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care two years after these regulations come into force.

These regulations also enable qualifications that are not currently covered by the automatic system to be considered by the relevant UK regulator and compared with the equivalent UK standard, as is currently the case. The regulations enable applications which have been made before exit day to be concluded under the current arrangements, as far as practically possible. This instrument also enables individuals practising under temporary and occasional status, or under the European professional card, to continue to do so until such registration expires.

Concerns have been expressed that the removal of temporary and occasional registration will have a detrimental impact on the number of EEA or Swiss-trained healthcare professionals practising in the UK, but we do not think that that is a genuine problem. Just 160 professionals are registered on a temporary and occasional basis. Professionals practising on such a basis will not lose their registration on exit day; they will instead be able to practise until their registration expires, which may be for up to 18 months. At that point they will be able to seek full registration in the same way as any other holder of an EEA or Swiss qualification.

Finally, this order removes obligations and administrative arrangements that will no longer apply to the UK regulators, operate effectively or be desirable to maintain when the UK leaves the EU. These include: the removal of the requirement to share information through the European Commission's internal market information system, IMI, to which UK regulators would no longer have access; the ending of arrangements that allow professionals to practise in the UK using an EPC, which relies on having access to IMI; and the removal of the requirement on UK regulators to set professional education and training standards that comply with standards set in the directive. This provides UK regulators with greater flexibility to set education and training standards that meet the needs of the health and care sector in the UK.

These regulations put in place a system for the recognition of EEA and Swiss professional qualifications if the UK exits the EU without a deal. It also ensures that those applications that are in process on exit day will be concluded under the current arrangements, as far as practically possible. On that basis, I beg to move.

12.45 pm

Amendment to the Motion

Moved by **Baroness Thornton**

At the end insert “but that this House regrets that, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, the additional administrative burdens for many qualifications and the prohibition of European Economic Area temporary and occasional healthcare professionals that are proposed by the draft Regulations could be detrimental to the National Health Service.”

Baroness Thornton (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for introducing this instrument with such clarity. The reason I have tabled an amendment to the Motion is to draw attention to the serious concerns that were expressed by the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee in its report in December last year. As the Minister has explained, these draft regulations laid by the Department of Health and Social Care set out the Government’s plans for recognition of EEA and Swiss professional healthcare qualifications in the event of no deal. Yet again we are spending valuable parliamentary time talking through quite large regulations that would not need to be here if the Government had ruled out no deal, to be frank. Here we go again. They need the scrutiny of your Lordships’ House because the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee drew them to our attention, because of issues of public policy that we need to address.

The Government have said that they would not introduce new public policy issues into these orders and Brexit legislation, so we need to ask whether these regulations raise any of those issues. My questions will be focused on the issues that the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee raised in its report.

The first question is about the regulators’ decision-making. The committee asked the DHSC how the UK regulators would make decisions. It was concerned about whether the regulators could set their own criteria for designation and the DHSC confirmed in its response to that question:

“Health and Care regulators are best placed to assess qualifications. Privy Council scrutiny ensures continuity for applicants in the short term whilst providing an inbuilt safety mechanism for removing qualifications that require further testing. The overarching principle behind the designation is the safety of the public—and we will work with regulators to ensure this”.

The question that the Minister needs to address is about ensuring a consistent and fair approach to the decisions by the different regulators, because each regulator will be responsible for the criteria for designation in its area.

That begs the question of how much work is involved and how much extra burden this will put on our regulators, given that the regulations give the UK regulators a discretion to designate EEA and Swiss qualifications as not acceptable in the UK after exit from the EU. The Minister needs to respond on what criteria regulators will apply in designating a qualification as not comparable to UK standards and what steps will be taken to ensure that regulators maintain a consistent and fair approach to their application. I

welcome the clarification that there will be no change to the language testing arrangements, because your Lordships’ House has been concerned about that for many years.

The Minister needs to address what the administrative burden on regulators might be. No information on cost or impact is given in the Explanatory Memorandum other than to say that they will be negligible—I try to avoid that word—which seems unlikely. Given that this function requires assessment of where a qualification is not comparable and may impose an additional burden on UK regulators, we need to ask the Minister for assurances that UK regulators will have the administrative capacity and resources to deal with such decisions.

The Minister has addressed temporary and occasional qualifications, but given the number of EEA and Swiss professionals providing healthcare services in the UK on a temporary and occasional basis, she should assure us that there will be no detrimental effect on the NHS as a result of the removal of the right of EEA and Swiss professionals to work on such a basis.

I think that is enough questions for the time being. Other noble Lords will probably draw to the attention of the Minister the views that have been expressed to us by a range of organisations which have an interest in this matter, including the BMA and the royal colleges. I beg to move.

Baroness Jolly (LD): My Lords, I think that there is agreement across this House that we should work to prepare this country as best we can for Brexit and the potential of a disastrous no deal. I welcome this morning’s response from the Home Office Minister in this House that she believes that no deal is unlikely.

A consequence of no deal will be that the UK is no longer part of the automatic electronic alert system between health regulators, which exchanges information on health professionals who are no longer allowed to practise in the country. The NHS is vital for our country and for the lives of our citizens. Our healthcare professionals are the backbone that holds in place the institution that we hold dear. It is imperative that the legislation is effective at retaining a frictionless flow of EEA and Swiss workforce, along with the care that they bring.

There are several areas of concern. I am concerned that impact assessments have not been done in all circumstances in relation to these SIs and that consultation has sometimes been rushed, or that little public consultation or sector consultation has been done. I intend to ask the Minister questions that are thematic. I do not mind if she does not have the time or the information to be able to respond to them today; I am quite happy for the answers to come in a letter, which I would like to be placed in the Library.

A no-deal Brexit would not allow temporary workers, and it is vague when it comes to permanent workers due to a lack of specific evidence about qualifications. I would like some light shed on this. Can the Minister confirm that, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, vital EEA medical workers will not be treated as international medical graduates—IMG—so that they can easily

work for our NHS and will not have to endure long and arduous registration processes which in some cases have been known to take up to at least a year? When do the Government plan to provide guidance to healthcare professional regulators on the information required to obtain Privy Council consent to remove a qualification from automatic acceptance should they have patient safety concerns? It is important that this process can be invoked quickly should concerns arise.

How do the Government intend to approach the two-year review of the SI? Will they commit to reform of professional regulators' legislation to allow the process for registering healthcare professionals who qualified outside the UK to be fair and consistent for all professionals, regardless of where they qualified?

I think the Minister is aware of issues around Spanish and Irish nurses. What conversations are we having with Spanish health services about the gradation of Spanish nurses to ensure that, as long as they stay here, their years working here count towards their time in the Spanish system? I had the privilege of meeting some Spanish nurses working in Taunton. They thoroughly enjoy working here but would be really anxious were this to go, because they would then feel that they would not be able to return home with any credit for the work they have done here. My noble friend Lady Thornton has already covered the issues that the scrutiny committee raised.

Moving away from the healthcare professions, why have the results of the consultation process relating to the Human Medicines (Amendment) regs and the other two SIs we are discussing not been released? Instead, the Government have provided a response that gives little transparency on any key concerns that were raised during the consultation process, or the specific organisations approached. The changes laid out in the SI are wide-ranging and many call for the establishment of new responsibilities, transference of powers or further discussions with EU counterparts. Is it realistic that the industry will be able to handle these changes in the short period remaining before 29 March and during the transition period afterwards? The MHRA does really good work and I assume that it will be taking on this work independently of the EMA, so will the MHRA receive additional funding to support this extra work?

Moving on to the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019, noble Lords got very exercised about this issue in the immediate aftermath of the referendum. The impact assessment says:

“Although this contingency legislation aims to help business in their preparations for a no-deal scenario, there is a risk that due to the requirements set out, businesses will not have sufficient time to prepare. In the event of no deal being agreed with the EU before 29 March 2019, the MHRA will have regulatory processes in place so that businesses will have the relevant information to prepare for this scenario”.

Are we to take it from this that if we crash out with no deal on 29 March, not having agreed this with the EU until directly before, the regulatory process will not be in place?

I thank the Minister for listening and, as I said, I am quite happy for her to write if she is not able to respond to all these questions now.

Lord Crisp (CB): My Lords, some concerns about nursing were raised in the committee by my noble friend Lady Watkins. She cannot be in her place today, but I understand that those concerns largely related to the points the noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, just made about Spanish and Irish nurses who will be disadvantaged by these regulations. The Spanish nurses will be disadvantaged for the reasons just mentioned—their time in the UK will not count towards their qualifications in Spain—and the Irish nurses because, for the first time, they will have to pay a fee for registration. Could the Minister assure us that steps are being taken to do something about those two points? Both of them affect groups of nurses from different countries, but they profoundly affect us. We should remember this in the context of the fact that 33,000 EU nurses are registered in the UK.

I will also make a wider point. Health staffing is one of the most vulnerable of all the Brexit issues—particularly if no deal is put in place. I note in the regulations that there will be a review within two years. However, I suspect a whole range of unforeseen issues will arise in the short term. Could the Minister let us know what arrangements will be in place to monitor those, and what liaison she and colleagues will have with employees, employers and staff organisations to monitor and deal with the issues that arise within that period?

1 pm

Viscount Bridgeman (Con): My Lords, I apologise for my discourtesy in not being present at the beginning of this debate. A number of years ago, with the very great help of our noble friend Lord Howe, we secured the requirement from the Commission that healthcare professionals coming to this country from the European Union be subject to language tests before registration, and not the other way round, as in the previous arrangement. Can the Minister confirm that this valuable requirement will be kept in place under the new regulations?

Lord Deben (Con): My Lords, I trust that the House heard with great pleasure the Minister's comments on how major an advantage this whole arrangement in the European Union has been to us. We should not be discussing any of these SIs without reminding people that our membership of the European Union has been a huge advantage to us, and that what we are doing at the moment is picking apart something which is to our advantage, for reasons which are increasingly difficult to understand. We should not allow any of this to go past without constantly reminding the Government that they are leading this country into a position in which it will be poorer and less advantaged than when they came to power. A historic responsibility will lie on their shoulders, and we should remind them of that constantly.

My concern in this whole debate is that we are being asked to discuss this SI under a double falsehood. The first is the argument that we need it because we might crash out of the European Union, but that we need not be too worried because we will not crash out. The second difficulty is that, if we do not crash out of

[LORD DEBEN]

the European Union, we are legislating for a series of things which will be there in the course of further negotiations. Even if what is referred to at the moment as the Prime Minister's "deal" were to be accepted—and it is manifestly not satisfactory—it is not a deal at all. It is an agreement to go on discussing to get a deal. During that period of time, what we are discussing here will be there in the background. There have been a number of occasions on which Opposition spokesmen have rightly pointed out that the trouble with these things is that if they are in the background while we are negotiating, they have a real effect. We have to take this very seriously.

Nor should we pass over the problem we are presenting ourselves with. We are saying that, to get the best advantage out of this ludicrous foot-shooting activity, we are going to make sure that every European Union national can come to this country to do what we want them to do without there being any difficulty. Of course, we cannot do any of the things that have made that particularly valuable in addition; we are not going to share the information both ways, which is what the European Union enabled us to do. Rather like the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, I have a real concern that the IMI system will not continue. The idea that you can happily forget about it because it happens to be convenient, and do the things you can do because they happen to be convenient, seems to me an abnegation of responsibility which I find extremely difficult to accept.

The noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, rightly referred to the additional matter of the electronic alert system. We will not be alerted to the very professionals we most want to know about, because we will have decided that, because Britain is so ultimately different from everywhere else, we will not have this association. I know it is not the fault of the Minister, who is having to defend the ridiculous situation in which we find ourselves, but it is for this House to remind people all the time of what this really means.

Then we go on to the fact that these regulations are in conformity with the withdrawal Act, which says that we are not going to use it to create any new legislation, but merely take into national legislation things that would not be in it if we left the European Union without any agreement. The trouble is that this is not actually possible, because we have to have regulators making decisions. They are now going to make decisions under a new regime—in that sense it is a new regime—and I very much want to hear the response to the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, on how we make sure the regulators make, roughly speaking, the same decisions across the whole range, and how we make sure that those regulators do not make decisions that extend or change the position we are in now. The latter would be contrary to the undertakings given by the Government.

However, the word that I very much worried about when the Minister used it was "flexibility". She said that no longer being in the European Union would give us a flexibility on the establishment of professional qualifications which we did not have up until now. I do not think that flexibility can possibly be accepted within this SI, because that genuinely changes the

position from what it was before. It may be that it is convenient for the Government to talk about flexibility as an advantage. I find it pretty difficult to see what that advantage would be. What would be the point of being flexible in changing our arrangements in such a way that they were out of line with the arrangements of our neighbours, when we rely upon those neighbours for such a high proportion of our professionals? It seems to me that flexibility is one of those convenient words used by the Government and those who believe in Brexit to suggest that there are some advantages hidden here which we have not yet got hold of. I do not think that there are, or that it would be legal for us to use flexibility under this SI, because it is specifically not supposed to introduce into our legislation anything that we have not had up to now.

I am afraid I will move on to something that I constantly say; that there is no impact assessment here. Why is there not? This is the real reason I say to the Minister that this is unacceptable. The reason there is no impact assessment is that the Government want us to believe that there is no impact. It is very inconvenient for the Government to say that the impact is that we will no longer have the advantages we had before leaving the European Union. They ought to be listing those advantages and explaining what the impact on us will be. But they are not doing that, because that would make more and more people aware of the lunacy of the measures we are now taking, and the ridiculous position in which Brexit places us.

But then there is another question. If you do not have an impact assessment, you also do not appear to have any idea about how much it will cost. I am afraid that I am a Conservative, and I am always interested in costs—I like to know how much it costs. I know that that is a disadvantage in the whole Brexit discussion, because the one thing we never get is the cost. It is amazing, is it not? We have a Conservative Government who never talk about the costs of Brexit, which is an absolutely ludicrous position for us to be in. Let us ask ourselves—I repeat the words of the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton—"What burden? What resources? What cost?"

One of my difficulties is that I have had the misfortune to have had to sit through a large number of these SIs, and every time you ask about the cost, the Minister concerned explains—charmingly, and with considerable aplomb—that the costs are negligible.

Baroness Thornton: Negligible.

Lord Deben: I have got it right this time. That is what they say. In every individual case, negligibility may well be the truth, but what is negligible in one case, when added up with a lot of other "negligible" costs, ends up being rather expensive. I am amazed at the number of things you can do with negligible cost. We are filled with these SIs—with all the things that we can do for nothing. I ran businesses, and I have to say that I do not know anything you can do in business which does not cost you something. I would love the Government to explain to me how they are managing to move whole areas of control and regulation over to British regulators without any cost. I would be able to

apply that to my businesses and it would be extremely valuable, because all I know is that the moment you change or move anything, it costs money.

I want to know not only how much it costs but whether we have the resources for it. It is also said that we have these organisations that are perfectly capable of doing all this, as if this is an easy thing to do, when in fact it is not only difficult, but if we get it wrong, we are endangering people's lives. Clearly, we have not worked out what the cost of doing this is; I just do not understand whether we have the human resources and the trained resources to do it. After all, we have shown so far that we cannot run the National Health Service without large numbers of people coming in from outside. I would like to understand whether we can regulate all this without some additional resources, and if so, we ought to know exactly what resources we will need and how much they will cost.

I am sorry that I have to say this to the Minister with such vigour, but it needs to be said; otherwise, this House looks pretty damn stupid. We look as if we are sitting around, having a gentle argument about what is the programme for catastrophe. This is what we are talking about: how a nation decides how to put itself into a very much less favourable position than it is in at the moment. Sometimes people say, "Ah, but Britain will manage—look what it did during the war!" But we did not ask for the war; we did not say that we wanted it. It happened, and we said that we had to fight it. Here we are asking for it, and are seriously sitting around planning for it. We are asked to do that with a degree of politeness and charm, and courtesy and care, when we ought to be very angry indeed that any Government should even suggest that we need SIs like this.

Lord Warner (CB): My Lords, it is a positive delight to follow the noble Lord, Lord Deben, as I have done on a number of occasions in the past few months in debates on other SIs which have been considered in Grand Committee. The one thing I would say about the noble Lord is that he has been masterly in the consistent way in which he has expressed himself. I do not altogether share his high assessment of previous Conservative Governments on costings, but we will let that one pass.

1.15 pm

I do not intend to go into the content of these SIs; I am saving my firepower for the last lot, on which I have quite a lot to say. However, when you look at this lot and the second lot of SIs—which presumably come out of the same department—you see a strange discontinuity between the level of the impact assessments and assessments of risk in this set compared with the second set, on which I will say some complimentary things about the MHRA and what it has done to set out some of the risk assessment. That is lacking in this set of SIs. It will be interesting to know why, coming out of the same stable, these two racehorses have been saddled up in a totally different way.

I will pursue with the Minister some of the issues around process and the status of these SIs in the number of different scenarios which we can foresee,

given that we are only 22 days away from the current statutory exit date. We can have as many warm words from the Dispatch Box as you like about there not being a no-deal exit. The truth of the matter is that the legislation on the statute book—at the insistence of the Government, and indeed the Prime Minister—says that it should be on 29 March.

My concerns and questions for the Minister therefore relate to a number of aspects which may change that—we do not know whether they will; a lot of things will turn on what happens next week. For example, we still do not know whether there will be an extension or a deal, or what type of deal there will be. If there is an extension of the Article 50 process, we cannot be sure what impact it will have on the implementation or transition period—whatever you want to call it.

First, what is the status of these SIs in a number of different circumstances? We know that the Government are committing to review these SIs after two years. However, as I understand it, there is no sunset clause in any of these SIs, so we have to take the Government's word for it that there will be a review in two years' time. But what happens on 30 March if we exit the EU with no deal? I assume there is an expectation that all these SIs, including the ones we are discussing today, will be brought into effect. I further assume that, somehow or other, the government machine, or agencies acting on its behalf, will issue guidance to all the affected people about what they are expected to do. Can the Minister clarify whether the guidance on those SIs will in fact be issued before 29 March to all the interested parties who will be affected, in particular on the specific SIs we are discussing today?

Secondly, what happens if Article 50 is extended? I will not go into the possibilities, but let us say it is extended beyond 29 March. What happens to these SIs? Is their introduction extended? Do they not come into operation until any new date when there may be an exit day? There could still be an exit day with no deal; because you have extended Article 50, it does not follow that there is a deal. What then is the status of these SIs in the set of circumstances where there is an extension of the Article 50 process to a new exit date?

Thirdly, let us assume that there is some kind of deal, whether the Prime Minister's deal or something else. Presumably, these SIs lapse. Is that correct, or do they stay on the statute book, given that Parliament will have passed them? How do we explain to the outside world whether it is supposed to take notice of these SIs or whether the status quo continues—which seems to be the Government's policy for the period of transition or implementation? What is the status of these SIs in those circumstances? How will the Government communicate their status with the wider world if there is in fact a deal? We, and the world outside, need a bit of clarity about what happens to these SIs in some of the foreseeable and possible scenarios, even if there is no no-deal exit on 29 March.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab): My Lords, it is very tempting to follow the noble Lords, Lord Warner and Lord Deben, in their remarks. I do not know whether the noble Lord, Lord Deben, has studied the document issued by the US Government last week on

[LORD HUNT OF KINGS HEATH]

their requirements for a trade deal, but there is a contrast between what Brexiteers told the public about how easy trade deals would be and the demands of the US Government, which this Government will have to accede to in their desperation to get a trade deal, and their implications for the National Health Service. Apart from anything else, they will mean that voluntary control on prices of branded drugs will go and the market which the Government now want to legislate to remove, amending the Health and Social Care Act 2012, would fall foul of the requirements of the US Government on public services, which are very explicit about the areas they want US corporations to bid for.

As the noble Lord, Lord Deben, said, I wonder how those on the Front Bench feel about being members of a Government which will be excoriated for decades to come, perhaps as was the pre-war Government in the 1930s, for the lack of preparations they made for the disaster into which they are now taking this country. Of course, this SI is a sort of backstop which, it is hoped, will never come into being. But do we really think the vote will take place next week or will it, as some people feel, be postponed yet again to a cliff edge, when there is no guarantee whatever that there will be an agreement to enter talks about an agreement? This order takes on considerable importance.

I should at this point declare my interests as a member of the General Medical Council and a trustee of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, and say that the GMC welcomes the order on its narrow terms. I should say to the noble Lord, Lord Deben, that it is the GMC's view that it can administer the new arrangements effectively without additional substantive burdens being placed on its day-to-day operations. I do not know whether that reassures him; I hope it may.

I should like the Minister to comment on one area which is relevant to what my noble friend and the noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, said. It relates to page 9 of the order, where new powers are afforded to regulators effectively to determine what should and should not be comparable clinical qualifications to those gained in the UK. This is clearly of great importance given the way we are going. Instead of the current automatic recognition given to qualifications gained by, for example, doctors, dentists and nurses in another EEA country, the powers allow them to be deemed non-comparable by a regulator if it felt that necessary for patient safety reasons. The order states that the Privy Council would have to approve any such decision by the regulator. On what basis would the Privy Council approve or not approve a request to do so? Without some idea of the criteria to be used, it will be difficult for regulators to adopt the powers in the order in this area with confidence. Do the Government expect to issue guidance to advise regulators on the basis of a Privy Council judgment? Can they do so as quickly as possible, and will they consult the regulators in so doing?

Baroness Hayman (CB): I also declare an interest as having been a member of the General Medical Council until that post was taken up by the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath.

Many of the points I wanted to make have already been made by the noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, and the noble Lord, Lord Hunt. I follow up his point about the ability to remove a qualification from automatic acceptance. When she introduced the SI, the Minister said that the Government would not issue guidelines. If there are no guidelines, one regulator may decide to remove an automatic qualification. The Minister said that it is in the best position to do so, but the SI lays down that there must be approval by the Privy Council. How is the Privy Council to make its decisions and against which criteria? There must either be criteria for the regulators to abide by and the Privy Council to supervise, or you give power completely to the regulator. I do not see how that process has any power or heft without guidelines.

The issue of review after two years has also been raised. There is concern that that review should be wide-ranging, because the process for recognising the qualifications of non-EEA and Swiss medical professionals is not satisfactory at the moment. It can be very long, drawn-out, bureaucratic and take a lot of money and time, as opposed to the streamlined system that we have had with EEA and Swiss nationals, which we are throwing away if we go for a no-deal Brexit. It is really important that that review is wide-ranging and does not leave us at the end with another cliff edge, which is that these health professionals on whom we depend so much become translated into international medical graduates and subject to an extremely unsatisfactory process.

In his wonderful speech the noble Lord, Lord Deben, referred to how the Government say that we will have wonderful flexibility but never quite explain what that is. Actually, the Government have flexibility on international medical graduates, because those procedures are not governed by the European Communities Act or by our membership of the EU. For many years, regulators have wanted to make progress on the issue but have not been given the legislative time or space and policy commitment from the Government so to do.

Alongside this work on EEA graduates, can we make sure that we look at the wider issue of doctors and other medical professionals coming here from outside the EEA? If the overall immigration trends are mirrored in the people coming to this country as medical professionals, we will see fewer EEA medical professionals but more IMG medical professionals coming here. I believe that we are seeing that already. Therefore, how we recognise their qualifications will be even more important.

1.30 pm

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I thank your Lordships for what I think we can call a robust debate. I will start by discussing the designation criteria, which were at the core of the questions from the noble Baronesses, Lady Thornton, Lady Jolly and Lady Hayman, and the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, and are central to this SI. It is important to set out the differences between the current system and what future recognition might look like under the SI. Obviously, we understand that this would happen only in a no-deal scenario, which the Government very much wish to avoid.

To clarify, the current system is based on automatic recognition of EEA and Swiss qualifications, as listed in Annexe 5, with eligibility based primarily on an applicant's nationality rather than where the qualification was gained. In future recognition, eligibility would be based solely on whether the individual holds a relevant EEA or Swiss qualification. UK regulators would therefore be able to apply for designation of an individual EEA/Swiss qualification as well. That is where the concept of flexibility comes from, which so upset my noble friend Lord Deben. Some aspects of the directive would no longer apply to the UK, so some of the ways in which the directive applied previously—such as on hours, which have previously been used to determine qualification—might no longer be appropriate in determining whether a qualification has been met.

This flexibility in setting standards should be welcomed. Indeed, we noted that Charlie Massey, the chief executive of the GMC, has previously raised concerns about the training of some individuals we had to accept under this automatic recognition process. For example, he raised concerns about family doctors in Italy before the Health and Social Care Select Committee. The General Dental Council has also raised concerns about the quality of some Romanian and Spanish dental qualifications. Under the new proposals, we would be able to raise such concerns through the designation process. They would go to the Privy Council because that is already the normal process through which UK regulators designate qualifications in the UK system. The process proposed under this SI is the standard UK process for establishing professional qualifications.

Moving on to how this would work, the instrument enhances the UK regulators' powers to protect the public by designating as no longer acceptable EEA and Swiss professional qualifications that they are currently obliged to accept automatically. As I said, the grounds for designating a qualification will be determined by the UK regulator, which is best placed to make such decisions. The UK regulator will be able to seek designation of any individual professional qualification about which it has concerns. The most likely basis for such a designation will be that a qualification does not meet the standard of UK qualifications. We do not expect the approaches to designation to vary significantly between regulators as they have a shared objective of protecting, promoting and maintaining the health and safety of the public—and long experience of doing so. Therefore, the reasons for seeking designation and evidence supplied in support of designation are expected to be largely consistent. As I said, Privy Council consent must be given for a qualification to be designated. This standard system has been used previously.

The Government have been asked whether they will set out guidance on the criteria to be applied by regulators when seeking designation of a qualification. We do not intend to do so because we believe that the most likely basis for designation will be a qualification not meeting the standard of equivalent UK professional qualifications. We think that UK regulators, not the Government, are the authority on standards for healthcare professionals practising in the UK. They set the standards for UK health and care professional qualifications and are therefore best placed to understand if there is

a case for designating a qualification. As I said, the Privy Council has a well-established role in overseeing the UK's health and care professional regulators. For some regulators, including the GCC and GOsC, it approves UK qualifications and the appointment of council members. Its new role in approving applications for the designation of EEA qualifications is simply an extension of its existing role.

Costs and the impact assessment were referred to by a number of noble Lords but particularly exercised my noble friend Lord Deben. I am afraid that we have gone into the costs in some detail, despite the concerns he raised. He will know that UK regulators operate on a full-cost-recovery basis and set registration fees that meet the cost of processing applications. The cost to regulators of moving to the new system is considered negligible because it mirrors the current system, as far as possible, for at least two years—we intend to review that, once the regulations come into force. Should the regulator incur additional cost, it will be able to recoup it through fees. We estimate the total cost to regulators on the automatic system—including the NMC, the GMC, the GPhC and the GDC—to be £250,000 per year and an additional £60,000 for recruitment costs in the first year of these regulations coming into force. This could raise registration fees by an average of 27 pence per registrant per year for the regulators to recoup additional administration costs. We have costed the impact and believe the assessment to be reliable. That is why we have the GMC's support; it believes that the impact assessment is reasonable and that it can cope with the impact.

I want to address concerns raised about temporary workers. I know that the noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, wanted to re-raise this even though I tried to address it in my opening speech, as the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, acknowledged. As we said, we do not think that the removal of this group of registrations will cause concern as only 160 professionals are registered on a temporary and occasional basis. Professionals practising on such a basis, even in that small group, will not lose their registration on exit day; they will be able to practise until their registration expires, up to 18 months later. At that point, it will be open to them to seek full registration in the same way as any other holder of an EEA or Swiss qualification. It is important to note that the number of joiners from the EEA has remained steady at around 2,050 a year since 2016. In 2017-18, doctors joining the register from non-EEA and UK routes made up 32.4% of the total, while EEA applicants made up 16.2%. We are confident that the impact on that point will be manageable but we will keep a close eye on it and ensure that it is kept in check.

Moving on to the question about the IMI, raised by my noble friend Lord Deben and the noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, it is absolutely right that if the UK leaves the EU without a deal, we will no longer have access to EU systems, including the IMI system which gives us access to the exchange of information about healthcare professionals. The regulators are aware of this and they are preparing for it. It is important that this instrument will mean that they will not be required to put in place new procedures for the recognition of EEA qualifications and that any costs involved with

[BARONESS BLACKWOOD OF NORTH OXFORD] the loss of the IMI system are unavoidable in the case of no deal. Such costs depend on a number of factors. While we would like to see continued access to the IMI system, it is worth bearing in mind that the registration of international health professionals takes place with non-EEA registrants without access to IMI. We have managed to ensure that that happens safely, effectively and efficiently. However, we will do our utmost to ensure that we consider other means to replace IMI that comply with the GDPR, such as standard contractual clauses. I hope that reassures noble Lords on that point.

Perhaps I may go on to answer the questions raised by the noble Lord, Lord Crisp, and the noble Baroness, Lady Jolly, on Spanish nurses and nurses from the Republic of Ireland. There is an issue on this point and I recognise the concerns that have been raised. There will be no change as a result of these regulations in the way Irish and Spanish qualifications are accepted, but at this point the Spanish regulator has said that it will not recognise the UK practice of Spanish nurses. This is a matter for the Spanish body, but we are continuing to discuss as a matter of urgency how EU regulators will recognise UK practice and qualifications, so that it does not matter which we are taking up.

As regards Ireland, the regulations ensure the continued recognition of Irish professional qualifications in Northern Ireland for at least two years after exit day and will allow professionals practising under temporary and occasional registration status to continue to do so until that registration expires. We are making sure that health and care practice across the island of Ireland is maintained smoothly and continuously. This has been a priority for the Government.

With those comments, I hope I have addressed the main concerns raised by noble Lords and given reassurance on those points. On that basis, I beg to move.

Lord Warner: My Lords, can the noble Baroness give me some answers to the points I raised about guidance being given in the event of no deal and exit on 29 March? First, how are the Government going to communicate that guidance to all the interested parties in the time available? Secondly, I asked about the status of these SIs in the event that the Article 50 period is extended beyond 29 March but there still being no deal. Does that mean that after that period, these SIs would come into effect when the period of exit is established post 29 March? Thirdly, what happens to these SIs if there is a deal? Does the present status carry on, with these SIs being put into limbo and therefore not introduced?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I apologise to the noble Lord for missing out on my answers to his questions; that was most remiss of me. These SIs come into force only if there is a no-deal exit. Should there be an extension of Article 50, they would not come into force until or if there is a no-deal exit, which is obviously most undesirable and something the Government are seeking to avoid.

On the communication of the effect or implementation of these SIs, they have been developed in close collaboration and consultation with the regulators

that would be impacted. They are well informed about their operation, and given that the effect of the SIs is to continue with business as usual as far as possible, we hope that that is the de minimis effect. I shall write to the noble Lord in response to his final question, as I am afraid I have forgotten what it was.

Baroness Thornton: My Lords, I thank the Minister for her extensive response and noble Lords for their interventions and questions on this SI. The indignation and anger of the noble Lord, Lord Deben, has been reflected right across the House. Noble Lords may not express it quite as well as he has, but it absolutely is there. We have just spent an hour and 10 minutes debating this issue. Then there are all the hours of preparation, the cost of civil servants, the cost of our time and, indeed, the worry that all this is causing, not only to us in the Chamber but to millions of people outside. As the noble Lord, Lord Deben, and others have said, the Minister has done the best she can with the hand she has been dealt and answered our questions to the best of her ability. However, this is not where any of us wants to be. On that basis, I shall withdraw my amendment.

Amendment to the Motion withdrawn.

Motion agreed.

European Qualifications (Pharmacists) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018

Motion to Approve

1.45 pm

Moved by Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford

That the draft Regulations laid before the House on 6 December 2018 be approved.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con): My Lords, this statutory instrument has been brought forward in the absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly which, as noble Lords will be aware, is suspended. We have just debated a complementary instrument which deals with the recognition of other EEA and Swiss health and care qualifications in the UK in a no-deal scenario. My department has worked closely with Northern Ireland Civil Service officials in the development of these regulations and they are the result of positive and collaborative work between the respective departments. Noble Lords will now be familiar with the recognition arrangement for all other EEA and Swiss qualified health and care professionals across the UK, which this instrument seeks to replicate. I will therefore describe only briefly what these regulations do.

This instrument deals with the recognition of EEA and Swiss pharmacist qualifications in Northern Ireland. It has three main effects. First, like the previous set of regulations, it puts in place arrangements for the recognition of EEA and Swiss pharmacist qualifications

that are currently automatically recognised. Secondly, it ensures that applications for recognition that are ongoing on exit day can be completed under the current legal arrangements. Finally, it removes a number of provisions which it is not possible or appropriate to maintain in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

The instrument puts in place new arrangements for the recognition of pharmacist qualifications that are currently automatically recognised by the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland. Such qualifications will become “relevant European qualifications”. As such, they will continue to be recognised without additional testing other than checks of language skills and whether there are concerns about their fitness to be registered.

The regulations give the PSNI a new power to stop the automatic recognition of a qualification by seeking designation of that qualification. This is not currently possible under the directive and is an important additional measure that will enhance public protection. Such a designation will be subject to the agreement of the Department of Health for Northern Ireland.

The Government have been asked whether they will set out guidance on the criteria to be applied by the PSNI when seeking the designation of a qualification. We do not intend to do so. The PSNI will be able to seek designation of any qualification that is currently automatically accepted about which they have concerns. It will be the PSNI’s responsibility to gather the evidence in support of designation. The most likely basis for designation will be that a qualification does not meet the standard of the equivalent Northern Ireland pharmacist qualification and therefore presents public safety concerns. The PSNI sets the standards for Northern Ireland pharmacist qualifications and is therefore best placed to identify if there is a case for designating a qualification as not being comparable to these standards. The arrangements for the continued recognition of automatic qualifications will be reviewed by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care no later than two years after these regulations come into force.

Qualifications that are not covered by the automatic system are considered by the General Pharmaceutical Council, which regulates pharmacists in Great Britain. These pharmacists can practise in Northern Ireland under a memorandum of understanding between the GPhC and the PSNI. This arrangement will continue, and changes to the GPhC’s procedures in a no-deal exit have been dealt with in the previous order.

These regulations enable applications which have been made before exit day to be concluded under current arrangements as far as practically possible. The instrument also allows individuals practising under temporary and occasional status or under the European professional card to continue to do so until such registration expires. Concerns have been expressed that the removal of temporary and occasional registration will have a detrimental impact on the number of EEA and Swiss trained pharmacists practising in Northern Ireland. I do not accept this. The PSNI does not have any pharmacists registered to practise on a temporary and occasional basis and has never received an application for temporary and occasional registration in Northern Ireland.

The instrument removes obligations and administrative arrangements that no longer apply to the PSNI, operate effectively or are appropriate to maintain when the UK leaves the EU. These include the requirement to share information through the European Commission’s IMI, to which regulators will no longer have access; arrangements that allow pharmacists to practise in Northern Ireland using an EPC; and the requirement on the PSNI to set professional education and training standards that comply with standards set in the directive. This will provide the PSNI with greater flexibility to set education and training standards that meet the needs of the pharmacy profession in Northern Ireland.

These regulations put in place a system for the recognition of EEA and Swiss pharmacist qualifications in Northern Ireland if the UK exits the EU without a deal. They also ensure that applications in progress on exit day will be concluded under current arrangements as far as possible. The regulations ensure a consistent approach to the recognition of professional health and care qualifications across the UK.

Baroness Thornton (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for introducing these regulations. These ones are kind of like a double whammy: there are no-deal issues to deal with and no Assembly in Northern Ireland to deal with them.

These regulations are not as complex as the other ones. However, briefings we have received about this in the last week suggest there is some confusion among pharmacists in Northern Ireland about what might happen. The Company Chemists’ Association suggests that the impact of Brexit,

“could lead to a major nationwide shortage of pharmacists available for work”.

There has reportedly been a huge drop in the number of pharmacists registering with the General Pharmaceutical Council since the Brexit vote, with registrations of pharmacists from the EEA falling by 80%—that is generally, not just in Northern Ireland. The Chief Medical Officer for England stated that our pharmacists will be on the front line if there are any shortages. It makes being a pharmacist in the next month or so a pretty daunting prospect.

Concerns are rife, despite the Government stating that they wish to keep free movement of the protected professions and recognising pharmacists’ qualifications. Can the Minister clear up the confusion between pharmacists? Some seem to be saying it will be okay; others say they will fare very badly in the event of no deal. Can assurance be given to pharmacists that their qualifications will be recognised after we exit the European Union? Can the Minister outline the impact she thinks Brexit will have on our pharmaceutical industry and our chemists? In the UK, we depend on our pharmacists as the front line, the people we go to quite often so that we do not have to bother our GP. There seems to be a lot of concern out there that our pharmacists will find themselves in some difficulty.

Lord Lea of Crondall (Lab): My Lords, I want to pick up a point made by both the Minister and my noble friend Lady Thornton at the start of her remarks—the lack of an Assembly and how things are dealt with

[LORD LEA OF CRONDALL]
in Northern Ireland. The Minister may not be able to respond to this, but I will put it on the record to see whether someone in government could respond. Is she aware of reports in the press that civil servants in Northern Ireland are increasingly worried about having to take policy decisions? The people then think they should be accountable for the policy decisions, so criticisms are made of civil servants who are making policy decisions. This is certainly not what anybody wanted, but it is inevitable now and has been going on for some time.

This is one of many examples. If there is no way in which the Northern Ireland political parties can be consulted, the way they are behaving is causing an increasingly treacherous situation. I say this to put it on the record and ask for someone in government to respond as to whether they agree that Northern Ireland's civil servants are in an impossible position in terms of them making policy. Secondly, I ask whether consideration has been given to how far the Civil Service in Northern Ireland circulates this material to political parties and seeks any feedback. Is that also out, in the present situation of no Assembly?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: That was quick. I thank noble Lords for their contributions. The points made by the noble Lord, Lord Lea, are indeed important and concerning. I will arrange for the specific points he has raised to be answered in writing. On the issues regarding this SI, I would like to reassure him that since August 2017 my department has engaged closely with the PSNI and colleagues in Northern Ireland in developing this instrument. These have been technical discussions relating to the proposed amendments to legislation and how they could impact the provision of healthcare services. The department has regularly communicated with stakeholders and colleagues in the devolved Administrations to ensure that their comments on the draft legislation were central to the development of the regulations. There were regular discussions between my officials and each health and care regulatory body to ensure that this reflected operational performance in country. I hope that reassures the noble Lord.

I move on to the questions raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton. We do not have figures for pharmacist registration in Northern Ireland, so I will have to write to her on that. On the general point regarding the numbers of pharmacists and the role they play in Northern Ireland, she is absolutely right. The Government recognise the important contribution to Northern Ireland made by regulated pharmacists, including those from the EEA and Switzerland. That is exactly why we are bringing forward this instrument today, to maintain a simple procedure for recognising EEA and Swiss pharmacy qualifications to help ensure that EEA and Swiss trained pharmacists can be registered to practice in Northern Ireland after exit day should there be no deal, even though we do not want that to happen. It puts in place after exit day a system of recognition similar to the current system, which is why we think it is workable. It allows applications made before exit day to be concluded under current arrangements as far as possible, and allows individuals

practising under temporary and occasional status or under the European professional card to continue to do so until such registration expires. For that reason, we think this should have no impact on the numbers of pharmacists operating in Northern Ireland.

I think I have answered the questions raised, and I hope that has reassured noble Lords. On that basis, I commend the regulations to the House.

Motion agreed.

Human Medicines (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Motion to Approve

1.58 pm

Moved by Baroness Manzoor

That the draft Regulations laid before the House on 23 January be approved.

Relevant document: 16th Report from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee (Sub-Committee B)

Baroness Manzoor (Con): My Lords, I am confident that we have a shared intention to protect and improve the safety of patients using medicines and medical devices, while enabling their access to the most innovative of treatments. Our regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, MHRA, has over 30 years' experience as a leading regulator in the EU. This expertise and experience is globally recognised and respected; we want to ensure that this continues, to the benefit of UK patients. It is with this at the forefront of our minds that the UK's plans for the regulation of medicines, medical devices and clinical trials in a no-deal scenario have been developed. Before I set out these plans, it is important to restate our aim to retain a close working partnership with the EU, in order to ensure that patients in the UK and the EU continue to have timely access to safe and effective medicines and medical devices through the co-operative network we have built over the years.

As described in the published Explanatory Memoranda, the system for regulating medicines, medical devices and clinical trials is currently set out in EU legislation. These SIs have been laid to ensure that our national regulatory system continues to function appropriately in the event of the UK leaving the EU without a deal.

In developing these regulations, my department's priorities have been to make sure that timely availability of safe, effective medicines and devices continues whilst minimising disruption to patients, businesses and ongoing trials, and to ensure that the UK regulator is able to continue to protect public health.

The House will note that these regulations have been developed through continued close consultation and co-operation with stakeholders. After a period of informal consultation, in August last year the MHRA published an initial proposal for the UK's medicines, medical devices and clinical trials regulation framework, and then followed this up through a four-week public

consultation in October. The feedback from that consultation, which received around 170 responses, led to revised proposals, which were published in January and inform these SIs.

Wherever possible we have sought to maintain existing arrangements to ensure continuity and to minimise any disruption. In medicines, the UK regulator already operates a national licensing route and some 90% of medicines used by patients within the UK will already have a national licence. These licences will continue to be valid. Noble Lords will know that in leaving the EU without a deal, the UK will no longer be part of the European Medicines Agency, so this legislation also provides for the automatic conversion of all existing centrally authorised product—CAP—licences into UK licences to ensure continuity for patients.

Given that the system for clinical trials is currently based on national decision-making—both in Europe and globally—in some key areas we have not had to make any substantial change. For example, the ability of the UK to participate in multinational trials, in the EU or the rest of the world, will not change. The data gained from trials in the UK can still be used internationally, deposited in international repositories and be accessed by others.

On devices, the UK is currently a part of the EU system of conformity assessment for medical devices. This system sets out the standards for pre-market and post-market assessment of medical devices and the MHRA is the competent authority within the UK. These standards will not change and this SI will ensure that UK law aligns with EU regulations in this area after we leave.

In other areas, we have faced a choice regarding the UK's regulatory requirements, and in those instances we have sought to maintain current arrangements while ensuring the regulator still has sufficient ability to protect public health. For example, for medicines we will continue to recognise batch-testing of medicines in the countries we recognise today.

To ensure continuity of the existing clinical trials landscape and to maintain the UK as an attractive, open environment in which to conduct clinical trials, the MHRA will continue to recognise a sponsor or legal representative established in an approved country, which on exit day will include all EU and EEA states. We will continue to recognise existing UK clinical trials approvals and will require the same information requirements as the EU for any new applications for multistate trials in the UK.

We will continue to recognise the CE mark on medical devices and in vitro diagnostics which have demonstrated their conformity with EU regulatory requirements. We will do this for a time-limited period while we consider the need to revise the UK system of regulation.

However, there are a few areas where it has been necessary to add a new requirement as a result of the UK no longer being part of the wider European regulatory framework for medicines. For example, the new requirements for medicines are to ensure that medicines do not enter the UK supply chain without having been certified by a qualified person. Therefore, we are creating a new position within the wholesale

licence-holder regime of a responsible person for import, or RPI. This person will be responsible for providing assurances that such certification is in place.

As to the new requirements for clinical trials, the MHRA is putting in place a new national IT system for clinical trial submissions and safety reporting. This portal will also be important to maintaining the transparency of clinical trials by allowing the MHRA to publish information on UK trials as is currently done on international registries. The MHRA is communicating with trial sponsors to update them on how to use the new submissions portal.

As to the new requirements for devices, we will ensure that all new medical devices and in vitro diagnostics being placed on the UK market are registered with the MHRA by establishing a new national database of all devices. Manufacturers based outside of the UK will be required to have a UK-based responsible person who is legally responsible for deficiencies or required improvements in those devices. There will also be a transitional period to enable industry to implement these requirements.

The Government are working towards securing a deal. However, in the event of no deal, these regulations will put in place a pragmatic solution that ensures the UK's medicines, medical devices and clinical trials regulation legislation continues to function effectively after exit day. These provisions will minimise any impact on patients and businesses and ensure the timely availability of safe, effective medicines on the UK market.

The devolved Administrations have been consulted during this process and they support these regulations, which apply across the UK. I beg to move.

Baroness Wheeler (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for introducing these three EU exit instruments on human medicines, medicines for human use in clinical trials and medical devices, two of which are long, complex and tortuous documents full of technical guidance and information and new schedules—so much so that the relatively short and straightforward clinical trials SI comes as light relief. Thank goodness for the Explanatory Notes.

It is hard to see how even the most enthusiastic advocate of separating ourselves from the EU and going alone on such crucial medical treatment and patient safety issues and provisions on which we have worked for so long in partnership with the EU, to mutual benefit, can view these instruments with any enthusiasm, clarity and certainty about the efficacy and quality of what is to replace the current arrangements, particularly in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

The human medicines and medical devices regulations were considered in the Commons yesterday, and a range of issues and concerns were raised that will need to be addressed. There is no time today to raise all these issues, but I can assure the Minister that we will vigorously pursue these key matters at every opportunity in the future. The regulations we are discussing now are nearly or over 200 pages long, cover several EU directives and cannot possibly be read in the time left before so-called Brexit day, let alone debated and

[BARONESS WHEELER]

scrutinised sensibly. We therefore place on record our deepest concerns that the process for these regulations is not as accessible and transparent as it needs to be.

The first SI, on human medicines, makes amendments to legislation and the regulation of medicinal products for human use. It allows the UK licensing authority, acting through the MHRA, to operate the functions previously carried out by the European Medicines Association and other EU bodies and procedures and to function as a stand-alone regulator in the event of a no-deal EU exit.

Sadly, as a direct consequence of Brexit, the European Medicines Agency has relocated to Amsterdam. Indeed, it closed its London offices at the start of this month. However, we know that in a post-Brexit scenario, deal or no deal, there must be a strong and close relationship and alignment with the EMA to protect UK patients' swift access to new medicines. As Cancer Research UK has pointed out, without an agreement to participate fully, licensing could be disrupted and there could be serious delays in life-saving medicines reaching UK patients.

Paragraph 2.5 of the Explanatory Memorandum to the statutory instrument contends that the MHRA as a stand-alone regulator will be able to,

“ensure patient access to safe and effective medicines as well as monitor the ongoing safety of those medicines and where necessary to protect patients”.

Can the Minister explain how this is to be achieved, particularly in the transition period when the new UK processes and structures are being established, or in a no-deal scenario?

I understand that the MHRA will not be able to act as the lead authority on marketing authorisation applications for new drugs in the transition period. Without the ability to act as a lead assessor, there could be ramifications for patients around Europe, given the loss of MHRA capacity and expertise, which could undermine the UK's world-leading life sciences environment.

With regard to supply, it is imperative that we retain the uninterrupted movement of medicines and medical supplies between the UK and EU in any eventuality. Pragmatic government and industry planning to secure the supply of medicines in the short term is vital, but any delays in cross-border supply as a result of new customs or regulatory checks would be damaging, especially for novel medicines that are not easily stockpiled.

Specifically on serious shortage powers—SSPs—this contingency legislation enables regulations to be made to modify the application of the 2012 regulations to deal with a serious shortage of medicinal products, which, as we know, is a matter of great public interest. That would replace the regulation-making power in the European Communities Act 1972 for certain limited purposes and ensure that the Government continue to have the power to make temporary changes to the 2012 legislation in a no-deal scenario. Is this not yet another example of Ministers being given Henry VIII powers over regulations if they think there is an urgent need because of shortages? Does the Minister anticipate a doomsday scenario in which it will be necessary to use these powers, or are the Government saying that

they do not anticipate any problems but need the powers anyway? Will the Minister outline how the process will be handled if there are shortages and what scrutiny will be available for decisions made under it? Will the Minister also say how the Government intend to secure the supply of novel investigational medicinal products—IMPs—used in clinical trials? The regulations for them are also under consideration today. Many of the IMPs used in CRUK trials would prove very difficult to stockpile and would suffer from delays at borders, causing significant disruption to trials.

Finally on the first set of regulations, will the Minister acknowledge the serious concerns in the NHS and in the pharma and biotech industries about the MHRA's announcement that the falsified medicines directive will not apply in the UK under a no-deal Brexit? Not only would we have no access to key EU-wide safety databases and checking systems, but the tougher rules to ensure that all medicines are safe and that trade is rigorously controlled will not apply to us. We were told last month that the Government were evaluating the options for a future framework. Will the Minister explain how interim arrangements will work to protect patients from fake medicines? Will she also respond to the warnings from the UK pharmaceutical and biotech industries about a no-deal Brexit increasing the risk of counterfeit medicines entering the UK and EU supply chains, and the UK becoming a target for counterfeiters? How are the Government going to ensure that the UK and the EU will co-operate on protecting citizens from counterfeit medicines and prevent fake or fraudulent medicines entering the legal supply chain?

2.15 pm

These are three very lengthy SIs, and I am now moving on to the second, on clinical trials. The Minister will be familiar with the views and concerns of noble Lords across the House on this crucial issue, which were forcefully expressed during debates on the EU withdrawal Bill, and their concerns that the new EU clinical trials regulations, which the UK played a leading role in developing, will not be in force on the current EU exit day. All the organisations currently involved in conducting clinical trials urgently need the certainty of the Government's implementation of their promise to ensure speedy alignment with the CTR in the UK after the EU adopts the new regulation being enacted without delay after Brexit. The draft SI recorded this commitment and the priority the Government promised to give to it, but it is not addressed in the SI. The commitment is to be,

“delivered through a separate legislative vehicle which will be brought forward when the application date of the new Regulations is known”.

Will the Minister explain what procedures and timescales are envisaged once it is known? What advanced planning work is taking place on this vital issue?

The regulations require all interventional clinical trials to be authorised by the MHRA as the national competent authority in the UK, to have favourable ethics opinions and to be conducted in accordance with good clinical practice. The requirements for the assessment and supply of investigational medical products—IMPs—and for safety reporting are also

crucial. However, agreement has still to be reached in negotiations on the UK's participation in the single assessment process and on access to the portal and database that underpin this regulation. No access to the portal would severely reduce the ease of UK-EU trials set-up and cause severe damage to our life sciences industry.

Urgent negotiations on access to the EU's current trials portal and database are vital to ensure that the UK remains a global leader in medical research and pioneering clinical trials and to provide the certainty that is needed for researchers and patients. We know there are concerns that, because the UK will be seen as a smaller market for new drugs, companies will be more likely to prioritise the authorisation of new drugs in the EU rather than in the UK. What assessment have the Government made of this risk?

Will the Minister tell the House what the implications of no deal would be for clinical researchers who are EU nationals? Will the UK be eligible for EU funding for clinical trials in a no-deal scenario? The MHRA will have power to publish its own guidance on clinical trials applications and on ethics committee consideration and opinion, as well as declarations of the end of clinical trials and the content of documents forming trial master files. Could the MHRA continue to work with EU states in order to keep regulation in line with the EU? Will the Minister review important details such as ethics when concerns are raised?

In his previous role, the noble Lord, Lord O'Shaughnessy, promised that, in the event of no deal, the new systems would not impose additional bureaucracy. The jury is out on whether these regulations will meet that challenge, given the scale, size and risks of what will need to be undertaken if we crash out of the EU.

Finally, the medical devices regulations bring into sharp focus many of the issues raised in last week's excellent debate on the safety of medicines and medical devices. We have more than 200 pages of regulations, aiming to cover the key elements contained in existing EU regulations, which ensure the safety and quality of general medical devices, active implantable medical devices and in vitro diagnostic medical devices, and we have the commitment made by the noble Baroness, Lady Blackwood, in that debate, which was repeated today, that after Brexit the Government intend fully to align the UK with the new EU medical in vitro diagnostic devices regulations that will come into force after the UK leaves.

Again, it is intended that there will be an enhanced role for the MHRA, and the questions to the Government on the earlier statutory instrument on MHRA resourcing, expertise and capacity to carry out the new tasks need to be re-emphasised here. What plans are in place for increasing and recruiting MHRA staff with the specialisms and expertise that will be needed for its new roles and responsibilities, particularly under a no-deal Brexit scenario? The BMA has already warned about the skills gaps in pharmacovigilance to support discovering and verifying adverse events in the development of medical devices, such as the surgical mesh implants we heard about last week that caused terrible suffering to patients. How are these and other skills gaps that will arise from the loss of expertise as a result of the EMA's move from the UK to be addressed?

The regulations mean that in a no-deal Brexit the UK's current participation in the European regulatory network for medical devices will end, with the MHRA taking on those responsibilities and having a strengthened market surveillance and assurance role. All medical devices, including active implantable medical devices, IVDs and custom-made devices, will need to be registered with the MHRA prior to being placed on the market so as to ensure that the agency can become a stand-alone regulator. After a no-deal exit, does the Minister really believe that the MHRA, as currently staffed and constituted, will be able to take on its extensive new role and responsibilities?

On data exchange, no deal will mean that the UK no longer has access to key EU data systems, including the European Databank on Medical Devices, which is to be overhauled and enhanced under the new EU regulations to be bought in after the UK has left. The new enhanced Eudamed database will include key data on CE certificates, incidents, clinical investigations and market surveillance, all of which we will have no access to. Not to worry, though, because the regulations assure us—as the noble Baroness did today—that the MHRA is building its own electronic system to mirror Eudamed requirements. Has work begun on this yet, and what costs are involved in the replacement and development of this and other EU IT database systems that we will no longer be able to use?

On data collection, the Government have said that they are considering the establishment of a national medical devices register, and that has been welcomed by the Royal College of Surgeons. It would be helpful if the Minister could tell the House what progress is being made in the consideration of this. The RCS has stressed that all new surgical procedures and devices should be registered, with related data collected, before they are routinely offered to patients, and that implantable devices should also be registered and tracked to monitor efficacy and patient safety. It also supports the conducting of clinical trials for medical devices wherever possible. In many cases this would play a crucial role in improving patient care and in testing the safety and efficacy of new innovations.

Finally, in last week's debate we heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Cumberlege, the chair of the Government's Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review, about the review and its work so far, talking to patient groups about their concerns and experiences. The review was welcomed by noble Lords and is due to report this year. How will these new arrangements be considered by the review?

Lord Warner (CB): My Lords, I want to start by providing the House with a few vital statistics on these three life sciences statutory instruments. On my bathroom scales this morning, they weighed in at a little over 2 kilograms. There are 416 pages of statutory instrument and 132 pages of explanatory memorandum, including impact assessments. There are now just 22 days for those working in the life sciences industry to understand how they might be affected by these SIs if our beloved Prime Minister inadvertently drives the Brexit car over the cliff on 29 March. The one thing that I can congratulate the Government on is that the MHRA

[LORD WARNER]

has done its best to consult the industry on these SIs and has done a reasonably professional job on risk assessments. I want to concentrate on the first two SIs, although I share many of the concerns about all the SIs voiced by the noble Baroness, Lady Wheeler.

No doubt the Minister, like other Members of your Lordships' House, has read every page of these documents. I make no such claim, but I have tried to understand the impact assessments and have had the benefit of some very helpful briefing from the industry, especially the BIA.

It is very clear that, despite the expertise and professionalism of the MHRA and the industry, they have been left with ludicrously little time to master a massive amount of new detail and system change, particularly as many of the companies in this sector are SMEs. These SIs create a great deal of additional red tape and running costs. They have already taken funding and resources away from research and development, and, as the impact assessments show, this will continue into the future.

I start with the clinical trials statutory instrument and the assurances given by the noble Lord, Lord O'Shaughnessy—an ex-Minister for whom I have great respect and who has wisely removed himself from the scene. In a speech that he gave in July 2017, he said:

“In the event that it is not possible to reach a deal that secures ongoing, close collaboration between the UK and Europe, we will set up a regulatory system in the UK that protects the best interests of patients, and supports industry to grow and flourish. We will ensure that our system is robust, efficacious and does not impose any additional bureaucratic burdens”.

Fine words, but what we have before us today fails to meet those three guarantees that the noble Lord, Lord O'Shaughnessy, gave on behalf of the Government back in the heady days of July 2017.

Regulation 18 of the clinical trials SI will add another layer of red tape and runs totally counter to what I will call the “O'Shaughnessy assurances”. Specifically—here I quote the BIA briefing:

“Industry does not understand the need for the requirement for an additional UK-based quality assurance system to verify QP certification of investigational medicinal products (IMPs) imported from EU/EEA countries on the approved country list given that the clinical trial sponsor is responsible for ensuring the integrity of the IMP supply chain”.

Therefore, it is saying to the Government, “You've introduced something which is not necessary”.

It gets worse. I am told that the August 2018 government technical notice on the batch release of medicines and IMPs stated that the UK would unilaterally recognise EU batch release for IMPs. Therefore, despite the assurances given to the industry in 2017 and 2018, the Government have now added a new layer of red tape that will reduce the benefit for the sector of that batch release recognition. This, in turn, will impact adversely on the attractiveness of the UK as a location for clinical trials. Perhaps the Minister can explain to us and to the industry why there has been this last-minute change of policy.

I now turn to the human medicines SI and will address, first, the issue that I raised during debate on earlier SIs in Grand Committee—the start date for market exclusivity. It is proposed that market exclusivity

will start on the date of authorisation of the drug in the EU or in the UK, whichever is earlier. The Government claim that this will encourage companies to submit applications for innovative products to the UK as soon as possible. The BIA says something different. It says that many of its members take a totally different view from that of the Government and that that will delay market authorisation in the UK, thereby reducing company revenue because of a shorter period of exclusivity. This would also reduce the access of UK patients to innovative medicines. Perhaps the Minister can say why the industry's view has been rejected by the Government.

The impact assessment on this SI very honestly sets out a raft of reasons why a separate UK regulatory system will increase the costs of securing UK market authorisation for new drugs. These are not my words; they are in the impact assessment. The cumulative effect of these duplicated costs on pharmaceutical companies is likely to be considerable, as the MHRA makes abundantly clear. The assessment goes on to say:

“It is likely manufacturers would seek to recoup these additional regulatory costs through price increases, which would affect NHS budgeting and spending choices”.

The assessment also cites independent analysis suggesting that there could be delays in new, innovative medicines coming to the UK market once the UK has legislated to become a stand-alone regulator.

2.30 pm

The life sciences ecosystem has been a thriving one, especially the biotech part. Every month, 45 million packs of medicine move from the UK to the EU and 37 million packs come back the other way. The pharmaceutical sector invests more in R&D than any other sector: 20% of all business R&D. This is an industry with an annual turnover of £60 billion and exports of £30 billion. It employs 63,000 people with 24,000 jobs in R&D. A clunky regulatory system with extra costs and disincentives to innovation, which the Government are busily devising, puts this sector's future success at grave risk. It also damages patient access to new drugs and drives up NHS costs. The Government have made a hash of managing Brexit for the life sciences and this can only be made worse with a no-deal Brexit, as the impact assessments of these three SIs demonstrate.

This is a highly successful UK industry. If it is seriously damaged by Brexit, I want people in the future to know where the blame rests: with this Government.

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Wheeler, and the noble Lord, Lord Warner, for their valuable contributions to this debate. I take the opportunity once again to reassure the House that, as a Government, we are fully committed to a system of medicines and medical device regulation which intelligently balances patients' access to new, innovative and world-leading products. I reassure the noble Baroness that we will continue to work in close partnership with the EU. I stress again that the fundamentals of how medicines and medical devices

are regulated and how clinical trials operate will remain the same; I say this very clearly to the noble Lord. We have sought to maintain existing arrangements for the UK's regulatory system wherever possible rather than create new ones.

I want to answer a number of the questions put to me. At the heart of the questions raised by both the noble Baroness and the noble Lord was the issue of the regulator. I stress that the MHRA brings real expertise to many areas, including the licensing of medicines, pharmacovigilance and clinical trials regulations. This expertise already provides benefits to patients across the UK and the EU. As I said in my opening comments, the MHRA has over 30 years of knowledge as lead regulator on over 3,500 medicines on the EU market. The expertise of its licensing, devices, inspections, batch release and pharmacovigilance regime is globally recognised and respected. We want to ensure that this expertise and our shared experience continues to be of benefit to UK and to EU patients.

On medicines, the MHRA is globally recognised, as I said, for its experience and typically undertakes a significant proportion of EMA pharmacovigilance work and safety referrals. This is already a national route for the licensing of medicines in the UK and, where we collaborate with the EU over licensing, most products ultimately receive a UK rather than EU-level licence.

Clinical trials are managed nationally in the UK by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. This will remain the case in the event of no deal. The UK will continue to recognise existing approvals for both regulatory and ethics approval—the noble Baroness asked about that—and there will be no need to reapply. She also asked how we will ensure that false medicines do not enter the UK market. I reassure her that the UK's strict regulatory controls govern the sale, supply, manufacture, distribution and advertising of medicinal products. The potential harm of falsified medicines to patient health is taken seriously across the Government. Combating the real and present threat posed by falsified medicine products will continue to be a priority for the MHRA. The majority of the falsified medicines directive was implemented in 2013 and would remain in UK law even after a no-deal exit. The Government want to retain a close working relationship with the EU, as I have said, to ensure public health across the EU and UK.

The noble Baroness asked about MHRA skills and expertise in relation to any gaps. I have already indicated the MHRA's immense expertise, and this will not cease. We will continue to ensure that, if there are any gaps, they will be looked at carefully. She asked how the Government would use serious shortage powers in regulations to ensure medicines supply. She will be aware that the Human Medicines Regulations are made under the European Communities Act 1972. If we leave the UK without a deal, we can no longer make regulations under that Act. The amendments made by this SI are necessary so that, if we are faced with a serious shortage of medicines and the need arises to temporarily modify the Human Medicines Regulations to ensure that patients get their medicines, we can do so.

The department has well-established processes for managing and mitigating shortages in collaboration with manufacturers, suppliers, clinicians, the NHS and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. Temporary modifications to the regulations would be considered only where other options have been exhausted.

On the question of how we can ensure safe, effective medicines in the transition period, I say to the noble Baroness that provisions, including the transition provisions, have at their heart a recognition of the need for safe, effective medicines. The transitional provisions have been carefully developed with this in mind. While, wherever possible, they allow businesses time to adapt, this is not at the expense of safety, quality or efficacy. For example, wholesale dealers who import from the EEA will have two years to put in place responsible persons for import, but checks that qualified person certification has taken place will continue in the meantime.

The noble Baroness also asked about EU funding of clinical trials and participation. The UK will still be able to take part in multinational trials, as I said in my opening comments. The Government have previously confirmed that UK law will remain aligned as far as possible with the new EU clinical trials legislation, which is expected to apply from 2020. Of course, this will be subject to the usual parliamentary approvals.

Both the noble Baroness, Lady Wheeler, and the noble Lord, Lord Warner, asked about the supply of IMPs after exit. IMPs will continue to be supplied direct from the EU to UK sites as they are today and, as I have said, the UK will be able to participate in all multinational trials. The Government are actively working with organisations that run clinical trials to ensure continuity of supply of IMPs. We are also putting in place contingency plans including for access to the same prioritised shipping routes as are available for licensed medicines.

The noble Baroness asked about the review by my noble friend Lady Cumberlege and how these SIs will take account of the new arrangements. The MHRA has provided, and will continue to provide, all relevant information to the review. It has already made written and oral contributions. In the event of a no-deal exit, we will ensure that these regulations and their practical effect continue to form part of that process.

The noble Baroness also asked what plans and resources are in place for dealing with expanded roles for devices. I reassure her that there will not be any radical change in the MHRA's role in relation to devices. This will be an expansion of what the MHRA already does and, as I said in an earlier response, it has plans to build up its skilled resources.

The noble Lord asked about the industry's view on the market. There is currently a single EU-wide start date for data exclusivity, due to the reciprocal arrangements and other arrangements of centralised and decentralised procedures, which apply across the EU. Once the UK is no longer part of those arrangements, this single state would no longer apply automatically, and this has the potential to result in delays in new medicines being brought to the UK market.

Lord Warner: The Minister does not need to convince me; she needs to convince the industry. It is simply not convinced by the changes that have been introduced. These are the companies earning their living in this sector day to day. The Government have a lot of work to do to try to convince the industry that they have not damaged the exclusivity period for many of these biotech companies. They are the people who have done the briefing on this and the Government—not the Minister personally—have failed to convince them, just as they have failed to convince them by going back on the kind of assurances about no more bureaucracy that the noble Lord, Lord O'Shaughnessy, gave to the industry in July 2017.

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, I would like to think that I am trying to convince the noble Lord as well as the industry. I reassure him that we work closely with industry and take its views seriously. As I was saying, maintaining the start of data exclusivity as the date of first authorisation in the UK or EU should incentivise parallel applications to the EU and UK and thus help to mitigate any risk of delays in innovative products being brought to the UK for licensing. This is an appropriate way to address, through the powers in the EU withdrawal Act, something that would otherwise present a risk to public health in the UK. However, we have committed to reviewing this position and of course we will continue to work with industry on this issue.

There were a number of other questions; I will go through those very quickly to ensure that I have not missed anything. The noble Lord, Lord Warner, and the noble Baroness, Lady Wheeler, asked what assessment of impact on EU researchers and clinical trials there will be. The Government recognise the need for accessing highly skilled researchers and the clinical trials research delivery workforce. The Government have published our immigration White Paper and are working with stakeholders to ensure that, after exit, the system will support researchers and clinical trials. Of course we recognise that the clinical trials research delivery workforce is important.

I have a brief note on the comments from the noble Lord regarding industry. As I said in my opening comments, it is a priority for the Government to ensure that the UK continues to be a competitive destination for life sciences companies from around the world, in any Brexit scenario. The Government are committed to maintaining our world-renowned strength in science and research and plan to increase R&D expenditure to 2.4% of GDP by 2024. Since the referendum, we have seen many signs of industry's continued confidence in the UK. In 2017, we received the highest level of life sciences investment in Europe, and worldwide were second only to the US. In the same year, UK biotech initial public offerings raised twice as much money as in 2016. That is a strong vote of confidence.

I end by stating very clearly that the effect of these three sets of regulations is to ensure continuity in the area of medicines, medical devices and clinical trials in a no-deal EU exit. The department has sought to minimise any disruption to patients and industry; to

make sure that UK regulators can still protect public health; and to ensure that the UK's life sciences sector contributes, and continues to be a world leader in clinical research and the pharmaceutical sector. This legislation does not prevent future changes we may wish to make to ensure that the UK maintains a competitive regulatory environment and remains one of the best places in the world for science and innovation. With the assurances I have given, I hope that the House will approve these important SIs. I commend them to the House.

Motion agreed.

Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Motion to Approve

2.46 pm

Moved by Baroness Manzoor

That the draft Regulations laid before the House on 23 January be approved.

Relevant document: 16th Report from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee (Sub-Committee B)

Motion agreed.

Medical Devices (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Motion to Approve

2.47 pm

Moved by Baroness Manzoor

That the draft Regulations laid before the House on 24 January be approved.

Relevant document: 16th Report from the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee (Sub-Committee B)

Motion agreed.

International Women's Day

Motion to Take Note

2.47 pm

Moved by Baroness Williams of Trafford

That this House takes note of International Women's Day and the United Kingdom's role in advancing gender equality globally.

Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con): My Lords, it is wonderful that we have so many excellent speakers in this final, very important debate today. Many noble Lords have made transport arrangements, so I shall just say, in the nicest way possible, that it would be much appreciated if noble Lords could stick to the time allocated.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con): My Lords, it gives me great pleasure to open this International Women's Day debate—for the fourth year running, I think. International Women's Day provides us with the perfect opportunity to come together, to celebrate the remarkable achievements of women and to commemorate the great progress we have made and continue to make. Around the world today, women and men will be marking this celebratory occasion in various ways. There will be events in local communities, discussions in places of work, arts performances in schools and debates across countries, much like the one taking place today in your Lordships' House, and it is a privilege to be just one part of these celebrations.

We have come a long way in a short time and we should celebrate all that we have accomplished. Last year, in particular, was an outstanding year for women's progress, and I want to highlight some of our incredible achievements. We allocated £5 million of funding to mark the centenary of voting rights for women. This money funded over 300 projects that raised awareness of this crucial milestone and encouraged more women, in particular, to participate in democracy, building a diverse political system that reflects the nation it serves.

For example, the Courage Calls event built on the Ask Her to Stand model, featuring workshops hosted by parliamentary experts and discussions with serving MPs, and providing help and guidance for 350 women to get on that crucial first rung of the political ladder. I hope to see some of the women who participated enter Parliament as sitting MPs one day.

There was the Centenary Cities fund, allocated to seven towns and cities to celebrate their suffrage history. These cities hosted a range of exciting projects to celebrate as well as remember those individuals who helped to make votes for women a reality. Let me give your Lordships a taste of what was on offer. In Manchester, we had cycle rides through history, touching on the lives of some of the women who made important contributions to the cause of women's suffrage. In Nottingham we had banner-making workshops, encouraging people of all ages to celebrate the anniversary of the Representation of the People Act 1918. In Bristol we had the Black Women 100 event, which unearthed stories about the incredible women of colour who fought for the right to vote in the early 20th century. This is just the tip of the iceberg. I know that in Leeds, Bolton, Leicester and London there were hundreds, if not thousands, of other events, which took place as part of the celebrations.

Of course, we had the statue of Millicent Fawcett—the first statue of a woman to stand in Parliament Square—and the statue of Emmeline Pankhurst in my home city of Manchester. It was a huge privilege to be part of the unveiling, and what made it so special and so significant for me was the fact that my daughter was watching from the building opposite, where she works. I know she wished to work for her employer due to its proven track record on gender equality, which makes me incredibly proud of her. I am certain that all these statues will serve as a reminder to all us of the courage of our foremothers, and will inspire future generations of women and girls to come.

In November, we hosted Women MPs of the World. More than 100 female MPs from across the world participated, and we witnessed history as the House of Commons Chamber, for the first time ever, was filled solely with women. It was a herculean task to pull it off. I must pay tribute to the right honourable Member for Camberwell and Peckham. It started as her idea and evolved into a collaborative effort of two political parties, three government departments and three arm's-length bodies to fly in around 100 female MPs from around the world to participate in receptions, plenary sessions and workshops here in Westminster. It demonstrated the power the House has when we all pull together.

Last year's work has left a lasting legacy that will undoubtedly provide greater opportunities and influence for women in our society. But the fight for equality did not stop last year. We need to carry forward the momentum from the centenary year to make sure that our progress towards gender equality does not stall.

We know that inequality still persists across the world. Globally, one in three girls or women has been beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime. Every two minutes a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth. Over 200 million women living in 30 countries have undergone female genital mutilation. In the UK, we know that women are much more likely to have time out for caring, with lasting impacts on pay and progression. Nearly 90% of those not working due to caring for home and family are women. The gender pay gap still stands at 17.9%. Until we have true economic, social and gender parity, we will never be equal.

This year's theme for International Women's Day is "Balance for Better". With that in mind, I want to look to the future. I want to talk about what the Government are doing to ensure we have better balance in our society and how we are delivering for women and girls.

Yesterday, the Government published the refreshed violence against women and girls strategy, which sets out how we are going further and faster in our response to these terrible crimes. Much has changed in the three years since the *Ending Violence against Women and Girls* strategy was published. We have a better understanding of the effects on victims and have seen increased public awareness through the #MeToo and Time's Up campaigns, which is welcome.

The refreshed strategy will implement a review of the criminal justice response to rape and serious sexual violence, which is crucial to ensuring that victims and survivors see the justice they so desperately need. I welcome increased reporting of these crimes, which shows that more victims have the confidence to come forward, but we must ensure that the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the response through the courts are as robust and effective as can be. We will also develop guidance for providers and commissioners on best practice in supporting LGBT victims of VAWG, as well as reviewing our national statement of expectations to ensure that VAWG services delivered locally are as effective as they can be. Sadly, violence is something that touches many of our lives. We must do all we can

[**BARONESS WILLIAMS OF TRAFFORD**]

across government, working with statutory agencies and specialist third-sector organisations, to support victims and bring perpetrators to justice.

Later this spring, we will publish our gender equality and economic empowerment strategy, setting out our plans to address the persistent gender-based barriers that women—and men—face across the country at every stage of their lives. The strategy will focus on four key themes: entry and progression in the workplace, especially for those far from the labour market or in low-paid, low-skilled work; optimal choice over parental leave and childcare; economic well-being in later life; and attitudes and social norms about the roles that men and women play.

My right honourable friend the Minister for Women and Equalities shared her emerging thinking about the strategy with a wide range of stakeholders on Monday this week. She set out that a key theme will be tackling the financial fragility that impacts on some vulnerable women and girls. As a compelling example of this, she announced that she will be convening an expert cross-sectoral task force to find sustainable ways to address period poverty in the UK, along with UK aid support for projects tackling period poverty and stigma globally.

The gender pay gap reporting deadline for year two is less than a month away. Our world-leading legislation meant that, for the first time last year, over 10,000 employers reported their gender pay gap, providing an unprecedented level of transparency, driving board-level discussions and pushing employers to take real action to close the gap. In fact, Bloomberg liked our model so much it has integrated our key measures into its gender equality index for investors.

Reporting is just the start; it is crucial that employers use their gender pay gap data to identify the barriers to women's recruitment and progression, and take action to break down these barriers. We had 100% compliance last year and we expect the same this year. We saw the gender pay gap fall to its lowest level ever of 17.9%, but it will take until 2052 at this rate—

Baroness Thornton (Lab): We will not be here any more.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: No, we will not—to eradicate it completely in the UK, and much longer globally. We have to do better.

We have committed £5 million in funding to help people return to work after time out for caring and to find jobs that use their valuable skills and experience. In addition to the initial £5 million fund we established for returners in 2017, a further £500,000 has been provided to support those with additional barriers to participating in the labour market. This may include people with complex needs or multiple barriers, such as substance abuse or homelessness. We have gone even further, and an additional £100,000 of funding has been announced to support those people with little or no work history. We have also launched best practice guidance and a toolkit to help employers run effective returner programmes. We urge them to make the most of these publicly available resources.

Gender equality is a global issue. I recently attended a gathering in Spain of Ministers from across Europe. While we are leaving the European Union, we are clear that we will continue to work with partners in Europe and across the world to ensure that women and girls have the same rights and opportunities as their male counterparts.

I conclude by saying again that I am proud to participate in today's debate with so many staunch advocates of gender equality. I am proud to be part of this Government, and it is an honour to be part of the work we are doing and will continue to do to fight for gender equality across the UK and the world. We are making great progress and it is only right that we celebrate how far we have come. Now, all I ask of you is to keep working together, especially in these challenging times, to think about how we can balance for better, and how we can ensure that gender equality becomes a reality sooner rather than later. I beg to move.

2.59 pm

Baroness Gale (Lab): My Lords—and Baronesses—I thank the Minister for bringing this debate before us. It is as she feels: it is a privilege to be speaking in this debate, albeit late on a Thursday afternoon as last business. Perhaps we could have a much better time for our debate next year. This year's theme is "Balance for Better" and as we consider the UK's role in advancing gender equality globally, we must face up to the challenges that remain so as to tip the scales, which are currently weighted towards men. Whether it is about intimidation in public life, gender-based violence or equal pay, only by tackling those issues can a truly better balance be found.

Increasing the number of women in public life is about improving decisions and outcomes—and, more importantly, having our elected institutions look like the people they represent. According to the United Nations, only 24% of all national parliamentarians are women. In the UK, for example, 32% of the Members of the House of Commons are women, while the figure for the House of Lords is 26%, for the Welsh Assembly 47%, for the Scottish Parliament 35% and, in Northern Ireland, 32%. I am proud to say that the Welsh Assembly is the best in the United Kingdom, and that if we can do it in Wales we can do it anywhere. That is a challenge to the rest of the country.

The voice of women in the UK was lost when the coalition Government disbanded the Women's National Commission in 2010. Although the Government said at that time that its work would be taken in house, with the Government Equalities Office having the responsibility, nothing is now heard from it. It cannot possibly be doing the work that the WNC was carrying out. Can the Minister tell the House what is happening in this field? The WNC was an asset to the United Kingdom, comprising over 650 women's organisations and providing different Governments over a 40-year period with a great link to women. If this Government are not prepared to establish a new WNC, I can guarantee that the next Labour Government will do so. We will provide a strong, independent voice for women's organisations in the United Kingdom; it will be women's voice to Government on a whole range of issues.

Women in politics face an extraordinary amount of abuse online and offline, partly because they speak up but also simply because they are women. Online abuse can affect women's human rights to safety and freedom of expression. Social media companies must do more to protect female users, but this abuse undoubtedly comes from the sexism that still exists in our society and that can manifest in even more violent ways. Sadly, many women in public life have been victims of this violence. I pay tribute to my former colleague, Jo Cox, who was killed just because she was serving the people of her constituency. We think of her today. As we call for more women to enter public life, we must always remember those who have paid the ultimate price.

When talking about the UK's role in advancing gender equality globally, we cannot ignore the biggest domestic issue of the day. It is difficult to talk about the idea of a global Britain while we leave our most important international institution, the European Union. The EU has been credited with advancing women's rights and gender equality. According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Brexit could lead to equality protections falling behind those in the EU, as well as existing ones being removed. The Government continue to leave no deal on the table, which would be catastrophic not only for the economy but for equality. The Government's own impact assessment revealed that no deal would leave the UK's economy up to 9% smaller. The Women's Budget Group said that such a downturn would disproportionately impact on women. However, there would be many other consequences. A no-deal Brexit would leave hard-earned women's rights at the whim of future Governments, without the protection of an international court. A hard border in Ireland could mean women travelling to access safe abortions facing increased checks, costs and delays. Will the Minister explain how women will be protected in the event of an economic downturn resulting from a no-deal Brexit?

Another dividing line between the sexes remains gender economic inequality. Eurostat ranks the UK as having the fifth worst gender pay gap in the EU, 2.77% higher than the OECD average. The Office for National Statistics found that the gender pay gap among all UK employees is 18%. More must be done to close this gap. The Minister spoke about this in her opening remarks but I do not think we can wait until 2050, I think it was, when we will not be around to see that. Let us hope we can get a move on.

Gender-based violence remains a major public health issue and a violation of women's human rights. Women fleeing conflict are left in extremely vulnerable positions. The development charity International Rescue Committee states that,

"girls living in crisis-affected communities ... are at increased risk of gender-based violence ... including sexual violence and exploitation, intimate partner violence and early and forced marriage".

The UK must lead the global effort to protect and empower these women but we must make sure that this protection extends to women at home. It is a well-known fact that, on average, two women are killed every week in England and Wales by a partner or ex-partner. Unfortunately, the Government's austerity programme and the cuts to funding for women's refuges

have left many women with no safe place to go. Women's Aid found that one in six referrals to a refuge were declined, owing to a lack of space or capacity to support the survivor.

I met a remarkable woman recently: Charlotte Kneer, who is CEO of a women's refuge. She is a survivor of domestic abuse and took part in a Channel 4 documentary on the women's refuge she now runs. It was called "Safe at Last: Inside a Women's Refuge" and it was the first time such a film has been made. Charlotte allowed Channel 4 access to the refuge mainly to highlight the lack of funding but also to show what work is carried out. The staff were absolutely amazing and so dedicated, but they are very worried that it may have to close owing to a lack of funding. I recommend that noble Lords watch this documentary and, if possible, that it be shown in Parliament. I would be really happy to facilitate that. Will the Minister meet Charlotte to hear directly from her of the difficulties that women's refuges are undergoing? The Government need to ensure that local government has enough funds to support women's refuges, so that no woman is turned away. When a woman is turned away and must return to an abusive relationship, she is risking her life.

I look forward to the domestic abuse Bill coming to your Lordships' House and I welcome the Government establishing a Joint Committee to consider it. The Minister has reassured me that when the Bill is passed, the Government will ratify the Istanbul convention. If so, they will need to provide all the resources necessary to ensure the work can be carried out effectively. Can she explain how the role of the domestic abuse commissioner will operate in practice, and how do the Government plan to guarantee the commissioner's independence?

A better balance of women's voices, ideas, rights and protections and a fairer distribution of wealth, as per equal pay, can only make the world a better place for women and girls. Gender inequality continues to hold women and girls back. We cannot allow women to be short-changed in the workplace. We cannot allow women to lose their jobs in a no-deal Brexit. We cannot allow violence to be used as a weapon against women and girls and, when we consider the UK's role in advancing gender equality globally, we should not settle for anything less than the UK becoming a leader in equality. I give the House an assurance that that will be the aim of a Labour Government, and I look forward to the day when there is a "Balance for Better" in the lives of girls and women globally.

3.10 pm

Baroness Hussein-Ece (LD): My Lords, I thank the Minister for introducing this important debate and pay tribute to the Government's work in advancing women's equality and rights globally, building on the work of successive Governments and the incredible work that has taken place around the world. It is a pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Gale, and I pay tribute to all the work she has done as well.

I come to this as somebody who has been involved in gender equality and working with women, particularly women from ethnic minority communities, for many decades. I founded the first domestic violence project

[BARONESS HUSSEIN-ECE]

for Turkish, Kurdish and Middle Eastern women 25 years ago, and I am proud that it is still going from strength to strength. Many of the women who initially came there for support have gone on to become empowered women, much more in control of their lives, and to help other women. That has been something that has followed down the track and been successful.

My contribution today is on the public discourse on black and minority ethnic women, particularly Muslim women. I want to touch on this because I have become increasingly concerned that narratives and stereotypes persist that Muslim women are either victims—subjugated, oppressed, controlled by their families and unable to speak English—or, at the same time, blamed for bringing up children who become radicalised. My contribution may not be popular but it needs to be said, because I have become increasingly uncomfortable. I have been at various events this week with other women from Muslim backgrounds—younger, empowered and educated women—who are fed up with this narrative that persists.

For example, whenever there are Questions in your Lordships' House that refer to Muslim women, they are inevitably about forced marriage, FGM or child brides. They are never about anything positive. I recognise that these things exist, but this is not the only dimension in which we should look at women from these backgrounds. We are missing the opportunity to support and empower Muslim women if we stereotype them and put them in a box of oppressed women. I come from a Muslim background. My mother was a Muslim woman and I can tell you nobody ever controlled my mother; she barely took suggestions, let alone instructions. That is the line of women I come from and I know many women like that from other communities.

I want to touch on some facts. British Muslim women face various layers of discrimination. They are women, they are an ethnic minority and they are Muslim. A 2015 study found that 35% of Muslim women are employed, compared to 69% of all women, but we are told that Muslim women are not allowed to work. But they do want to work. Some 16% of Muslim women are always looking for work—that number has probably gone up—compared to 5% of the rest of the female population. Looking at the figures, Muslim girls and women are doing extremely well in exams and schools, and going on to further education. They are pushing at the door, wanting to get into more professional jobs, from which they have traditionally been excluded. They want to be part of, and integrate into, British society. Let us accept that that is what we all are; I am one of those who is part of British society. There is no other, and Muslim women need our support to reach their empowerment.

Many factors directly impact on Muslim women. Forty-six per cent of the Muslim population live in the most deprived areas of the country. That has an impact and we must recognise it. There is strong evidence that Muslim men and women are being held back in the workplace by Islamophobia, racism and discrimination, and they are less likely to be in full-time work, not for want of trying.

I was looking at recent research from the Government's Social Mobility Commission. Professor Jacqueline Stevenson of Sheffield Hallam University, which led the research, said:

“Muslims are being excluded, discriminated against or failed, at all stages of their transition from education to employment ... Taken together, these contributory factors have profound implications for social mobility”.

Academics cite similar problems. Students face stereotypes and low expectations from teachers. There are fewer positive role models in the classroom. Young Muslims routinely fear becoming targets of bullying and harassment and feel forced to work, as one put it, “10 times as hard” as their white counterparts to get on and be accepted.

I come to headscarves, because this is such a big issue. There is an obsession with what women wear. Women wearing headscarves face particular discrimination. I do not know why what a woman wears should be of such consequence, particularly to men, but apparently it is. It is a controversial and emotive subject, and it is sad that the previous Foreign Secretary likened Muslim women in niqabs to “letterboxes” and “bank robbers”, which led to an increase in abuse and attacks on women. That was unfortunate.

We need our political and civic leaders to act responsibly in the public discourse. We need to stop this narrative that Muslim women are all victims who need saving or figures of fun. Let us not tolerate this casual racism. We need more positive role models, and it is very positive, as the Minister mentioned, that we now have eight Muslim women MPs in the other place. That is a record number and it is great, but we need more. We need more here as well. We need more BME teachers. We need more role models, because schools and pupils are losing out on the talents and skills of BME teachers, who are unable to advance their careers.

As I said, however, women and girls are doing better. If we value the contribution of all women in our society and are serious about BME women and men feeling valued and integrating into our society, we must create a level playing field, and dispel the outdated narrative that women from different communities are all oppressed and simply need saving.

I shall close with this. BME women are now leading in the media, the arts, business and sport. I meet so many talented young women, who have come here from around the country and are doing so well. Let us celebrate this and ensure that these women's voices are heard, celebrated, valued and encouraged. The “Balance for Better”, the theme of International Women's Day, can be achieved only with the efforts of men and women in positions of influence to give all women a strong voice in our society.

3.18 pm

The Lord Bishop of Portsmouth: My Lords, I rise with some caution, conscious of the considerable risks as a man speaking on International Women's Day. But dwelling in ambiguity is perhaps the lot of those occupying these Benches. I am acutely aware, for instance, that as a Lord spiritual speaking on defence matters, I interest myself in swords and in ploughshares.

It was sporting those two hats that I recently watched the RAF's current recruitment advertisement. Its images depict the reality of women in a service in which every role is open to everyone. We see women readying themselves for combat, as engineers and pilots. The voiceover, alas, articulates a more familiar reality, in which women are told, predominantly by men, that their concerns centre on lip gloss, skincare and the contents of their wardrobe. The disparity between voice and image strikingly expresses the distance travelled, but also the many miles we have yet to traverse. I sensed some of this while listening to this week's Questions and debates in your Lordships' House. We have reflected this week on FGM, on consent, on pay and abuse, on how much has been done, on how much we want to do and on how much there is to do.

I cannot avoid reflecting that the same is true of the Church. Next Tuesday sees the 25th anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Church of England. The fruits of the hundreds of women who have followed their call are all around us, including in this House, with the right reverend Prelates the Bishop of Gloucester, the Bishop of Newcastle and the Bishop of London sitting on these Benches—shortly to be joined by the Bishop of Derby. In the College of Bishops, women represented around half of appointments made between 2014 and 2018. Among the clergy, I was particularly struck by the comments from a first-year ordinand, Hannah Barr, at a recent anniversary service at Lambeth Palace. She said that, in preparing for priestly ministry, she stood on the shoulders of giants, inspired by the first great generations of women in ordained ministry. They have made the Church better; they have made society better; they were, and are, pioneers.

We can look to the promise of the years to come. At Ripon College Cuddesdon, where I serve as chair of governors, half the academic staff are women. On Cuddesdon's different pathways to ordination, we see a clear majority of women. The same is true of a subset of that group, the ordinands on my own diocese's training programme, the Portsmouth Pathway. That pattern is replicated more widely.

And yet. Your Lordships might have noticed that I refrained from describing women in ordained ministry as "women priests", nor would I describe female colleagues on these Benches as "women bishops". That risks suggesting that there are priests and bishops—and then there are women priests and women bishops. No. There are priests and there are bishops, all of whom have been obedient to their call. Similarly on numbers, a majority in training does not translate into equality. We are decades from that. Even at that distant point, much will depend on who sits where.

Our culture, in the Church and in society, has some distance to travel before we can confidently say that we are inclusive. As one ordinand, Jo Winn-Smith, put it, equality happens only when men start doing what women do, not when women do what men do.

We have much about which we must be humble, perhaps even penitent. I wonder therefore whether this is a moment for celebration; it is rather more an occasion to mark, to take note.

I end with this thought. Christians, or more exactly theologians, are fond of the word "eschatology". I risk the ire of those same theologians for grossly simplifying a complex notion, but we might say that eschatology is interested in progress towards the end time and anticipates that time—the time when all things are made new. That is a helpful concept for today's debate. There is progress, yes, but we have much more progress to make before we reach one particular eschatological moment. That is our arrival in another country, a country in which we find it no longer necessary to mark International Women's Day or the anniversary of the ordination of women. In that other country, equality is so embedded in our lives, our practices and our very beliefs that what is right is what is normal, unexceptional and natural. We are still far from that New Jerusalem.

3.24 pm

Baroness Anelay of St Johns (Con): My Lords, it is clear that many women around the world still lack equal rights and empowerment opportunities. They face discrimination and violence. As parliamentarians, what can we do individually to change that? One way is to be an active member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. All of us here today are automatically members of that by virtue of being parliamentarians. The IPU feels strongly about achieving gender equality, recognising the link between democracy and the equal participation of men and women in parliaments and civil society.

Travelling overseas with the British group of the IPU or taking part here in the inward programmes for overseas parliamentarians gives us all the opportunity to work for gender equality. We can demonstrate the advantages of the progress already made here in the UK and support the work of DfID in developing countries. We have made good progress in the UK, but we have much more to learn—we can do that—from other countries to make gender equality a reality worldwide.

In the February recess, I took part in the IPU visit to Ethiopia, together with the noble Baroness, Lady Barker, and Pauline Latham MP. Our objective was to strengthen the relationship between the UK and Ethiopia at a time of political change and reform. In his first year in office, the new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, has appointed women to 50% of Cabinet positions, appointed the first ever female President, appointed a woman as Speaker of the House of the Federation and put a woman at the head of the Supreme Court.

Despite these changes and Abiy's determination to carry out widespread reforms rapidly, many worry that they will not sufficiently address the deep-seated bias against women in the country, which is near the bottom of the UN rankings on gender equality in sub-Saharan Africa. DfID's annual budget in Ethiopia is £300 million. That is its largest budget in Africa and its second-largest worldwide.

The Ethiopian Government have used international aid and their own resources to lift millions out of poverty over the past decade, but it remains a country with enormous development needs. It still has high rates of chronic childhood malnutrition and maternal mortality. That, combined with female genital mutilation and early marriage, leads to acute gender inequalities.

[BARONESS ANELAY OF ST JOHNS]

I was therefore keen to learn about DfID's work on education and health. Access to both transforms the lives of girls and women. We visited a UK aid-supported elementary school and health centre built on the same site in Ada'a district. One of the barriers to girls' attendance at school has been a lack of access to water and toilet facilities. DfID's water and sanitation strategy is vital. DfID also gives financial and technical support to the health centre to procure essential maternal and child health medicines, including vaccines and family planning aids. The centre is staffed by a clinical officer, nurses, midwives and auxiliary health workers, and there is an ambulance to bring mothers to the health centre to give birth.

Against this background of genuine improvement in reducing maternal and child mortality, much more needs to be done. At our DfID pre-brief in Addis, Pauline Latham asked the officials what work was currently being done by DfID to eradicate FGM. She had visited Ethiopia a few years ago with the Commons Select Committee and seen DfID's work on FGM projects. It was having some success. But the surprising answer to her question was that DfID officials were not aware of any UK development aid-assisted projects on FGM in Ethiopia now. I hope that that is not the case. Can my noble friend the Minister outline the current work of DfID or DfID-funded projects to eradicate FGM in Ethiopia? If that work really has stopped, why is that, given that FGM is still so prevalent?

DfID's programme in Ethiopia remains vital to the country's development and for improving the prospects for women and girls. We can do much to assist progress there towards gender equality, but at the same time we can learn how we can make even better progress ourselves and practise what we preach.

3.29 pm

Baroness Jenkin of Kennington (Con): My Lords, this time last year we held two debates. In addition to our regular one on International Women's Day, the other, in February, was around the role of women in public life, recognising not only the centenary of the Representation of the People Act but also 60 years since women were first made life Peers. As my noble friend said in her introductory remarks, last year was a big year for those of us involved with and concerned about encouraging and supporting more women into public life. Looking back, it feels a bit like two steps forward and one step back—perhaps even one step forward and two steps back.

There were many highlights of the year. We marched in the usual International Women's Day march, but a very special memory were the processions in June when tens of thousands of women and girls, wearing violet, green and white scarves, came together in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London as part of a celebratory mass participation artwork. It was a beautiful day and a very joyous event. The unveiling of the Millicent Fawcett statue in Parliament Square was another highlight. I was lucky enough to be in a front-row seat and, with our second woman Prime Minister unveiling the statue, we all felt uplifted and hopeful about the future. The summer was full of Pankhurst parties and EqualTeas—rather too many cups of tea and cakes, to be honest.

November saw a great #AskHerToStand event, with around 250 MPs inviting women from their constituencies to an inspiring day at Westminster. A huge effort, it was organised by 50:50 Parliament and supported by the Fawcett Society, of which I am now pleased to be a trustee. As my noble friend Lady Williams said, Parliament hosted an international Women MPs of the World conference where, for the first time ever, elected women from more than 100 countries across the world were welcomed to sit on our green Benches by senior women MPs from all sides of the House, sharing both best practice and challenges.

The Centenary Action Group, which has organised a coalition of more than 40 women's groups, has become a powerful lobby organisation, and 50:50 Parliament, the only organisation committed to the simple aim of a balanced Parliament, run by the indefatigable Frances Scott, has been a game changer for those of us from all parties campaigning to get more women into Parliament. She runs it on a shoe-string but with incredible energy. I urge my noble friend to look inside the pockets of the GEO to see whether some funding might be made possible for 50:50. It would help to increase its capacity and outreach work.

All this activity and a full year of asking women to stand has culminated in a substantial increase in the number of women starting their journeys towards public life, probably in all political parties but certainly for us in the Conservative Party, where I understand that between 400 and 500 additional women are now in the pipeline. In August, our Conservative Party chairman, Brandon Lewis, announced his ambition to increase the number of women on the candidates list from around 30% to 50%. He admitted that this would not be easy but confirmed that he personally would work tirelessly to make it happen. I look forward to working with him to achieve this increase.

So a year of activity and optimism—and yet. Is it two steps forward, or one step forward and two back? The vile and violent assault on women parliamentarians, especially in another place, has increased exponentially. This puts women off even starting their journey. I recently heard of one elected woman in a senior role in public life who is being harassed by a group of men who resent her position and are doing what they can to drive her out. Apparently, she is a “difficult woman” who needs “taking down a peg or two”. Really? Nothing about doing the job competently or well—just what appears to be good, old-fashioned misogyny. Both Labour and the Conservative Party have lost women MPs to the Independent Group, taking us in the Conservative Party back down to below 20% of MPs. To put it another way, four out of five Conservative MPs are still men. This is disappointing.

But there are events and organisations to celebrate this year. The Conservative Women's Organisation, the oldest political women's organisation in the world—formerly chaired by my noble friends Lady Seccombe, Lady Anelay, Lady Byford and Lady Hodgson, inspirational role models all—starts its centenary celebrations at this weekend's conference. We look forward to the unveiling of Nancy Astor's statue in Plymouth to commemorate the centenary of her election as the first woman MP, and a Conservative to boot.

The 90th anniversary of the first general election with full voting equality will fall in May. The credit for that, as I am sure noble Lords will be aware, lies with Stanley Baldwin. In 1927, he said:

“democracy is incomplete and lop-sided until it is representative of the whole people, and the responsibility rests alike on men and women”.

In 1928, he extended that franchise to all women over 21, overcoming strong opposition in his Cabinet, led by Mr Churchill, who thought that “flappers” would find socialism irresistible. Mrs Pankhurst, a friend of Baldwin, who was adopted as official Conservative candidate for Whitechapel in 1926, sadly died before the 1929 election, at which she would have proudly displayed the Tory colours.

Finally, I have a word of advice for those considering starting their journey into this building. If you do not buy a ticket, you will not win the lottery. Get going. Who knows where it may take you?

3.35 pm

Baroness Donaghy (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for initiating this debate. One of the key ingredients for advancing gender equality is leadership, and I believe that the noble Baroness has shown that in spades.

When I first started on the road to try to advance gender equality, more than 50 years ago, I hoped we might have gone further down the road than we have. We seem to have won the right to work twice as hard as men, all the while multitasking—the right to be knackered. I want to talk about two things. The first is that macroeconomics do not take women’s contributions sufficiently into account. Secondly, I want to give examples of how inspiring women keep me going.

Almost all macroeconomics is male based. Women’s unpaid care work is a crucial and often neglected consideration in the design of economic policies and reforms. One report of a conference run by the Women’s Budget Group highlights how unpaid work,

“unjustly absorbs economic shocks and often compensates for austerity measures”.

In other words, it is women who pick up the pieces during periods of austerity, and the Government must accept some responsibility for this. The disproportionate burden of unpaid work on women and girls creates a barrier to access to decent jobs and promotion prospects.

There may be more women in employment than ever before, but many have been displaced from secure public sector jobs into temporary work, the informal economy or underemployment. This increases their financial insecurity and widens both the wage gap and the gender gap. Importantly, many have few opportunities to participate in decisions that directly or indirectly affect their living conditions and those of their families and communities.

All economic policy changes should be subject to a gender equality impact assessment. The failure to take account of the full range of contributions made by women means that the impact of austerity measures is not taken fully into account. Local government is a case in point. Central government funding fell by nearly 50% between 2010 and 2018, and this has had a devastating effect on local services mainly used by

women: adult social care, domestic violence refuges, childcare. It has also led to more job losses for women in public services.

In the last year, there have been two reports from UN experts highlighting the devastating impact austerity is having on women’s rights. Combine the austerity measures with the obscene gap between rich and poor and the result is disillusionment with traditional social democratic parties and fertile ground for extremism or populism or both.

I turn to how women in leadership can be a vital element in encouraging and motivating others. I have time to mention only three. Watching Julia Gillard, when she was Prime Minister of Australia, in total control at the Dispatch Box in Canberra—and yet finding time to see me immediately after Question Time—was inspiring. She is now leading global education projects and inspiring many more.

Su Patel from USDAW, the shopworkers’ union, who chaired this year’s TUC Women’s Conference, has said:

“We are underrepresented in decision-making structures ... and overrepresented in poverty statistics”.

Gina Martin told the *Sunday Mirror*:

“I’m just an ordinary working-class girl from the North”

and, she went on, “if I can change the law, anyone can”. As many noble Lords will know, she was at a festival when someone photographed under her skirt. She reported it to the police, who told her it was not a crime. When she posted a picture of the two perpetrators on Facebook, she was told to take it down because it was harassment. She felt so violated that she started an online petition to make upskirting—as it is called—illegal. She said:

“Eighteen months later, I watched the law being changed at the House of Lords, tears streaming down my face. People who take violating pictures up skirts can now be sent to prison for up to two years”.

That is a case of actions speaking louder than words. Let us renew ourselves for another year of fighting for gender equality.

3.40 pm

Baroness Seccombe (Con): My Lords, each year in this debate many noble Lords speak of their experiences and share uplifting stories. They also speak of traumatic situations and practices they have witnessed around the world—and very troubling some of those events are. I thought that this year I would concentrate on the good fortune that we have as women living at this time in this country, and be thankful for the changes that have taken and are taking place.

When I was first married and became involved in politics in the 1950s, life was very different from today. Many married women did not take paid employment, for various reasons; some institutions did not employ married women, and some women felt that, as their income was added to their husband’s, there was no point—he paid tax on it and, as noble Lords can imagine, difficulties often arose. Women were unable to open a building society account or to buy any item on hire purchase without their husband signing the document. I believe that one of the most important

[BARONESS SECCOMBE]

emancipations for women has been the implementation of legislation in 1990 for the independent taxation of husband and wife, changing a woman from being a chattel, and in the process often saving many a woman from being chained to an abusive husband.

Women began to take a greater interest and role in public life, and over the years flexed their muscles to improve the lives of women in the workplace. Despite legislation, the gender gap has still not been eliminated and, as we heard from the Minister, it is likely to be a long time before it can be. It can at best be assessed as work in progress.

I am proud that the Conservative Party has had two women Prime Ministers, setting the aspiration for all women candidates. Baroness Young blazed the trail as Leader of this House nearly 40 years ago. I understand that we must set the goal of equal male and female representation in the other place, and we are very slowly getting there. I believe that preferential treatment is not the way forward. There are, however, so many well-qualified women out there who should be elected, and we must continue to promote and assist them. Headway is being made. Women2Win is a brilliant association, and my noble friend Lady Jenkin of Kennington deserves much praise for being an inspiration to us all by always working for others.

Brexit has absorbed our nation and taken some matters of urgency off the agenda for now. We must resolve Brexit and return to normality so that we can deal with our national problems. There is so much to do, but we will get there.

In this debate we have heard of the dire situations of many women across the world who know what real poverty is. They value education for their children and will go to all possible lengths to get them there. I congratulate the Government on giving us a buoyant economy so that this country can spend 0.7% of its GNP funding aid to enable developing countries to grow their economies.

Last year we celebrated the centenary of the first partial emancipation of women, and I am so happy that we were able to ensure that Emmeline Pankhurst remains in her rightful place close to Parliament. Along with her colleagues, she was certainly someone who fought constantly throughout her life for the status of women. She and all of them have been an inspiration. She certainly deserves to have such recognition.

In no way am I complacent, but I believe that once a year it is right to be grateful for the progress across the world and to be thankful for our own situation in which we take so much for granted. During this next year we will face an exciting future and, I hope, a time when we will all come together and be proud of our country and what we stand for. I hope we will be an example that others, particularly developing nations, will feel they wish to emulate.

3.45 pm

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer (LD): My Lords, there are some debates in your Lordships' House that are remarkable by their gender divide. Today's debate has 35 speakers, of whom about 85% are women; I do not think it is any the poorer for that,

and I am honoured to take part in it and see many whom I have come to regard as friends on other Benches.

When we have a debate in the House on defence, weapons or war—

Lord West of Spithead (Lab): My Lords, perhaps I may—

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: I was going to mention the noble Lord in a minute. Would he wait?

Lord West of Spithead: I will wait until I am mentioned.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: When we have a debate in this House on defence, weapons or war, the inverse is true. At a political level, even in 2019, wars, weapons and even navies—the noble Lord, Lord West, is representing the Navy, as ever—are regarded as a man's area. Nowhere is this starker than in the area of nuclear weapons.

Lord West of Spithead: Part of the reason why there are not more men here—this has been said already—is that the debate was unfortunately timed for a Thursday. I would have spoken, but I cannot be here at the end of the debate. On the Navy, 30 years ago I carried out a study into the employment of women at sea; it was remarkable at that stage how women were considered as nothing. I said that they should go to sea, but it still took time for that to happen.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: I thank the noble Lord for his contribution. He slightly proves my point.

Yet nuclear weapons, including our own Trident system, specifically target civilians; they target cities and women and children as a so-called deterrent.

I will use my time today to ask the Minister whether there is a correlation between the lack of women involved and the fact that not only have nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament talks largely stalled, but we are now likely to be heading into a new nuclear arms race. That truly terrifying prospect was highlighted by the noble Lord, Lord Howell of Guildford, when he talked of the evidence that the International Relations Committee had heard that,

“we were on the verge of a terrifying new arms race and the possible spread of tactical nuclear weapons, and that the limits on nuclear warfare that the world has hung on to since Hiroshima are now slipping away and could leave our cities in smoking ruins”.—[*Official Report*, 27/2/19; col. 253.]

Your Lordships will remember that back in 2000 the UN passed Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, to encourage greater female representation on disarmament bodies. That has not happened to the degree that was hoped for then. One of the women to see this first hand is the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Her Excellency Ms Izumi Nakamitsu. As frequently the only woman at high-level talks, she says:

“More perspectives could help to find new approaches to break stalemate”.

Many noble Lords will have heard of the Doomsday Clock, which moves nearer to midnight according to the threats. Right now it is at two minutes to midnight because of nuclear war and climate change.

I am sure that noble Lords will agree that, the moment you have children, the existential threats to the future take on a new urgency. Back in the early 1980s, when the US was planning to, and did, put nuclear-armed cruise missiles in the UK, the women of Greenham Common were so moved—Helen John in particular, who was their leader—that they raised public awareness, putting the issue firmly in front of politicians and the public. Taking part in the “ring the base” at Easter made me aware of the power of women acting together to address this terrifying threat to humanity. We need that power again. Of course we need it for climate change, and Greta Thunberg is doing a great job with the much younger generation; Spring Uprising in Bristol is looking at that. However, the threat from nuclear weapons has not taken on the urgency that it needs to prompt the same sort of action among the young.

We need nuclear weapon use or possession banned. It will not happen in my lifetime, but the first step was taken with last year's UN ban treaty, which was signed by 122 countries—sadly, not the UK. When it is ratified, it will make the possession or use of nuclear weapons illegal. As we start on the first steps of this process, if humanity and the world as we know it are to enter the 22nd century, we need women to be far more involved. Men have not had the impetus or the will to achieve nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Women are good negotiators; we are realists and we invest emotionally in the future. Women must become involved in the nuclear disarmament effort at every level—and fast.

3.51 pm

Baroness Bull (CB): My Lords, it is a great pleasure to speak among so many inspirational women—and men—as we mark International Women's Day. It is always a privilege to rise in this Chamber, but never more so than in this debate today. Given the barriers women face to participation in both political and leadership roles, I am acutely aware of the privilege we hold as women Peers within your Lordships' House.

Female representation in Parliament is just one of many advances for women over the last century. Educational attainment, workforce participation, control of reproduction, and anti-discrimination laws are all evidence of the scale of change, here in the UK and in countries around the globe. But all these gains have failed to translate into equality in terms of leadership. Across the world, women make up just a quarter of parliamentarians, news media leaders and judges. Just 15% of corporate board seats are occupied by women and only in healthcare, education and the non-profit sector does female corporate leadership exceed 40%. Change is happening, but it is at a snail's pace. A lack of consistent data makes global progress hard to track, but analysis of LinkedIn data found that over the decade to 2017, the proportion of female leaders increased by just 2% across 12 industry sectors.

Therefore, despite all the advances in gender equality that we celebrate, it is clear that women still face significant barriers in progressing to leadership roles. Some of these are embedded in law: in at least 100 economies worldwide, women face gender-based job restrictions, and in 18 countries, husbands can still legally prevent wives working. Some 59% of countries have no law against workplace sexual harassment. More often, though, the barriers are embedded in culture and customs—those unstated norms that conspire to exclude women or prevent them accessing the influential networks that offer a leg up on the ladder to the top.

Alongside this, we read that women's educational choices can leave them less prepared than men to prosper in the workplace. In a wide range of economies, women's access to technology is limited, so they lack proficiency in what is becoming the critical skillset of the future. As we know, women are more likely to carry domestic and caring responsibilities, which leaves them more likely to seek part-time or flexible working.

As we have heard, when women rise to leadership, they continue to face challenge, marginalisation and hostility. We have seen horrific examples of this over recent months in the UK, but this is a worldwide concern. Of 55 female parliamentarians from 39 countries surveyed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2016, almost half reported threats of death, rape or violence.

In parallel to this overt hostility is a more insidious form of assault. Blair Williams at the Australian National University wrote her PhD thesis on the ways in which media representation had reinforced gendered and sexist stereotypes in the three weeks following the elections to power of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and Theresa May in 2016. Analysis of newspaper coverage revealed that, far from having moved on in the years between the UK's two female Prime Ministers, references to appearance, clothing and gender had doubled in some areas of the press. Both women were repeatedly compared to head girls, a term that infantilises women and denigrates their skills and success. An over-emphasis on handbags and kitten heels is just one of the not-so-subtle ways in which the media undermine female political leaders at every turn and, in doing so, undermine women as a whole.

Perhaps it is not surprising that across the four areas on which the 2018 Global Gender Gap Index reports, the major disparity was in political empowerment. Just 17 of the 149 countries assessed have female heads of state; and on average, only 18% of Ministers and, as we have heard, 24% of parliamentarians across the world are women.

Why does this matter? I do not need to tell you, but I will: in short, because women's political leadership results in better outcomes for women and girls, which means better outcomes for society more broadly. Research indicates that women work harder at communicating with their constituents, and there is a correlation between female representation and higher expenditure on social issues. A 2018 study found that when women are signatories to peace agreements, they are more likely to be implemented and to have longer-lasting effects.

There are plenty of quantifiable arguments for women's political empowerment, but even without them, its justification is irrefutable. Women make up half the

[BARONESS BULL]

world's population, yet their voices are still not equal in the places where decisions are made. The prediction is that it will be 107 years before this particular gender gap is closed. On the eve of International Women's Day, does not the Minister agree with me that 107 years is far too long for us all to wait?

3.56 pm

Baroness Berridge (Con): My Lords, today is the day to celebrate progress while recognising that there is more to do. I thank the researchers in the Library for providing me with a favourite number: 228. I am only the 228th woman to have been appointed under the Life Peerages Act since 1958. I find this sobering when I think of the centuries of history in this Chamber. Many barriers still exist, but like my noble friend Lady Seccombe, I count myself fortunate to have been born at this time and in this country, where I can own property, start a business or charity, vote—in most elections—and speak my views freely. As a lawyer by profession, I know that there are a growing number of role models. Twenty-five per cent of the Supreme Court judiciary, including its president, are now women. Overseas, the testimony of the former Attorney-General of Canada, Jody Wilson-Raybould, defending prosecutorial independence against interference by the Prime Minister, should be standard viewing for all law students.

Injustices still exist, however. The problem of forced marriage led the coalition Government to take the positive step of making it a crime. There are cases where the victims are men, but 77% of the victims are women. To make this criminal law effective, the Government changed the definition of marriage to any religious or civil ceremony, whether or not legally binding. Some women are brave enough to give evidence against their husbands and perhaps other family members, and successfully secure a criminal conviction, proving beyond reasonable doubt that there was a forced marriage. But they are left without a remedy in the civil court to get their share of matrimonial assets, as the woman is not viewed in the civil law as married. Our law is therefore contradictory: she is married for some purposes but not for others. It is not the crime of forced cohabitation; it is the crime of forced marriage. This irrational situation will last until a victim of forced marriage attains a media profile because, having no claim on his assets—his house, business and, probably most likely, pension—ends up claiming universal credit. I would be grateful if my noble friend could arrange a further meeting to discuss this gap in our law.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, said Martin Luther King. As a state comprehensive girl from factory-working parents, this lofty quote compels me to raise one of the last—perhaps the last—bastion of direct discrimination against women in UK law. I call it the “Lady Mary Crawley problem”, because *Downton Abbey* was in search of a male heir as women could not, and still cannot, inherit. When we changed the law for the monarchy, part of Her Majesty's Government's reasons for not getting rid of this discriminatory law was that it meant,

“disinheritance of individuals with legitimate expectations to inherit an hereditary peerage”.—[*Official Report*, 11/9/15; col. 1633.]

Men cannot possibly rely on legitimate expectations created by direct discrimination against women to prevent law reform. I pay tribute to the work of Daughters' Rights and wish to place on record that, like many other Members of this House, I do not vote in any hereditary Peer by-elections where there are no women on the ballot paper. This law directly affects the gender balance in this Chamber; I would be grateful to hear the Government's view on this matter.

Finally, like the noble Baroness, Lady Hussein-Ece, I want to address briefly the double discrimination that many women face: additional barriers and prejudice against women from black and minority-ethnic communities. I support the recommendation made outside the Chamber by my noble friend Lady McGregor-Smith that companies should publish their data on this matter. The next logical step from a gender pay gap reporting requirement is publishing the ethnicity pay gap. However, this issue concerns not just business but the charitable and social investment sectors. I discovered that the UK has the fastest-growing social investment market in the world, worth £2.3 billion and growing at 17% a year, but BME women are sadly the least likely to hold a directorship, representing only 2.8% of such positions. I am surprised that charities are also underperforming, with 62% of the UK's largest charities having all-white boards of trustees, despite black people being the ethnic group most likely to volunteer each month. Surely there should be some reporting requirement to make such boards justify this absence of diversity. I hope my noble friend the Minister will raise this with the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, the chair of the Charity Commission.

Today, I will finish work, as I often do, walking past the statue of Emmeline Pankhurst. Thank God for her life, but today I will also be grateful for her part in enabling me to be female life Peer number 228.

4.02 pm

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab): My Lords, these contributions are very brief. I know that many of us would love to talk about a much larger range of women's activities and contributions across the world.

Today, I will limit myself to talking about a very small part of a commission I have chaired for the past 18 months, which last week published a report looking into the experiences of the most disadvantaged women in this country. They have experienced violence and abuse, chronic poverty and what has become, for them, a punitive benefits system that often compounds their problems. Without support, many such women go on to develop mental health problems and use drugs or alcohol to cope with trauma and abuse. That often leads them into a downward spiral, with some of them even facing the criminal justice system at some stage.

The commission looked into the experiences of our most disadvantaged women. As I said, many of them develop a range of other problems. It is estimated that one in 20 women in England—equivalent to about 1.2 million women—have experienced extensive physical and sexual violence throughout their lives. More than half of these have a common mental health disorder; one in three of them has an alcohol problem; and one in five has been homeless. We worked extensively with

them. One of our greatest experiences was being able to pick up and train these “women with lived experiences”, as they are known, as peer researchers. They then interviewed 18 women in their own localities who were suffering from these sorts of disadvantages. They were a joy to work with, and I will come back to this.

Many women who come to this country expect to be safe and protected. They have heard us talk in positive terms about what advantages we have as women. However, their experience when they get here is far from that. Hearing from some of them made me feel ashamed. I want to give just two examples of where we really must address the needs of women who do not have settled migration status.

We were told that the hostile environment had led to women in abusive relationships without settled status fearing to report what was happening to them. They were scared to go and seek help. Often, the abusive partners would say that they would be deported if they did so. Safe pathways to reporting violence against women and girls should be created for all women, not only those of us who are confident about our position in this society.

The second example is that of the whole issue of having no recourse to public funds. This affects people who do not have settled status. Too many are denied support, which means they are unable to access help and support. They are unable to go to a refuge and they are unable to access alternative accommodation. They do not have any money and they are certainly not going to be taken on by landlords. As I say, even many refuges will deny access for that reason. They are unable to get treatment for health conditions or for what has happened to them as a result of abuse. We have to look very carefully at abolishing the rule for women in this position.

There are some really good and practical recommendations in the report—although I would say that—which is entitled *Breaking Down the Barriers*. I do not have time to go into them all and I hope that noble Lords will take the opportunity to read at least the executive summary.

At both the local and the national level we have to make sure that services and NGOs can work across the silos and meet the needs of individual women. We have to use and employ women with lived experience. As I say, they are a real inspiration. They are the ones who know what it is like and are therefore the best first contact with other women. We also have to extend the use of trauma-informed work. Too many women present but no one understands or recognises the consequences of abuse, so they are pushed from pillar to post, from service to service, and no one deals with the essential first thing: that they have experienced trauma as the result of violence and abuse. We have much to do on this, but it can be done. I hope that we will all work towards making a change.

4.08 pm

Baroness Meyer (Con): My Lords, it is a great honour to speak in celebration of International Women's Day. It has a special personal meaning for me. On this day 102 years ago, my mother was born in St Petersburg in Russia. She lived for 100 years and two weeks. When I think of her life's journey, I am reminded of

women's resilience and courage. I am also reminded of the many misfortunes that women of that generation had to endure and overcome.

For the first 30 years of her life, hardship and danger were my mother's travelling companions: from Russia on the eve of the revolution, through the years of civil war in Siberia, exile in war-torn China, tragedy during World War II in Indochina, where her first husband was killed by the Japanese when she was nine months pregnant, to sanctuary at last in Paris and London. When I think of her life, I remind myself how lucky my generation was to have been born in this country when we were. Yet we had our own struggles—and we too needed more than a few drops of determination to overcome them. Those of us who decided to forge a career in the 1970s and 1980s could be confronted by an often intimidating and hostile world dominated by men, many of whom saw the arrival of women as a threat to the natural order.

While at university, I decided to become a commodity broker in the City; I was one of the first women to do so and I enjoyed it enormously. But to get there and stay there, I had to run the gauntlet of harassment, molestation and abuse, some of which would make you blush today. The view then was that if you wanted to make it in a man's world, you had to pay this price and shut up. Thankfully, today that kind of behaviour is considered totally unacceptable and often illegal. This is surely something for all of us—men and women—to celebrate. It is an example to the world. This Conservative Government can be proud that female employment is at a record high and the gender pay gap at a record low.

But there is no room for complacency. Some men will always resist the equal treatment of women. Power too often goes to the heads of men who wield it, leading to abuse and bullying—we have seen gross examples in the press—so the struggle goes on. Eradicating misogyny is challenge enough, but we need to move beyond that. More women should be positively encouraged and helped to become politicians, CEOs, firefighters, surgeons or train drivers—whatever they want to do—with equal opportunities and equal rights. That should also embrace women who want to stay at home as wives and mothers, if that is their choice, without being judged as second-rate by their female peers. The challenge for women today is to get the balance right and not to let the pendulum swing too far in the other direction.

Let me explain what I mean. I have a confession to make: I like men. I have two sons, two stepsons and a husband. I do not want to emasculate men, bludgeon them into submission or turn them into our enemies. I do not want them to be afraid of paying me a compliment, opening a door or entering a lift alone with me. What I want above all is for the vast majority of decent men to be on our side—to work with us. We do not want to wage a gender war, nor do I believe it necessary. What we want is to be respected for what we are and who we are. In turn, we need to do the same and respect the majority of men. So let us include them in our fight. I see very few men here today, and I hope that next year the debate will be earlier so that more

[BARONESS MEYER]

men can participate. After all, we are all—women and men—one humanity. This is how I have watched my sons and stepsons grow up—to cherish and respect women as their equals, to enjoy their company and, if it is their choice, to love them.

4.14 pm

Lord Hussain (LD): My Lords, I am pleased to take part in the International Women's Day debate, which is to recognise and celebrate women's achievements as well as highlighting the challenges they face across the world.

I wish to speak about the plight of Kashmiri women who are living under some of the most difficult conditions in the world. The daily lives of the women of Kashmir are controlled by occupying military forces. They do not know when the Indian Army or some other paramilitary force will force their way into their homes, harass them, rape them, beat up family members and take away the men, some of whom will come back alive with torture scars; the bodies of some of the others may be found weeks or months later on roadsides, and others may not be seen again.

The term "half-widows" is commonly used in Indian-occupied Kashmir for the wives of men who have gone missing. According to the *Guardian* of 10 October 2010, while authorities in Kashmir estimate the missing number to be approximately 4,000, the Association of Disappeared Persons estimates that there are between 8,000 to 10,000 missing people in the region. The number of publicly announced and reported half-widows in the Kashmir valley is between 2,000 and 2,500. Along with the plight of 6,000 orphans—the children of half-widows who are affected deeply by the conflict—this issue adds much to the crisis. True data and numbers for both half-orphans and half-widows are thought to be much higher.

According to a detailed report of 2007 by the award-winning Kashmiri-based journalist Haroon Marani, the primary concern of a family is to find their missing person. They move from one police station to another; from one army camp to another, and so on. It takes months and years to find out.

On pellet gun victims, according to a report on French news channel France 24, on 30 November 2018, India introduced official "non-lethal" 12-gauge pellet shotguns in Kashmir in 2010. Reliable aggregate data about the number of injuries and blindings from the pellet guns is hard to come by. Government data from 2017 revealed that the weapon killed 13 people and injured more than 6,000 in eight months alone, including nearly 800 with eye injuries. The Central Reserve Police Force, the Indian paramilitary deployed in Kashmir, told a court in 2016 that it fired about 1.3 million pellets in just 32 days.

Amnesty International has urged the Indian Government to ban the use of pellet guns, and lawyers and other rights groups have appealed to courts, to little avail so far. US-based Physicians for Human Rights has called their use "inherently inaccurate", "indiscriminate" and potentially, "lethal to humans at close range".

There is an estimated figure of between 10,000 to 12,000 women being raped in the last three decades by

the security forces. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report of April 2018:

"Authorities have failed to independently investigate and prosecute allegations of sexual violence by security forces personnel. There is no record of allegations of sexual violence by security forces being prosecuted in a civilian court ...

One significant case that illustrates the state's failure to investigate and prosecute allegations of sexual violence and addressing impunity for sexual crimes in Kashmir is the Kunan-Poshpora mass rape, which took place 27 years ago and for which attempts to seek justice have been denied and blocked over the years by the authorities at different levels.

According to survivors and a local administration official, on the night of 23 February 1991, soldiers from the 4 Rajputana Rifles regiment of the Indian Army gang-raped around 23 women of Kunan and Poshpora villages of Kupwara district. The Indian Army and Government of India have denied the allegations".

The special rapporteur states that:

"Information received through both written and oral testimonies highlighted the use of mass rape, allegedly by members of the State security forces, as well as acts of enforced disappearance, killings and acts of torture and ill-treatment, which were used to intimidate and to counteract political opposition and insurgency ... she was 'not informed of any measures to ensure accountability and redress for victims'".

Women in Indian-occupied Kashmir are living lives under siege and constant surveillance whether in public or in their own homes. According to the UN Human Rights Council, they have lived for many decades under the mercy of the security forces, which operate with complete impunity. These women fear for themselves and their children, brothers, husbands and fathers day and night. They are suffering from grave physical and mental traumas. They are in dire need of help.

As many noble Lords know, I have stood on these Benches of your Lordships' House many times and pleaded for justice and protection for Kashmiri women, but I am disappointed to say that I have not seen our Government taking any action at any level in this regard. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the head of the Commonwealth, Britain has huge responsibility for human rights globally—

Noble Lords: Order.

Lord Hussain: Government Ministers are very touchy about it. Let me finish.

Noble Lords: Order!

Lord Hussain: Sorry. Can I have one minute please?

Baroness Goldie (Con): My Lords, everyone has been very good about trying to observe the advisory time limit. I know Members have undertakings at the end of this debate, so if the noble Lord would respect the time limit and bring his remarks to a close, that would be very helpful. I am sorry: you are well in excess of the advisory time limit at the moment and other Members have to be taken into account.

Lord Hussain: We simply cannot turn a blind eye to the appalling and horrendous conditions that Kashmiri women are having to live under. May I ask the Minister whether she believes that the dignity, honour and respect of a Kashmiri woman is any different from that of a British or European woman? May I also ask

what she is prepared to do to help the women of Kashmir live a normal life without fear? What will the Government do to raise these issues with the Indian Government?

4.23 pm

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con): My Lords, sadly there is still no country in the world where there is true gender equality in political, economic and social terms. International Women's Day this year, with its theme "Balance for Better", gives us a chance to take stock and celebrate the successes but also to identify the challenges that remain at home and abroad.

As my noble friend Lady Jenkin mentioned, I, and several of my noble friends, began political life in the Conservative Women's Organisation. On Saturday, I will be attending the CWO centenary conference. I pay special tribute to my noble friend Lady Secombe, who was Conservative vice-chairman for women for 10 years. Many of us owe our political careers to her encouragement and mentoring. She has made a real difference to so many on our side.

This morning we had the Third Reading of the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Bill, which I have helped my honourable friend Tim Loughton MP progress through this House. It will bring in simple but important changes for women. Since 1837 there has been provision for only the father's name on a marriage certificate, and the Bill will enable mothers to witness marriage certificates too. It also requires the Government to prepare a report on how the law should be changed to permit the registration of pregnancy losses before 24 weeks, which cannot be registered as stillbirths under the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953, and a report on whether coroners should be able to investigate late stillbirths, which would support the current work by the Department of Health and Social Care to improve maternity safety in the UK.

Next week, I and many other women from around the world will head to the UN in New York for the Commission on the Status of Women meeting. This year's theme is access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The CSW meeting is the second largest of the year at the UN, yet almost nothing is heard about it in the media. Although the CSW is enormously welcome, can the Minister please tell us how the UK will work with others to improve the impact that the CSW makes across the world? In many countries, women desperately need international support.

I co-chair and run the APPG on Women, Peace and Security, and last autumn we greatly welcomed the UK's fourth national action plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. I also congratulate our Ministry of Defence on launching JSP 1325, the policy on human security in military operations. This is vital in protecting civilians, especially women and children.

However, there is still much more work to be done. Eighteen years after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, why are Syrian women not allowed at the peace table? We should not have to justify women being included in peace processes; we should ask the men there to justify their exclusion. As we look at tentative peace processes

in Yemen and Afghanistan, where are the women? You cannot have peace that excludes half the population. How can we, in the UK, exert global influence to make sure that women are included?

The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, launched by William Hague—now my noble friend Lord Hague—in 2012, brought to global attention the fact that rape is used today as a weapon of war. This initiative was always going to be a marathon, not a sprint, and we must ensure that focus on this important issue is not lost. Its relevance is seen in the conflicts raging today, with the high levels of sexual violence committed by Daesh against the Yazidis and the terrible stories coming from the Rohingya camp at Cox's Bazar. Can the Minister please update us on the plans for the PSVI international conference that the UK will host this year, five years on from the unforgettable 2014 global summit?

There are always many inspirational meetings around International Women's Day, but the one that will remain with me this year was the APPG on Human Rights on Tuesday, when we heard from two journalists—women human rights defenders—Zaina Erhaim from Syria, and Nurcan Baysal, who is Kurdish and from Turkey. Listening to them was truly humbling.

We should never forget that there are many women around the world who, in spite of constant threat, continue to stand up fearlessly for what they believe in. As we safely celebrate International Women's Day here in the Palace of Westminster, we must hold out our hands to them and offer our heartfelt help and support.

4.27 pm

Baroness Blackstone (Ind Lab): My Lords, each year when International Women's Day comes round, we can celebrate the extraordinary contributions that women have made both nationally and internationally. We can also celebrate the fact that in many aspects of women's lives there are improvements over what went before. However, we cannot be complacent and assume that gender equality is just a few years away. It is not. On present progress, it could be a century or more before the gap is closed, according to the World Economic Forum.

Last year, the UNDP reported:

"The disadvantages facing women and girls are a major source of inequality and one of the greatest barriers to human development progress".

In considering those barriers, I want to focus on the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls in poor, developing countries. Unless this is addressed, millions of young women will not achieve their potential as fully engaged citizens and many will suffer horribly. The subject of this debate is the UK's role in advancing gender equality globally, and it is my contention that there can be few areas more worthy of our attention and our commitment to securing a better life for women and girls than this one.

One source of vulnerability is the lack of education. In spite of huge advances in access to education in many countries, girls are still more likely than boys to leave secondary education before completing it. Girls with poor levels of literacy, and who lack the capacity

[BARONESS BLACKSTONE]

to obtain secure employment, are likely to become victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, and to be trafficked. They are also more likely to be pushed into very early marriage. Extending the education of girls must be part of a preventive strategy to promote improvement in the lives of young women in poor countries, and countries where there is a prevailing culture that fails to recognise the rights of women.

One of the most horrific statistics I have seen for a long time is that in South Sudan, where 72% of children are out of school, a girl is more likely to die in childbirth than to complete secondary education. According to the UN, in 2017, an estimated 21% of women aged 20 to 24 were married or in an informal union before the age of 18, and one in three girls aged 15 to 19 have been subjected to FGM in the 30 countries where it is most concentrated.

Very early marriage and FGM run the risks of problems in childbirth. Both need to be prevented. New laws specifying a minimum age for marriage of, say, 18 would be of great value. Better information about the risks of giving birth at too young an age is needed, and better access to contraceptive services is vital. If a young girl becomes pregnant, she will need to obtain antenatal care to identify whether she is at risk and likely to need specialist help during childbirth. Advice should be available on access to safe abortion, where it is legal.

In remote, rural areas, and in countries where there is conflict, it is especially important to try to provide these services through development aid programmes. Can the Minister say what priority DfID is giving to these services? I ask this against the fact that the leading cause of death for 15 to 19 year-olds globally is complications from pregnancy and childbirth. Around 11% of all births worldwide are to girls aged 15 to 19. According to the UN Population Division, one or two countries have an adolescent birth rate as high as 200 births per 1,000 girls of this age, compared with a global average of 44 births per 1,000 girls.

While, overall, maternal mortality has declined, there are still far too many preventable deaths, especially of adolescents. The involvement of DfID in the sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda is very welcome, but I would like to raise two or three points for clarification about how it is taking its work forward. First, can it more clearly articulate its vision in this area and give greater priority to the neglected areas of safe abortion and the care of at-risk adolescents before and during childbirth? Secondly, when it articulates its vision for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights, can it translate them into concrete measures in all DfID country plans, ensuring that fragile and conflict-affected areas are included? Thirdly, will DfID ensure that family planning is given high priority in its programmes, and support national Governments in sustaining the supply and distribution of contraceptives?

In conclusion, I hope that the needs of girls and women who are still suffering from a denial of access to good reproductive healthcare will remain central to the UK's programmes under DfID, as well as to overseas development aid financed by other departments. Even if it will not be achieved in my lifetime, I want

my daughter and granddaughters on some future International Women's Day to be able to celebrate global equality in the provision of sexual and reproductive health rights. We still have a long way to go.

4.33 pm

Baroness Newlove (Con): My Lords, the theme for International Women's Day—"Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change"—puts innovation by, and for, women and girls at the heart of efforts to achieve a gender balance. As the UN Women website says:

"Achieving a gender-equal world requires social innovations that work for both women and men and leave no one behind. From urban planning that focuses on community safety to e-learning platforms that take classrooms to women and girls, affordable and quality childcare centres, and technology shaped by women, innovation can take the race for gender equality to its finishing line by 2030".

We heard a different figure from the Minister at the beginning of this debate, but I know that we can achieve the fifth sustainable development goal: gender equality.

It begins with making sure that women's and girls' needs and, more importantly, their experiences and voices, are integrated at the very inception of new technology and innovations. It means building smart solutions that go beyond acknowledging the gender gap to address the needs of men and women equally. Of course, ultimately, it means innovations that disrupt business as usual by paying attention to how and by whom technology is used and accessed, and ensuring that women and girls play a pivotal role in emerging industries.

Global youth organisations, such as World Merit, are proudly operating from the UK and driving this agenda forward with great results. I had the great pleasure of speaking to more than 200 young people worldwide and being in a room full of good vibes—together as one, as they said. There was no gender divide in that room; teamwork thrived.

I thought about how I could add my experience as Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales to this debate, even though my work does not reach outside those countries. I think this plays a part and we need to bring victims' voices into this Chamber. As Melinda Gates said:

"A woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult".

As Victims' Commissioner, I travel up and down the country, meeting victims and survivors of horrendous crimes of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and rape, sitting with them face to face and hearing them tell their stories, which come from the darkest places—places where they were so brutally trodden down by their abusive partners, who said that they loved them. I stand here today as the proud mother of three beautiful young daughters, who are all psychologically damaged because they witnessed every kick and punch of their father's brutal murder. As Melinda Gates said, searching for that voice is remarkably difficult.

I stand here to say that, listening to how all the victims of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and rape across our country survive, and hearing the passion in their voices, creating a life for the next generation is so important. We need to have that message in this country as well as globally. This is such an important

debate. I am sad that we are at the end of the list; it is typical that women are at the end, but we have a voice. We should have a two-day debate on this, like the ones we have on Brexit at the moment. I believe in coming together as one, because we all have a part to play in making our words come to life, and because our needs and words and our fight for the next generation are so important.

4.37 pm

Lord Loomba (CB): My Lords, it is a pleasure to be taking part in this debate today and I thank the noble Baroness for ensuring that we have the opportunity to speak ahead of International Women's Day tomorrow.

We are all aware that women all over the world face a huge number of problems, including violence, sexual harassment, abortion laws, pay and pension gaps, FGM, trafficking, modern slavery and other human rights violations. However, there is one issue that has not been highlighted much, and that is that of widows. I declare my interest as the founder and chairman trustee of the Loomba Foundation.

There are estimated to be 258 million widows around the world. Sadly, their number is increasing every day due to conflicts in many countries, including Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Nigeria, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and, more recently, Venezuela and some South American countries. Widows and their daughters in conflict zones face extremes of abuse and violence, including sexual violence. Both conflict-afflicted mothers and daughters are vulnerable to traffickers, sexual slavery, forced "temporary remarriage" and modern-day slavery.

Then there is the question of "half widows". There are uncounted millions of wives of men forcibly disappeared or missing. In Colombia 86,000 are missing, and in Sri Lanka 40,000. In Syria and Iraq there are uncounted missing husbands, sons and brothers. In so many conflict zones men go missing or lie unidentified in mass graves. These women are in limbo, unable to have any closure, their status so ambiguous.

These women, widows, half widows and their daughters need help if we want to achieve gender equality as well as the sustainable development goals by 2030. I was extremely pleased when the noble Lord, Lord Bates, called a meeting in his office last month, inviting a few organisations that work for widows to discuss and understand the problems that widows face across the world, especially in developing countries. It was a constructive meeting and I truly appreciate the initiative taken by him.

Gender balance is not just a theme but a way of life that we should all aspire to achieve around the world. We need to make an extra effort in developing countries and fragile states suffering from conflict where the input into civil life from the female population is often very limited. Empowerment of women, especially marginalised widows who are doubly discriminated against, will not only help them but improve the lives of many more people in their communities who are living through conflict and strife.

I urge the Minister to set up a specialist unit in the Department for International Development to focus on widows and their issues. We really need to address

this issue and to provide skills training to widows and their unmarried daughters so that they can become self-reliant, earn money, educate their children, support their family and lead a life of dignity and equality.

4.42 pm

Baroness Crawley (Lab): My Lords, just before I came into the Chamber this afternoon, I heard the very sad news that the principal of my old college, Sister Dorothy Bell, has died. I want to put on record that she was strong, compassionate, very funny and a great supporter of other women. She was a person I will never forget. She is now in *Hansard*—and, I am sure, in heaven.

I am delighted to be taking part in this year's Lords debate to celebrate International Women's Day. I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Williams of Trafford, for setting out the many positive initiatives that the Government have put forward or are supporting, especially on violence against women. However, like my noble friend Lady Gale I am dismayed that this might be the last such debate with us as members of the European Union, which has been the bedrock of women's and family rights legislation for four decades.

We discuss the Irish backstop a great deal in this House, but the EU's historic backstop in the protection of women's workplace rights is a story still to be told. EU law underpins the Equality Act 2010, including rights to equal treatment for part-time workers, the majority of them women; to health and safety protection for pregnant workers; and to maternity leave, emergency time off for dependants, and parental leave. As chair of the Women's Rights Committee in the European Parliament in the early 1990s when this country signed up to the maternity leave directive, I am inclined to take these issues personally. The TUC, the BMA and others have written to us setting out their concerns that while the Government have committed to maintaining equality rights and transposing other rights into UK law upon withdrawal from the EU, those rights could become vulnerable to amendment, narrower interpretation and weaker enforcement following Brexit. So for me, Brexit is no good for women.

It is inspiring to think that debates such as ours today are taking place in Parliaments all around the world this week—from countries where voting rights for women are over a century old to those where women have only just won the vote. As I understand it, one of the themes this year is the need to highlight the gender digital divide. That divide is highlighted in the research by our own excellent Lords Library for this debate, which says that an analysis of world labour markets in 2018 by the World Economic Forum,

"focused specifically on the gender gap in artificial intelligence ... It found that, globally, 22% of AI professionals were female, compared to 78% who were male. This produced a gender gap of 72%; the WEF stated this remained constant and 'does not at present indicate a positive future trend'. The study ranked the UK 10th globally for its AI talent pool, with 20% female".

Three worrying future trends come out of these figures. First, the AI skills gender gap may exacerbate the gender gaps in economic participation and opportunity for women, as AI represents an increasingly in-demand skillset. Secondly, the AI skills gender gap implies that general-purpose technology across various fields is

[BARONESS CRAWLEY]

being developed without women's talent, so limiting its innovative and inclusive capacity. Thirdly, the low integration of women into artificial intelligence talent pools represents such a missed opportunity in a sector where there is insufficient supply of adequately qualified talent. Some estimates tell us that by 2030, up to 9 million people's jobs will be replaced by AI. It is the future, whether we like it or not, and not enough women and girls are creating that future. I would like to hear what the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, has to say—I am sure she is as concerned as we are about these figures—and what she believes the Government can do about it.

4.48 pm

Lord Taylor of Warwick (Non-Aff): My Lords, I too thank the Minister for bringing this important debate before us and for her opening remarks. It was Rosa Parks who said that,

“knowing what must be done does away with fear”,

and her quiet determination not to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 was the catalyst for the civil rights movement. It is perhaps not a coincidence that it was a woman—indeed, a black woman—who symbolically gave birth to one of the greatest ever freedom and equality movements. Gender and race often go hand in hand in the struggle for equality. Since Montgomery, much has been said and done about these issues but there is still more to be achieved. As Rosa Parks said, we need to act on what we know must be done.

One of the strongest female role models in my life was my mother, who came to Britain from Jamaica. She worked as an auxiliary nurse. She used to tell me, “John, being black is not a profession. Make sure you get a good education”. Once, in sheer desperation, when I was about 10, I retorted, “Mum, you're just picking on me because I'm black”. That argument failed to resonate with my mother. I cannot think why.

There are numerous women of colour who have historically overcome the obstacles of racism and issues connected to gender. They include Mary Seacole, the Crimean War nurse, and the black suffragette, Sarah Parker Remond. Although overdue, last year the first statue of a woman was unveiled in Parliament Square, alongside a line-up of male leaders. This was of the suffragette campaigner Millicent Fawcett. Will the Minister explain what plans the Government have to ensure that more women are represented in this way in our public places?

As we celebrate the centenary of women in Parliament, my American wife Laura was keen to remind me that the first woman to take her seat as an MP in the House of Commons, in 1919, was Nancy Astor, originally from the United States. Turning to more recent times, as a journalist I interviewed some inspirational women from BME communities—for example, Dame Kelly Holmes, who overcame a challenging upbringing, rose through the ranks in the Army and won two Olympic gold medals, and the Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin, who came to England from Jamaica as a child. As noble Lords know, she is now chaplain to the Queen and performs that role brilliantly in the House of Commons.

Although 20% of small and medium-sized companies are run by women, there is still so much untapped business talent among women, especially BME women. As we all know, most corporate boards are still mainly male and white. So my next question for the Minister is: what plans do the Government have to encourage an increase in women company directors?

There are other ongoing issues, such as the pay gap between women's and men's earnings, and the cost of childcare. When I was a district councillor in the Midlands in the 1980s, I remember a lady complaining to me that her take-home pay was so low that it would not even take her home. I am not sure that much has changed for women in low-paid jobs. According to the *Women in Work Index* report by PricewaterhouseCoopers last year, the closure of the gender pay gap would produce a £90 billion boost to the UK economy. In the developing world it is widely recognised that empowering women is an important step to driving economic growth. What plans do the Government have to help reduce the gender pay gap?

Between 2015 and 2016, according to the same report, the UK fell from 14th to 15th place in a ranking of 33 OECD countries, based on five key indicators of female economic empowerment. As the fifth-richest economy in the world, surely we can do better than that, so my next question for the Minister is: what plans do the Government have to address this backward step? We are going backwards.

There is still a need for more women in science, technology, engineering and as university vice-chancellors. I say this as a former chancellor of Bournemouth University, which had at the time one of the few female vice-chancellors. Women-led businesses contribute about £82 billion of gross value to the British economy. I acknowledge that the Government try to support first-time business owners. There is the broadband challenge fund, for example, but its budget is modest and it is linked to only 13 localities. What will the Government do to expand that project?

I suggest that one of the most inspirational women role models in the world is our sovereign, the Queen. For the last 67 years we have had a female Head of State. Let us not forget that. She has continued to conduct herself with dignity and poise throughout, during smooth and rough times.

Lastly, we must not forget that women making a contribution to an economy is not new. There were prominent women business leaders in the Bible, over 2,000 years ago. For example, in the Book of Acts, Lydia ran a fashion company, Priscilla owned an up-market residence franchise and Queen Candace governed her nation's economy. There was also Deborah, in the Book of Judges, who was the nation's chief lawyer. There are many more examples. Those biblical heroines and women of today show that women are a real voice, not just an echo.

4.54 pm

Baroness Redfern (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Williams of Trafford, for moving the Motion to mark International Women's Day. I am proud to take part.

Tackling injustices such as the gender pay gap is part of building a country that works for everyone.

It is simply good business sense to recognise the enormous potential of women and to take action to support and help progress female talent.

The target for women to make up 33% of FTSE 100 boards by 2020 is ambitious, but it is part of a commitment to drive forward workplace equality and to look for opportunities to demolish barriers. Many of the UK's top companies are already leading the way in making sure that everyone's contributions to the workplace are valued equally.

However, the gender pay gap is not going to close on its own. BAME women, disabled women and younger women are still woefully underrepresented and have experienced significant discrimination over the past years. Sciences and gender equality are both vital for the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. In many cases, long-standing bias and gender stereotypes are still steering girls and women away from science-related fields.

Women's employment continues to be on the rise in traditionally male-dominated STEM fields. In 2018, the head engineers at Google, Adobe, Lockheed Martin, Apple, SpaceX and General Motors were breaking barriers not only as women in STEM but as women from diverse racial backgrounds. However, women are still deeply underrepresented.

Last year saw women breaking the Nobel prize barriers, with Professor Donna Strickland becoming the first woman in 55 years to win the Nobel Prize in Physics, joining a very small group which includes Marie Curie. Professor Frances Arnold shared joint honours in the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, the fifth woman ever to win the award. What role models they are to aspire to. Studies continue to confirm that girls and women have just as much natural aptitude as men when it comes to STEM subjects.

The message is getting clearer. Girls and women are getting the message that they belong as much as boys and men in computer science, where no one should be told that they cannot. The number of computer science jobs is projected to grow by 15% to 20% through to 2020, but it is thought that the majority of these positions will be filled by men.

As STEM-related industries on the whole add more than 1.7 million jobs in the coming years, we do not want a notable absence of women in the field. At a time when technology continues rapidly to transform the way we live, we can and should work to empower more young women to take an active role in that transformation, to encourage young women to be challenging and confident and to look past everything when entering a male-dominated field, with aspirations of making their own individual mark.

The lack of visible female role models continues to be a major problem, so we have to raise the interest in STEM subjects at every stage of the STEM skills pipeline. To do so earlier and earlier, even at primary school, would intrigue young, inquiring minds and help them think about futures in the tech industry, for the tech industry stands ready to turn pink.

It is not only about the enticement of pay; it is also about what female talent can bring to STEM and the impact on STEM itself. The UK and the world are

ready for women, and will change. It is about stating the fact: "You can be what you want to be". The race is on.

4.59 pm

Baroness Rock (Con): My Lords, it is an honour to contribute to this important debate and I too thank my noble friend the Minister. I am very privileged to be a founding ambassador of Women Supporting Women for the Prince's Trust. We are committed to supporting and inspiring young women to build their own futures through skills, education and employment, and female employment is, as we have heard, at a record high. This is worthy of celebration and, to be clear, we are celebrating fairness first and foremost, but we are also celebrating the means by which we can capitalise on the economic opportunity that empowering women gives us: that businesses with more women in senior positions perform better. McKinsey has estimated that bridging the gender gap completely would add £150 billion to the UK economy by 2025.

Today I shall focus on a specific and vital aspect of our economy: technology. I say "aspect" quite deliberately, because technology is not a sector, it is everywhere. It will change every industry and impact every business. It is the means by which we will stay competitive and future-proof our economy. If we do not deliver gender equality and opportunity in tech, we are missing the biggest opportunity of all. Economic opportunity and a sense of fairness should pervade our attitude to female economic empowerment, but there is another area that I would like to touch on: tackling inherent gender bias in applications of technology that impact every aspect of our economy and society. If we do not, because tech is the ultimate means to more productive ends, all these ends will have gender bias baked in.

We have heard about bias in recruitment—it is no different in tech than in other industries. But what if the algorithms that assist with recruitment and candidate screening are written by men and effectively for men? Then, we will simply see current cohorts replicate themselves and a perpetual cycle repeated. Artificial intelligence is just that: it is artificial and the artifice comes from people who create the algorithms, who code the inputs into the black boxes that spit out outputs. The data on which these algorithms are trained and developed will itself reflect historic biases, so this is about getting female coders developing the AI of the future and making sure that we take steps to address biases in the data they all work with. The noble Baroness, Lady Crawley, eloquently raised many of the issues associated with artificial intelligence.

What, then, can be done about it? In short, we can choose to have a responsible approach to algorithms and the principles of human conduct that govern them. There are a few emerging initiatives that should give us all hope. I was fortunate to be part of the House of Lords Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence. We specifically addressed algorithmic bias in our report, saying that,

"developers set the parameters for machine learning algorithms, and the choices they make will intrinsically reflect the developers' beliefs, assumptions and prejudices. The main ways to address these kinds of biases are to ensure that developers

[BARONESS ROCK]

are drawn from diverse gender, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and are aware of, and adhere to, ethical codes of conduct”.

This is a simple, analogue solution to a very complex digital problem. If the people who write the algorithms are reflective of the community, their outcomes are likely to be just.

While the Government did not accept in full our recommendation to use the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund to address this diversity issue, I am confident that it is an agenda we can deliver against—through the world's first Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, an advisory body dedicated to strengthening and improving the UK's use of data and artificial intelligence. I am fortunate to be a member of the board and we see algorithmic bias as one of our first priorities. Through this work, we have the opportunity not just to address the risks of exacerbating unfairness, but to harness the power of these systems in the cause of diversity, tackle bias and increase opportunity for all. The centre will bring together expertise from across sectors and society but also, importantly, listen intently to the public voice and ensure that our governance of these transformative technologies reflects our society's values.

Technology creates new opportunities for our economy, but also poses new challenges. I am confident that if we act decisively to address gender bias in tech, we will reap all the economic benefits that technology and female economic empowerment can bring, as well as all the societal benefits.

5.04 pm

Baroness Flather (CB): My Lords, I have just come back from my annual visit to India. I have been going to India for many years, just to see what has changed—what has got better, what has got worse. I was very distressed this time. Things have not got better, and they do not seem to be getting better, particularly in relation to women. I now feel very strongly that I do not want to go back again, because things are so bad. Seeing how difficult women's lives were was personally hurtful to me.

India has the largest number of poor people in the world, and noble Lords can imagine who are the poorest of the poor: it is always the women. It is said that men spend 37% of their earnings on their families, and the rest they need to enjoy themselves. As noble Lords can imagine, earning more does not help much; men still give their families only what they wish to give them.

India is a country of Indias. We must not think of it as one large, cohesive country, because it is not. Each state has its own culture, food and dress—some of us can even tell which state a person is from. Having said that, the north is much worse for women than the south. In the south, they still have some respect for women and do not do the sort of things that are done to women in the north. Mumbai is much better for women than Delhi. Delhi is pretty bad; there are a lot of rapes and attacks on women, and very few people are caught because, as we all know, it is never considered the top priority. This sort of thing is very distressing.

Modi, the present Prime Minister who will be facing an election soon, said that he would work on making women's lives better. He has not done very much. He reduced the abortion of girl babies in his state of Gujarat by quite a bit, but it is still happening in the northern provinces. It is rife. In Haryana, there are 12% more boys than girls. What some do there is even more horrible: they buy a girl—Nepali or Bangladeshi or something—and when one man has had a baby with her he passes her on to another man to have a baby. Sometimes when you think about women's lives, things are so bad that you cannot actually stay sane.

The noble Baroness, Lady Secombe, said that we are very fortunate to live in this country. We should realise that. I hope all the women who live here know that, because they complain all the time; I call it the British disease—moan, moan, moan all the time, whether it is about the weather or whatever else. Yes, we are better off here; there is no question about that. In that poor country, there has just been the wedding of a very rich man's daughter. The wedding cards cost 100,000 rupees, which could have fed several families for a whole year. This man spent so much money on his daughter's wedding, and to me it is an obscenity. How could he do that? In our culture, when you have a wedding, you go and feed the poor at the same time—that is what you do. He did not feed a single person. All these things together have put me off going back.

There is another issue in Haryana. If a girl and boy marry without parental permission, the parents' agents find them in one of the big cities and kill them. It is just so bad. I have set up a charity, which is not showing any success, called Women Matter. By visiting a lot of projects, I have discovered that if a woman earns even a small amount of money, she changes: she changes; her family changes; her status changes; everything changes. And it is very quick—it does not take years, but weeks. Suddenly she is somebody, because now she can bring in money. The whole idea is to try to get companies to employ poor women—not the educated ones—and give them a little training if necessary. If women are very hungry, they train very quickly. That is what I am trying to do, at the moment a little unsuccessfully.

On Muslim girls and boys, I want to say to the noble Baroness, Lady Hussein-Ece, that I used to teach immigrant women, and there is no question but that the girls learn more quickly and assiduously. But those are the girls born here, or who are at least very young when they come here; the ones who come as wives have a different problem. Boys do not do anything, because they are little princes—why should they bother? Why the men are so much more important than the women, always and everywhere, is another issue.

I will say one last word about faith or religion. Religions have not supported women. I do not know how your Lordships feel about it—I am looking at the clock and am finishing—but they have not supported women. If they had supported women, it would have been a lot better for us.

5.10 pm

Baroness Finn (Con): My Lords, I thank the Minister for bringing forward today's debate and for giving us the opportunity to celebrate International Women's

Day. It is humbling, as ever, to follow in the footsteps of such inspiring women on this important day. But in this august Chamber, which has seen debates on and the passage of many important Bills that further the cause of gender equality, it is perhaps time to recognise the limits of legislation in getting us where we need to be.

I say this on the 100th anniversary of the sex disqualification Act, which opened up the professions and universities to women. It was an essential step, but not nearly sufficient when it comes to true equality of opportunity across the gender divide. What we now see is a system where the letter of the law is gender neutral but, in practice, we are a long way from declaring victory. For a start, we cannot legislate away a sexist culture. The law protects us in extremis but not from everyday casual sexism. It happens to all of us. Only recently, as I insisted on a particular detail in a contract, my boss was asked, “How do you put up with her?” In a man, it is seen as attention to detail but in a woman, it is—what?—nagging or being bossy.

I have long argued against a narrow focus on quotas, preferring merit and persuasion, but the time has come to ask who is deciding the merit. We need to stop playing by male rules and unpick the male bias that pervades every aspect of our economy and society. The Hampton-Alexander review into improving gender balance in the FTSE leadership found that merit was coded “male”. Briefs to recruit people to senior positions are written for men. Concerns were often raised that women lacked City experience because they were less well-known on the networking circuit. Similarly, in a recent book called *Invisible Women*, it was found that everything from crash test dummies, to office heating settings, to medicine dosage, is all coded for men.

We now live in an age where female qualities are better understood and recognised. In the magnificently titled book *Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders?*, the author highlights the bias towards confidence, and even self-absorption, as qualities. This blocks opportunities for women, and indeed for men who do not obviously exhibit those qualities.

The question is not whether male and female brains are different, but why society still insists on labelling male brains as better. My daughter, studying physics at university, was recently appalled at the treatment by male students of a top female lecturer. They repeatedly interrupted her, questioning her analysis and intelligence in a way they simply did not do with male professors. This is not an isolated incident. Studies show that students appear to evaluate women poorly simply because they are women.

Top companies know the benefits that ensue from more gender diversity, not least in financial performance, but despite some excellent progress there remains a profound sense of inertia. Indeed, the Hampton-Alexander review demonstrates that, even with the facts on superior performance and the prospect of more transparency and disclosure, listed companies can and do continue to resist change.

In a debate last year in this Chamber on women in public life, the noble Baroness, Lady Kennedy, made the point that we have tried to “make nice” and adjust our demands to the male norm, but it is time to structurally re-engineer our whole society. Only then

will we be able to unpack inbuilt cultural gender bias that the law cannot reach. The noble Baroness’s speech resonated in so many ways. Countless times, I have been told not to make a fuss, but we need to be less complacent and continue to fight. She finished her remarks by calling for quotas and all-women shortlists. In the face of the evidence and the lack of progress, that is harder to resist. We need to stop messing around and take this agenda seriously. It is worth making a fuss. Until and unless we do so, women will be behind for another century, and that is simply unacceptable.

5.15 pm

Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab): My Lords, this afternoon’s debate marks the culmination of a week of questions addressed to the Government on the role and rights of women and the restrictions they face in our communities, our nation and the world. I hesitated long and hard before adding my name to the speaker’s list. I felt that I should just listen rather than speak on such a day and on such a subject. But my wife counts the Pankhurst sisters among her forebears. “Put your name down”, she said, and I did. I congratulate all those who are contributing to our deliberations and, in the end, I am delighted to be counted among their number.

The Library briefing for this debate identifies key issues and addresses them, in the main, by means of statistics. This allows us to look quantitatively at various aspects of the situations faced by women: domestic violence, representation in the boardroom and senior management, the gender pay gap, our educational system, health, and participation in leadership and political life. This approach allows us to build an evidence-based picture, to spot trends and to measure success—or the lack of it—in efforts to build a world of equal opportunity, equal rights and equal rewards. It offers a vital tool as we move forward.

The last thing we need today is to be damned with faint notes of paternalism: some nice, comforting, cheap words from someone like me about solidarity and support for the struggle—good, high-minded things such as that. I want to stand in solidarity and want keenly to offer support, but I would prefer that to be measured by what I do rather than by what I might choose to say. My reason for adding my voice to that of so many others today may be thought somewhat strange. It is self-interest that has driven me to speak. I am tired of being part of a culture, and heir to a history, of patriarchal domination. As a 21st-century man, I am weary of feeling imprisoned within a stereotype: that of male power, trapped on the wrong side of all those statistics, part of an unfair and unjustifiable system. I long for continuing and accelerating progress in the journey towards gender equality, certainly for its own sake but also, undeniably, because the freedoms that will thus be enjoyed by women will bring consequential freedoms to men.

As a white man, I could put forward an almost identical case for race equality. As a heterosexual man, I could do the same for justice for people of all sexual identities. As a Christian, I long for the extirpation of all that smells of anti-Semitism or Islamophobia. As a relatively well-off person, I must fight the corner of

[LORD GRIFFITHS OF BURRY PORT]

the dispossessed and marginalised. Progress in any of those fields of endeavour will inevitably bring benefits to me too. The freedom of others is the best possible guarantee of something approaching freedom for me. Is it selfish? I suppose so. Is it motivating? Definitely.

Let me bow out by borrowing some lines from the poet John Donne. The relevant lines for the point I am trying to make will be obvious, but I have left in two or three words that are superfluous to my argument but not without their importance at this time. We all know the original words anyway. No person is an island; everyone is a piece of the continent, a part of the main, and,

“if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less”—

those were the words I spoke of, in case your Lordships' had not guessed. Any person's inequality diminishes me because I am involved in humankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for me.

I am more than grateful for the opportunity to speak on a day such as this and on such a noble subject. I express the hope that I might be a beneficiary of all the progress aspired to by those who have contributed thus far to this debate.

5.20 pm

Lord Crisp (CB): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate. As other noble Lords have said, it is an occasion for both celebration and publicising what more needs to be done, and an opportunity for renewing the energy for and commitment to more advocacy and change. This area is enormous, so I will talk specifically about health, and just a part of it. To start with, let me say that health is a field in which women play by far the largest role—a fact that is not always, if ever, recognised and acknowledged.

I will start at the celebratory end by congratulating Dr Roopa Dhatt and her colleagues at Women in Global Health and its sister organisation, Women Leaders in Global Health. Women in Global Health aims for gender equality in global health leadership in order to achieve better global health. Leadership in health globally is largely male but, as Women in Global Health argues, many excellent and well-qualified women are simply not recognised. Women in Global Health works to increase their visibility and opportunities for inclusion in leadership at all levels everywhere. It advocates for organisations to adopt gender-equal leadership, draw leaders from the entire talent pool and address the inefficiencies caused by gender inequality that weaken global health. It is great to see Women in Global Health growing in membership and influence, and it is very important to note that gender balance in the way it describes it is fundamental to improving health globally.

Let me widen this out by talking about nursing. Nursing is not a gendered profession, but about 80% of nurses globally are women. Incidentally, although this is not my main point, nursing needs to attract more men. It is one of the few fields in which there will be enormous growth in future years, and we need to involve the whole population. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health recently reviewed nursing

globally and found, across all countries, a systematic undervaluing of nurses—a devaluing, really—and an underutilisation in the sense of nurses being well trained but not being able to work to the top of their potential—“to the top of their licence”, as the Americans might put it.

In our survey, we read comments like, “We are invisible”, “We are taken for granted and kept down” and “We are seen as just nice women doing what doctors tell us”. They are not seen as truly trained professionals or allowed to work as such. Evidence suggests that this is happening partly because most nurses are women—how women are treated in particular countries seems to be reflected in the way nurses are treated there—and partly because they are not doctors and there is some territorialism about who does what. Whatever the cause, this is a most extraordinary waste of talent, passion and commitment—and, frankly, resources, if the largest part of our global workforce is unable to work to its full potential and contribute fully.

Moreover, as our report, *Triple Impact*—which came out of that study—shows, if you develop nursing, you do not just improve health and promote gender equality, you also promote the economy. For example, in African countries you involve more women in the cash economy. As my noble friend Lady Flather said, when women have money in their pockets, they are more likely to spend it effectively and for the benefit of a wider range of people. So there are three big wins from promoting and developing nursing, which is why my noble friend Lady Watkins and I set up Nursing Now, to improve health globally by raising the profile and status of nursing.

I have three questions on what the UK can do to advance gender equality globally. First, what are the Government doing to support the aims and work of women in global health? Secondly, what are the Government doing to raise the status and profile of nursing in the way that I have described—beyond their very welcome support for the campaign Nursing Now that Ministers have already pledged? Finally, perhaps I may raise a domestic issue. Noble Lords will know that the majority of carers in this country are women and that almost all of them are on zero-hours contracts. It would be interesting to know whether the Government recognise this as a problem, and, if so, what they will do about it.

5.24 pm

Baroness Helic (Con): My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register. It is an honour to speak in the debate today. First, I pay tribute to our Prime Minister and to the Minister and her team here for their commitment to women's rights and gender equality. I welcome the Government's commitment to ensuring that the victims of gender-based violence are supported, that the perpetrators are brought to justice, and that everything possible is done to prevent these crimes happening in the first place.

I also particularly welcome the Government's commitment to tackling domestic violence and the introduction of the Domestic Violence Bill. I am sure that every one of us here either knows or is aware of someone who has been a victim of domestic violence.

We are all aware of the tendency to avoid talking about this behaviour, even when we see it and recognise it. We have to break that taboo and stigma in order to support families who endure this despicable, shameful and pathetic behaviour in all its manifestations, and strengthen our laws and institutions accordingly.

Our willingness to confront entrenched gender violence and harassment in our own society should be matched by an equal determination to defend the rights of the most vulnerable women in the world. Indeed, the test of our commitment to women's rights is how we behave as a country in the most challenging situations. I will raise three issues in that regard.

Two months ago, the United States envoy for the Afghan conflict, Zalmay Khalilzad, announced that a framework for a peace agreement had been agreed with the Taliban. The US would withdraw its troops and, in return, the Taliban would undertake to prevent Afghanistan being used by terrorists for attacks on other countries. There are many unanswered questions, and great concern that the women of Afghanistan are once again in the sights of the Taliban. The negotiator for the Taliban has said explicitly that the Taliban rejects the constitution of Afghanistan which enshrines the principle of equal rights for men and women and Afghan women's right to education, political participation and economic opportunity. Our Government have welcomed the "progress" made by the US special representative, but I hope that this support is not unqualified.

Afghan women's groups from across the 34 provinces have recently come together to issue a declaration stating:

"We, Afghan women, request the Government negotiating team to fully defend our rightful and legitimate demands ... at every stage of the peace process, and prevent any type of compromise that undermines the achievements of women".

They go on to say that they expect the international community to,

"firmly adhere to their commitments to protecting democratic, civil and human rights",

in Afghanistan. I look to the Minister to give assurances that our Government will listen to Afghan women, that we will uphold their right to be formally involved in negotiations, in keeping with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and that we will not support any peace agreement that does not protect their hard-won rights and freedoms.

My second point relates to our ally in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, which announced this week that 10 women's rights activists who were detained last year, and reportedly tortured, will be put on trial for "undermining the state's security". Our Foreign Secretary has hailed Britain's "strategic partnership" with Saudi Arabia. Perhaps the Minister could ask the Foreign Secretary to urge our "strategic partner" to release these women activists rather than put them through a show trial. What does it say about a country when it fears journalists and women, and what does it say about us if we place our strategic partnership with any country above such vital, non-negotiable principles of human rights?

Finally, I welcome the Government's commitment to hosting a review conference in November this year on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, and I congratulate my noble friend Lord Ahmad on

his personal leadership and commitment to this. I also welcome the news that Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex is to support the initiative. I hope that the Government will soon set out ambitious goals for that conference.

As the Minister will be aware, sexual and gender-based violence is endemic in situations of conflict, disaster and human displacement, yet programmes for countering it are routinely underfunded and insufficiently prioritised in humanitarian responses. I therefore renew my call on the UK Government to commit to dedicating a fixed minimum proportion of the international development budget to this purpose. I believe that this would make a huge difference, particularly if other countries could be persuaded to do the same.

Let me finish by expressing my respect for our female parliamentarians, from all parties, who have suffered vicious online abuse, including sexist and anti-Semitic hatred. I applaud their courage. We need more outspoken and principled women in public life.

5.30 pm

Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD): My Lords, how do you summarise that lot? I thought I would group them today, but you cannot group these speeches—they are too individual, and of course they reflect the individuals who made them. It has been a privilege to sit here and listen to some of the really erudite and sometimes quite passionate things that people have said.

The noble Baroness, Lady Williams of Trafford, started off by talking about the £5 million given for events last year. I ask her: what about this year? Can the Government perhaps find another £5 million down the back of the sofa? I hope we may be able to do something like that again this year.

The noble Baroness, Lady Gale, talked about the voting system in Wales being the best in the UK. Of course, it is not the first past the post system, which works against so many different minority groups in this country. If it were the additional member system and we got fair votes, we could have a more representative and wider democracy.

Baroness Gale: I am sorry to intervene on the noble Baroness, but the fact is that most women in the Welsh Assembly got elected under the first past the post system. The PR system did not magically bring more women into politics.

Baroness Burt of Solihull: I am grateful for that intervention. I do not think it destroys the point I was making, but I congratulate those women.

My noble friend Lady Hussein-Ece focused her comments—very rightly, I am sure—on BAME women, particularly Muslim women. She made the valid point that Muslim women are not all victims. There are some hugely educated, talented women who can thrive, make a superb contribution and enrich our society.

I particularly loved the comments of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Portsmouth, who said we are not to talk about female bishops because they are all bishops. It does not make any difference; they are bishops who happen to be women. I had already

[BARONESS BURT OF SOLIHULL]

written down “female bishops”, then I quickly scrubbed it out. He talked about it not all being about women doing what men do. We had a lot of people talking about women in STEM and doing men’s occupations, but he rightly said that it is also about men doing what women do. When we are all doing a similar kind of job, using the talents we undoubtedly have, we will get a much fairer society.

The noble Baroness, Lady Anelay of St Johns, talked about the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the situation in Ethiopia. She said there is still hope—particularly with the actions of the brave Prime Minister—and still problems to deal with, but that progress is being made, albeit slowly. That is always the way; progress always seems to be slow.

The noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin, talked about the 50:50 movement, #AskHerToStand, and the successes and setbacks in the Conservative Party. I pay tribute to the hard work of many Conservative women and the efforts they have made in their own party. There are champions in the other parties too, of course; other champions are available.

The noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, referred to winning the right to work far harder than the men. She is not the only one who is knackered. I am also knackered after trying to accommodate all the wise words that we have heard during the debate. I am sure the Minister will wish to comment on the importance of gender equality impact assessments for all new legislation.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Secombe and Lady Bull, talked about how lucky we are to be who we are and where we are at the time we are in, and referred to giving a hand-up to our sisters elsewhere in the world who are not so fortunate. The noble Baroness, Lady Bull, said we are lucky, yes, but we still face challenges at home and in the world. Like my noble friend Lady Hussein-Ece, she said that we are not what we wear; that we do not need to be judged by whether we are wearing a scarf or by the way we are dressed. However, it is the way of the world, unfortunately.

My noble friend Lady Miller referred to the role of women in war and in peace and the fact that there is a direct ratio between women’s involvement and the degree of danger and fear, particularly of nuclear attack. She related inspirational stories about the Greenham Common women all working together.

The noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, has a magic number—228—the number of women Peers. I have a magic number too—167. I was the 167th woman ever to be elected to the British Parliament, which really puts matters into context.

The noble Baroness, Lady Armstrong of Hill Top, referred to women who do not have settled status—a hugely important area—having no recourse to public funds and the help that all abused women should receive regardless of their status.

The noble Baroness, Lady Meyer, gave an inspiring description of her brilliant mother—a Russian exile who faced great tragedy—and she also referred to how lucky we are.

My noble friend Lord Hussain, referred to the plight of Kashmiri women and described a harrowing

picture of half-widows, their search for their missing men and mass rape. It is a terrible situation and I commend him for the work he does.

I also commend the noble Lord, Lord Loomba, and the work of the Loomba Foundation and the importance of the priority given to women all over the world.

The noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson of Abinger, asked where the women are in the peace process. It is wrong to exclude 50% of us from the process; we are the peaceful 50%.

I realise that I have now had seven minutes. There have been many other wonderful contributions—people have sat here for a long time today—and I particularly enjoyed those of the noble Baronesses, Lady Crawley, Lady Redfern and Lady Rock, and the noble Lord, Lord Taylor of Warwick, in talking about the economic impact of women. We can work together to create better chances for women. If men are allowed to write all the algorithms we will get what they planned for, and we do not need that.

I finish by again referring to the words of the noble Baroness, Lady Williams, on this year’s theme—“Balance for Better”—and government planning for great things, including on period poverty, on which I have campaigned for a while.

It occurred to me that we have a very special talent as women: we are very good at working together. Shame on us if we do not work together and make sure that we use our combined talent across parties, for no party and for all parties to achieve success for us and our male counterparts—I particularly loved the contribution by the noble Lord, Lord Crisp, which was well worth listening to—so let us get on with it. We can do this together.

5.40 pm

Baroness Thornton: I agree with the noble Baroness—it was great to start the debate with the excellent opening speech by the noble Baroness, Lady Williams. She mentioned things we need to celebrate in the past year: the anniversary of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, which allowed women to become barristers, solicitors, jurors and magistrates, and of Nancy Astor taking her seat, and the unveiling of the Fawcett statue in Parliament Square, which was a wonderful event.

I am sure we can expect a stirring closure to this debate from the noble Baroness, Lady Vere, who I hope I can regard as a sister on this day, particularly since I know that when she was a parliamentary candidate some years ago she surprised some of us by saying that she was a reluctant champion of women, that she did not object to being a “Cameron Cutie”—I have to tell the House that I really objected to being called a “Blair’s Babe” all those years ago—and that feminism did not resonate with her. She also said that she thought it was all a bit of a left-wing agenda. I like to think that since then, she has joined the ranks of the feminists on her own Benches in your Lordships’ House who are so effective and who certainly, and quite rightly, do not concede feminist ground to us lefties.

We have had inspiring speakers. I thank the many organisations which sent briefings, and the Library for its brief. My noble friend Lady Gale kicked off on this

side by covering a great deal of ground about celebration and the challenges. The noble Baroness, Lady Hussein-Ece, was right to raise stereotypes of, and to call out casual racism against, Muslim women. I think her mum and mine were probably cut from the same cloth. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Portsmouth gave a most welcome address. I agree with him that all bishops are bishops and all vicars are vicars; our ranks have a recently ordained deacon.

I cannot mention everybody, but there were some great contributions from the noble Baronesses, Lady Meyer, Lady Hodgson, Lady Rock, Lady Anelay and Lady Jenkin, who is undoubtedly a leader. I have been led by her from time to time on various issues—I am very happy about that—and I think it quite likely that the noble Baroness, Lady Miller, and I were at Greenham Common at the same time.

My noble friend Lady Donaghy was completely right, and I agree with her about the right to be knackered—I have been in the Chamber for about six and a half hours today. The noble Baroness, Lady Berridge, talked about discrimination and primogeniture, although it is not an issue that is very high on the agenda. It is, as it were, from-the-top discrimination.

My noble friend Lady Armstrong was right to talk about access to support for the most vulnerable women. My noble friends Lady Blackstone, Lady Crawley and Lord Griffiths made different contributions—for example, on the part that the European Union has played in protecting women's rights. My noble friend Lord Griffiths can take back to his wife our thanks that she told him to put his name down for this debate.

While the noble Baroness, Lady Jenkin, was talking, I was reminded that I met and became a very close friend of a woman called Rosemary Pockley. It was the first time that I had ever spoken to a woman in the Conservative Party whom I regarded as a feminist and a sister. She made me aware of the struggles that Conservative women have had in their party, and they sometimes felt even worse than the ones that we were having in the Labour Party at around the same time. I want to pay tribute to Rosemary because she was a great friend and a great sister.

I want to say a little about the importance of our own body for equality, the EHRC, and its recent report based on the largest ever review of women's rights and gender equality in the UK. As noble Lords will know, the commission is the regulatory body responsible for enforcing the Equality Act 2010, and we are accredited by the United Nations as an "A status" national human rights institution.

The commission's duties are to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, and promote and protect human rights. Its biggest review of women's rights and gender equality threw up a whole range of issues. It says quite clearly that important progress has been made in some areas—for example, forced marriage has been criminalised and shared parental leave has been introduced—but that there remains a range of areas where significant challenges face women and girls. The evidence and recommendations have informed the UK's submission to the United Nations review of our progress on women's rights. This review takes

place across the world every four to five years. I gather that the United Nations is expected to issue its recommendations to the UK Government on Monday 11 March; I look forward to seeing them.

The recommendations include things that we all need to be aware of. For instance, according to the section on just and fair conditions at work, pregnant women, new mothers and women of childbearing age are still routinely discriminated against in the workplace. My colleagues on the Front Bench in the Commons—Dawn Butler and her team—have been highlighting this issue vigorously for a while. The research shows that 11% of mothers reported that they were either dismissed or made compulsorily redundant when others in their workplace were not, or that they were treated so poorly that they felt they had to leave their job.

The EHRC recommends that the UK Government should introduce a mandatory duty on employers to take reasonable steps to protect workers from harassment and victimisation, ensuring that flexible working is offered. They should also make it mandatory for employers to publish the narrative that goes with, for example, the gender pay gap within their companies, and support employers in collecting the necessary data for them to begin closing pay gaps affecting ethnic-minority and disabled women. I hope that the Minister will support those recommendations from our own commission.

I turn to the subject of gender-based violence. Despite signing the Istanbul convention on 8 June 2012, the UK has still not achieved ratification and has been criticised for a lack of accountability and oversight of its violence against women and girls strategy. Are urgent steps in place to ratify the Istanbul convention and, once it is ratified, will sufficient resources be dedicated to central, devolved and local authorities to ensure its effective implementation?

The EHRC recommends that the UK Government should mitigate the impact of welfare reforms on lone-parent families, the majority of whom are women, by uprating benefits, reversing the two-child limit on child tax credits and ensuring that work coaches are trained to deliver tailored employment support.

I turn to the public sector equality duty, which underpins much of the work and was introduced in the 2010 Act. Does the Minister acknowledge that the commission is proposing a new approach to the PSED to ensure that public bodies and government departments focus on the key inequalities affecting those affected by their functions? This would review and amend the specific duties underpinning the PSED to ensure that public bodies are required to focus on them.

I also highlight the recommendation to incorporate CEDAW into domestic law, so that individuals can effectively challenge rights violations by using the domestic legal system and access a domestic remedy for alleged breaches of CEDAW and other United Nations rights. There are many other recommendations, all of which, coming as they do from our domestic Equality and Human Rights Commission, we need to be listening to very carefully.

Finally I join with the noble Baroness, Lady Burt, in her request for some money for parties and events.

5.50 pm

Baroness Vere of Norbiton (Con): My Lords, I thank all noble Lords who have contributed today. It is indeed true: I regard myself as a champion of equality, albeit a reluctant one as I am rather irritated that we still need to have these debates. I truly wish that was not the case. In the olden days I did not like the word “feminist” because people used to tell me what to think and I do not like being told what to think. So I am very happy to be a sister, but perhaps I will not quite put on the T-shirt.

We have heard some powerful and moving messages from across the Chamber today. I cannot emphasise enough how important it is that we continue to discuss and debate gender equality to ensure that this issue gets the attention it deserves. We will be back the same time next year, but earlier in the day.

I have to cover education, employment, women's leadership—particularly in public and civic life—discrimination, Brexit, the tragedy of violence against women and international considerations in 20 minutes. I do not have a hope. Therefore, if I cannot do justice to the questions asked by noble Lords, I will of course write. In fact, I very much look forward to that letter as it will give me an opportunity to go into more detail than I am able to do today.

I turn first to employment and education, which is a thread that runs through everything. Women can be empowered only if they are educated and gainfully employed so that they can have their own income. This was mentioned by so many noble Lords. Working from the top—I do not plan to address peerages; I am thinking more of women on boards—this issue has been around for many years. I was going to cite all the figures. It is true that we have made progress with women on boards, but not nearly enough. I am disappointed that these figures are not better. I recognise the restrictions of the pipeline and the other things that feed into our ability to get women on to boards, but I also find the paucity of women in executive roles very disheartening. I hope that in a few years' time we will return to this and find that the numbers look much better than they do now.

The gender pay gap was covered by my noble friend Lady Williams of Trafford so I will not go into it in great detail. But it is worth remembering that reporting is just the start. We said that we would start noting how companies are doing on the gender pay gap. It is crucial now that employers use gender pay gap data to identify the barriers to women's recruitment and progression. They must take action to break down those barriers; otherwise, what on earth is the point of reporting all this data? We have published evidence-based guidance on practical actions that employers can take to close the gap, alongside help to diagnose it: to figure out why their gaps are happening in the first place.

I turn to the speeches by my noble friend Lady Rock and the noble Baroness, Lady Crawley. On the gamut of tech and AI, was it not absolutely fascinating to hear about the algorithms written by men and how rubbish they are, as they do only one thing whereas we need them to cover everybody? There was some comment about what the Government can do. We are doing

many things to make sure that the technology space becomes more diverse. We are supporting a scheme called the Tech Talent Charter. It is a private sector initiative designed to promote diversity in the tech workforce. The signatories to the charter pledge to implement recruitment and retention practices that will address the gender imbalance in tech roles. Some 290 companies are signed up to it, from international tech giants through to start-up SMEs and charities. All government departments have agreed to adopt the charter; DCMS was the first to sign up. This is one of the many tangible things we can do to get more women interested in tech and to make sure women are there to sort out our algorithms for us, because clearly they will not sort themselves out.

Another point to mention is that we are supporting female entrepreneurs. That is important. We have heard before that women often struggle to get loans from banks or equity from VC funds. The government-backed start-up loan system is providing funding and support to new entrepreneurs. Some 39% of loans go to women, so it is not quite 50%, but it could be worse. That is £450 million, which is a fair amount of money, and I wish those women great success.

Baroness Burt of Solihull: Is the Minister aware of the statistic from the British Bankers' Association which shows that less than 1% of venture capital funding goes to women? Is that not shameful? Should we not do something about it?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I was not aware of that statistic. I knew the figure was low, but I did not realise it was that low. That is shocking. We certainly should look at that, but the British venture capital industry needs to take a long hard look at itself and figure it out, because it has significant funds and clearly women can make a great success of these companies. We should all call on it to look at that and make sure that the imbalance is sorted out.

In her speech, my noble friend Lady Redfern reminded us of some great female role models in the STEM sector. However, if we are to get the pipeline sorted out, we have to get young girls interested in the first place, early on, from primary school onwards. It is very important that they start at school, then get to college and university and are still doing STEM subjects. We announced substantial spending commitments in the 2017 Autumn Budget on maths, digital and technical education and we are funding programmes, such as the advanced maths premium, to increase the take-up of maths, computing and physics and to support better teaching of maths, science and computing in schools. To address the gender imbalance in computing, we are launching a computing pilot programme this year, to improve girls' participation in computing as part of an £84 million investment to improve the teaching of computing in schools. This is essential for the AI issue that we talked about earlier. These things all build up together and should lead to greater success for women and girls in this area.

I was taken by the point raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy. I agree with her that not everything is great. Women are almost three times more likely than men to be working part-time, which is associated with

zero pay progression. Women are around 65% more likely than men to be earning the national living wage. We all want to change these things. Now that we know what we are aiming for, I hope these figures will improve.

But how do we improve them? As my noble friend Lady Williams stated in her speech, the Government Equalities Office is working incredibly hard across departments at the moment on the female economic empowerment strategy. My noble friend outlined what this strategy hopes to achieve, so I will not dwell on it too much at this stage. However, I would like to talk about the Women's National Commission, which the noble Baroness, Lady Gale, mentioned. She is right: it was disbanded in 2010. We do not have any plans to replace it at this time. However, the Government are very clear that the voice of women should be better heard by policymakers, and not just on a committee sitting in a room somewhere, but across government. The Government Equalities Office is doing a significant programme of work to make sure that women's voices are better heard by policymakers. It is important that the Government really understand the issues that impact on women from every walk of life, and across every part of the Government's agenda.

I will briefly pick up some issues mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Crisp. He focused on the status of workers, nurses and carers on zero-hours contracts. To focus on the latter, zero-hours contracts cause a great amount of angst and can be quite controversial, but we know that many people working on zero-hours contracts, whether in the adult social care sector or elsewhere, value their flexibility. For some, it is an attractive feature of such a job. However, we are well aware that, for others, fixed contracts with definite hours are preferable. There is an organisation called Skills for Care, which is a workforce development organisation for the adult social care workforce funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. It provides advice to employers on how to attract and retain the most excellent staff with the benefits of offering a choice of different employment contracts.

Finally, on employment and education, my noble friends Lady Meyer and Lady Finn mentioned sexual harassment in the workplace. I am sure there is not a female in this Room who has not had something rather unpleasant happen to them in the workplace. We take this extremely seriously. We are committed to ending any harassment, bullying, intimidation and violence that women might face. The UK has some of the strongest workplace protections in the world, including explicit protection against sexual harassment in the workplace under the Equality Act 2010. The Government will consult this summer to explore whether these should be further strengthened.

I turn to international issues, because there was a significant amount of interest on those issues and I want to make sure that I cover them where I can. My noble friend Lady Hodgson started by talking about the Commission on the Status of Women and how the Government can help it be more impactful. This is the biggest annual international event on gender equality. It has produced some of the most impactful milestones in the history of women's empowerment, including the

convention on the elimination of all forms of violence against women and the Beijing Platform for Action. We are looking forward to the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration next year. We will be working with like-minded countries to ensure that the CSW sets an ambitious programme of work for the next five years.

My noble friend Lady Hodgson also mentioned support for human rights defenders. The FCO and DfID strongly support the vital role that they and civil society organisations play in supporting sustainable development. For example, on international Human Rights Day in December, the Secretary of State for International Development spoke at an Amnesty International UK event to highlight the work of five inspiring female human rights defenders.

The noble Lord, Lord Crisp, mentioned the work of women in global health. This is absolutely critical. The Government appreciate that, without good health, nothing else can possibly follow. DfID supports developing countries to achieve international development target 3.8 on universal health coverage. This means ensuring that everyone, everywhere can access quality essential health services for prevention and care without suffering financial hardship. Investment in health workers, the majority of whom are women, is essential to achieve this. DfID invests in nursing and the broader health workforce through bilateral country programmes, multilateral partners and global initiatives such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Furthermore on the subject of health, the noble Baroness, Lady Blackstone, made a very wide-ranging speech about sexual and reproductive health. The UK leads the world in our long-term support for comprehensive sexual reproductive health and rights. We are the largest donor to the United Nations Population Fund and the second-largest bilateral donor on family planning. In 2017 the UK committed to spend an average of £225 million per year over the next five years on family planning. To illustrate what this means, we estimate that every year our investment will support nearly 20 million total users of contraception. It will prevent 6 million unintended pregnancies and so prevent more than 3 million abortions, many of which would be unsafe. It will save the lives of more than 6,000 women every year.

My noble friend Lady Anelay turned our attention to Ethiopia and FGM. Noble Lords will know that the UK has long supported the end of FGM, particularly through our financial support. The flagship programme currently in place comes to an end this year, but in 2018 we announced a programme with a further £50 million of UK aid, which again will be the single biggest investment worldwide to date by any international donor. This programme will continue to tackle FGM across the most affected countries in Africa. We are currently in the early stages of competitive tendering, so we are not yet aware of where that programme will cover. Of course I cannot prejudge its conclusion today, but I am sure that the results of that tendering will be available very soon.

My noble friends Lady Helic and Lady Hodgson spoke about the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative—an absolutely critical and long-term thing, which we must continue to pressure on. We are committed

[BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON]

to securing justice for survivors and breaking the culture of impunity by holding the perpetrators to account. The next PSVI conference will take place in November 2019. It is a three-day survivor-centred event and will celebrate progress, address remaining challenges and secure further commitments. It aims to focus on: accountability challenges; support for children born of rape; ensuring service provision for all survivors; and working with militaries, faiths and the media.

The noble Lord, Lord Hussain, mentioned Kashmir. The UK Government are concerned by any allegations of human rights violations and abuses. Our position is that any allegations must be investigated thoroughly, promptly and transparently. We noted the concerns raised in the report by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in June 2018 and continue to encourage all states, including India and Pakistan, to uphold human rights.

My noble friend Lady Helic mentioned peace in Afghanistan and of course we agree with her entirely. We continue to press for peace negotiations to be inclusive and representative of Afghan society by including women's participation. We also believe that any political settlement in Afghanistan should respect the rights of all Afghans, and that includes women.

The role of women in peace was also mentioned by my noble friend Lady Hodgson and the noble Baroness, Lady Miller. The UK is strengthening partnerships with organisations that share our interest in building women's capacity to participate in mediation processes, including the UN, other multilaterals and women's mediation networks. But the UK has a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which is jointly owned by the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and DfID. It sets out how the UK Government will integrate a gender perspective into their work to build security and stability overseas, protect the human rights of women and girls and promote their meaningful participation in conflict prevention and resolution.

I turn briefly to an issue on which I will certainly write to the noble Baroness, Lady Thornton. We obviously look forward to the report that will come from CEDAW. The UK was examined by the CEDAW committee on 26 February in Geneva and it will issue its conclusion, observations and recommendations later this month. We will of course consider its recommendations fully. If I can provide her with any more information, I certainly will.

On violence against women and girls, and domestic abuse, my noble friend Lady Williams opened with a strong review of where we are but perhaps I may put a few markers down on specific things. The noble Baroness, Lady Gale, asked about the DA commissioner and whether that person could be independent. The commissioner will provide public leadership on domestic abuse issues and play a key role in overseeing the provision of services in England. Their day-to-day independence from Ministers will be particularly important when called upon to identify local areas where service provision is insufficient.

The noble Baroness, Lady Thornton, asked about the Istanbul convention and its ratification. I believe that, if the domestic abuse Bill is passed, it will ratify the Istanbul convention.

I have 30 seconds to cover public service, recognition of great leaders and Brexit. Well, Brexit is out of the window. We have had so many interesting speeches today on the representation of women. So many Members of your Lordships' House, despite not being elected themselves, have been very involved in getting others elected to the other place, to councils and elsewhere. We are clear that politics must be representative. We have to do whatever we can to make sure that we have the right sort of diversity.

It is also quite a rough and tough world out there at the moment. I do not know whether any noble Lord has seen the video of Amber Rudd reading out some of the abuse that she has got on Twitter. It is appalling and shocking, and we must fight back against those things. It is not normal: people should not be speaking in that way, whether in person or anonymously.

Sadly, I must conclude, but I promise that my letter will be a very good one. Once again, I thank all noble Lords. It has been an excellent debate. This House works best when we work together, as noted by the noble Baroness, Lady Burt. So let us do just that. Perhaps, as noted by my noble friend Lady Finn, we can structurally re-engineer our whole society—but I do not want to start a gender war, as noted by my noble friend Lady Meyer. So what must we do? We must march on. We know what needs to be done and I beg to move.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 6.11 pm.

